

DRAFT

Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests

**Forest Plan Revision
Input from Forest Meetings: Themes & Need for Change**

SUMMARY

April 2006

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INTRODUCTION

Elaine Zieroth, Deb Beighly, Deryl Jevons, and Michelle Davalos visited each organizational unit on the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests. The objective was to provide an overview of the new planning rule and forest plan revision and begin gathering information for the Comprehensive Evaluation Report. In addition to providing an overview about revision, the meeting attendees completed an exercise to identify geographic areas, themes, and need for change.

- 3/8/2006 Lakeside Ranger District
- 3/8/2006 Black Mesa Ranger District
- 3/13/2006 Alpine Ranger District
- 3/13/2006 Springerville Ranger District
- 3/17/2006 Supervisor's Office
- 3/26/2006 Clifton Ranger District

The following pages represent a summary of information gathered at these meetings.

THE PLANNING AREA - NICHE

The Area

- 2nd and 3rd highest mountains in Arizona
- Clean air – Class I Airshed over Mt. Baldy
- Water – head of the watershed for most of the state
- Part of the largest continuous ponderosa pine forest
- Land varies from high desert grasslands to piñon-juniper, ponderosa pine, mixed-conifer, spruce-fir forests, and high elevation grasslands
- Unique geology: caves, volcanoes
- Forest boundaries are fairly contiguous

People & the Forests

- Majority of forest visitors are from the desert metro areas of Arizona (Phoenix & Tucson)
- The Forests' elevations provide respite from the heat of the summer desert
- Stands of aspen and large herds of elk provide a scenic attraction for visitors
- Large dispersed recreation use, including hunting, fishing, camping
- Popular developed recreation sites, including Rim Lakes and Big Lake Recreation Areas
- Increasing urban pressure
- Strong Tie to Water
- Tribal and Cultural
- Large transportation system – easy access
- Collaboration – community involvement, RAC, watershed groups & cooperators

Fire & the Forests

- Rodeo-Chedeski - largest fire in Arizona history.
- Mogollon Rim has the largest amount of lightning caused ignitions in the nation
- Community Wildfire Protection Plans – 29 communities
- Aggressive treatment in WUI (Wildland-Urban Interface)

Forest Products

- White Mountain Stewardship - largest 10-year stewardship contract in the nation
- Biomass and small-diameter wood market
- Miscellaneous forest products (fuelwood, Christmas Trees ...)

Biodiversity of the Forests

- Wide ecological diversity
- Unique and rare terrestrial and aquatic wildlife and wildlife habitat
- Large number of cold water fisheries
- Mexican Gray Wolf recovery
- Large elk herds
- Least noxious weeds

Special Areas on the Forests

- Blue Range Primitive Area (last primitive area in nation)
- 3 Wilderness Areas
- 5 Research Natural Areas (1 existing, 4 recommended)
- 20 eligible rivers for wild and scenic river designation

Neighbors of the Forests

- Major landowners: Tonto, Coconino, and Gila National Forests, San Carlos Apache Reservation, Fort Apache Reservation, Arizona State Lands, and Bureau of Land Management

PLANNING AREA – CONCERNS, ISSUES, AND NEED FOR CHANGE

Social & Economic Health and Sustainability¹

Community Growth and Development

- Need for land exchange
- Infrastructure (roads, water, energy corridors)
- Illegal use of federal lands (intrusions, trespass)

Commodity Production

- What are the impacts to local communities?
- Is there a shift from commodity production to tourism?
- What is the right mix?
- Is the infrastructure/market available?

Recreation Opportunities

- Management of motorized vehicle use and associated conflicts
- Increased demand for dispersed and developed recreation opportunities
- What areas should be recommended for designation into the Wilderness System?
- If roadless aren't recommended for wilderness, how should they be managed?

Livestock Grazing

- Land suitable for grazing
- Guidance needs to be more flexible
- Forage and water allocation – livestock vs. wildlife
- Tie monitoring to ecological condition and ecological classification system

Community Protection from NFS Threats

- Reduce fire risk to communities (WUI)
- Fire suppression and smoke management
- Need additional education and community involvement
- Insects & Disease

Ecological Health and Sustainability

Flora & Fauna Habitat

- T&E management and recovery
- Mexican Spotted Owl (MSO) standards and guidelines – conflicts with aspen regeneration, need to incorporate upcoming revision, conflict with restoration objectives
- Northern Goshawk standards and guidelines – protection of snags, coarse woody debris, conflict with restoration objectives
- Habitat for density dependent species – where do we provide?
- Antelope Habitat – where is it? Need a plan for connectivity.

¹ Some issues can not be easily categorized as either social/economic or ecological. Many touch all three areas, such as livestock grazing.

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- 10,000 acre diversity areas – no longer achievable (road density, snags/acres).
- Better interagency coordination on sport hunting and fishing.
- Wildlife closures/quiet areas – need to re-evaluate
- Elk, deer, antelope, and sheep population management

Water

- Conflicts with recreation, wildlife, range, T&E species, roads, surface water rights, wells, municipal demands, riparian vegetation
- Poor riparian/watershed conditions
- Adequacy of riparian guidelines

Restoration of Fire-Adapted Ecosystems

- Take advantage of fire use where appropriate
- Revisit all vegetation guidelines
- Maintenance and restoration of grasslands (conifer encroachment)
- Piñon-Juniper (P-J)-grassland interface, poor condition, climate, need plan, encroachment, grazing/wildlife conflicts, soils, lack of fire, need for mechanical treatment. How do we accelerate PJ treatments/management?
- Mixed conifers – spruce fir management – need a plan, need science
- Fuelwood – currently no consultation, resource conflicts
- High tree densities
- Vegetation structure
- Aspen decline – affect on scenery
- Loss of riparian species – B. Willow, cottonwoods
- Impacts on commercial sales – small diameter limits, lands outside WUI
- Public education
- Disproportionate areas of the Forest is in Fire Regime Condition Class 3

Invasives

- Noxious and invasive weeds
- Anticipate the unknown
- Insects & Disease – bug kill

Long-Term Drought

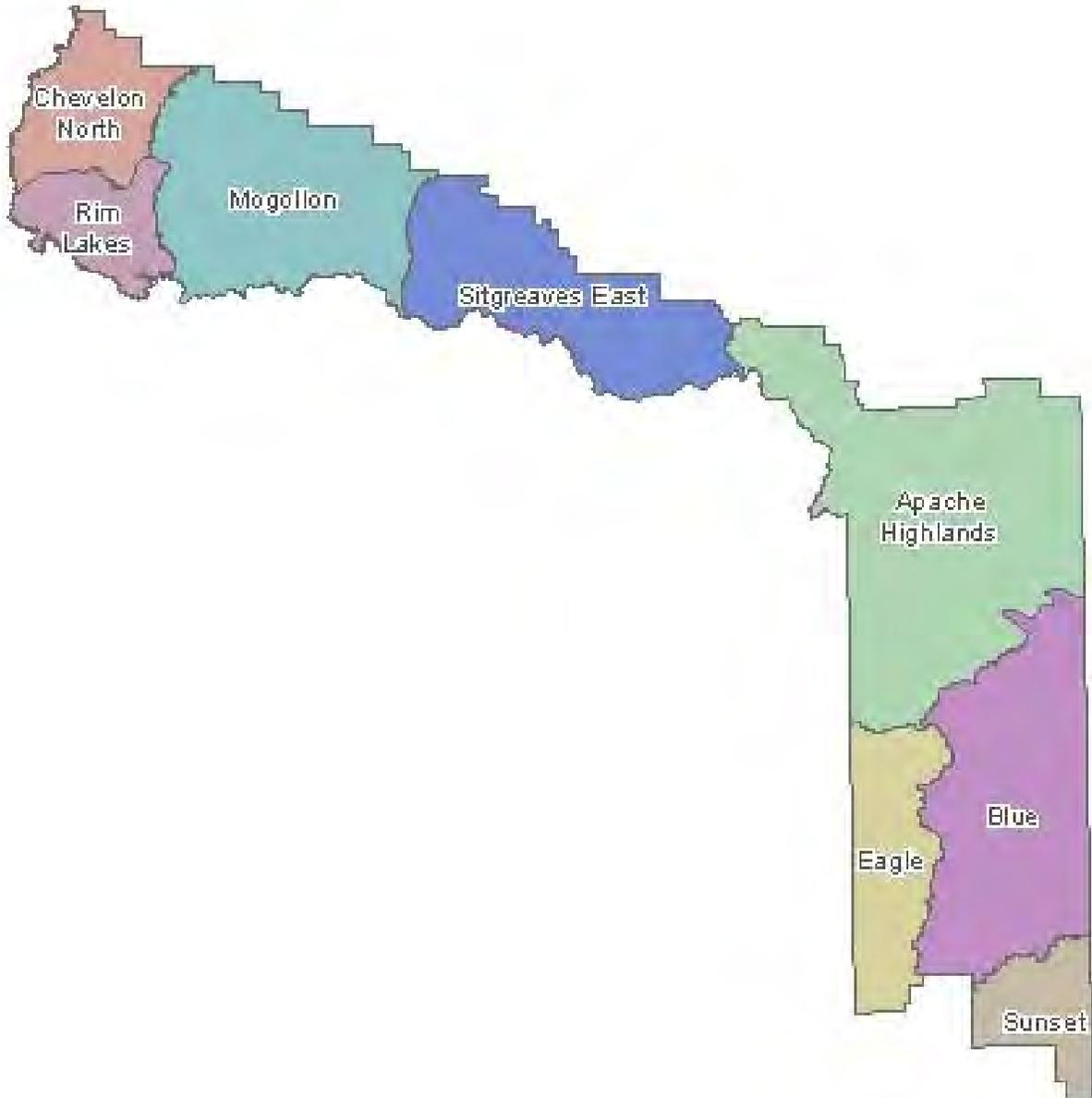
- Affects all resource areas (poor range conditions, increase in snags, die-offs, species habitat)

Coordinate & Partner . . .

- with Forest stakeholders and conservation and watershed groups. (such as Little Colorado Watershed, ULCR, Eagle Creek WS, RC&Ds)
- with county governments and local communities
- with Tribes (White Mountain Apache, San Carlos Apache)
- with other agencies including: Arizona Game & Fish, Arizona Department of Transportation, etc.
- with adjacent land management entities including BLM, Arizona State Lands, Tonto National Forest, Coconino National Forest, and the Gila National Forest

GEOGRAPHIC AREAS

The Forest has been divided into eight geographic areas for planning purposes.²



² During the forest visits, the Mt. Baldy Wilderness Area was identified as a separate geographic unit. Since no other wilderness areas are in their own geographic area, Mt. Baldy has been merged back into the Apache Highlands Geographic Area. During the April 24, 2006 FLT meeting, decision was made to merge the Coyote Creek geographic area (northeast corner of the Apache NF) into the Apache Highlands and rename the Lakeside geographic area to Sitgreaves East. Black Mesa Ranger decided to change name of Heber/Overgaard geographic area to Mogollon.

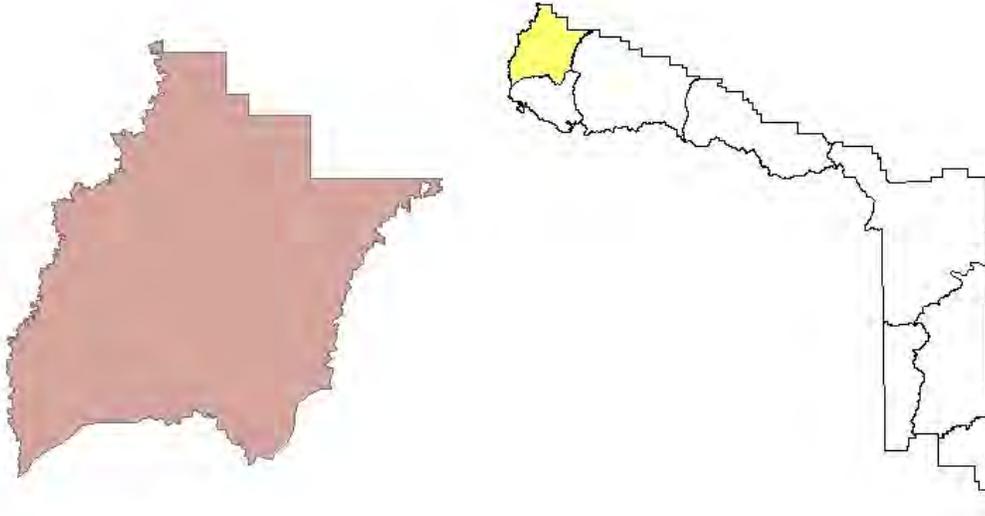
CHEVELON NORTH

- **Traditional Use by Winslow Communities:** Fuelwood, Recreation
- **Wildland Fire Use Opportunities**
- **PJ Encroachment and grazing conflicts/issues**
- **Archaeological Resources**

Adjoining land entities: Coconino National Forest, Arizona State Lands

CHEVELON NORTH - CONCERNS, ISSUES, AND NEED FOR CHANGE

- Management of Chevelon work center
- Infrastructure – need for improvement?
- Potential wilderness – Chevelon Canyon
- Proper area for bighorn sheep
- Large # of archaeology sites – are they surveyed? Impacts of protection on management.
- Watershed Condition is unsatisfactory.



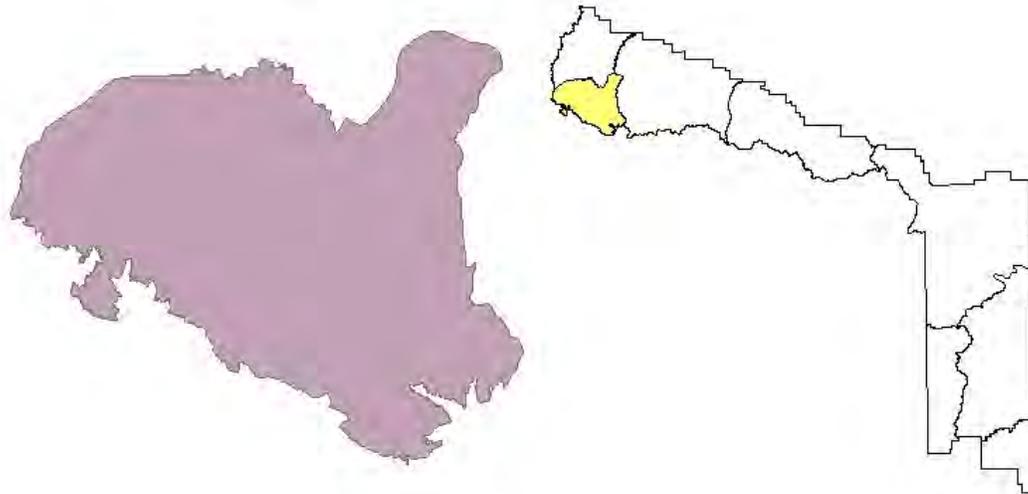
RIM LAKES

- **Recreation:** Year round recreation use and demand for access, Information Corridor, Viewing opportunities off the Rim, recreation use (motorized and non-motorized) vs. wildlife, watershed, water quality, riparian area integrity
- **Fire Issues:** Difficult to mitigate fire due to safety concerns related to density of public, limited access, evacuation/transportation bottlenecks, smoke management. Increased opportunity for human caused fire.
- **Wildlife Habitat Diversity:** T&E, livestock vs. wildlife forage, elk grazing and vegetation management (diversity) / wildlife habitat, MSO Habitat Management

Adjacent land agencies: Coconino National Forest, Tonto National Forest, Ft. Apache Indian Reservation

RIM LAKES - CONCERNS, ISSUES, AND NEED FOR CHANGE

- Transportation Concern – FR 300 – high demand. Need to control flow.
- Need comprehensive recreation management plan because of increased use and demand.
- Balance between developed and dispersed. What can/will public sector provide?
- Need wildlife plan – conflicts with recreation/transportation.
- Water quality is impaired @ Bear Canyon Lake (ADEQ 2004)



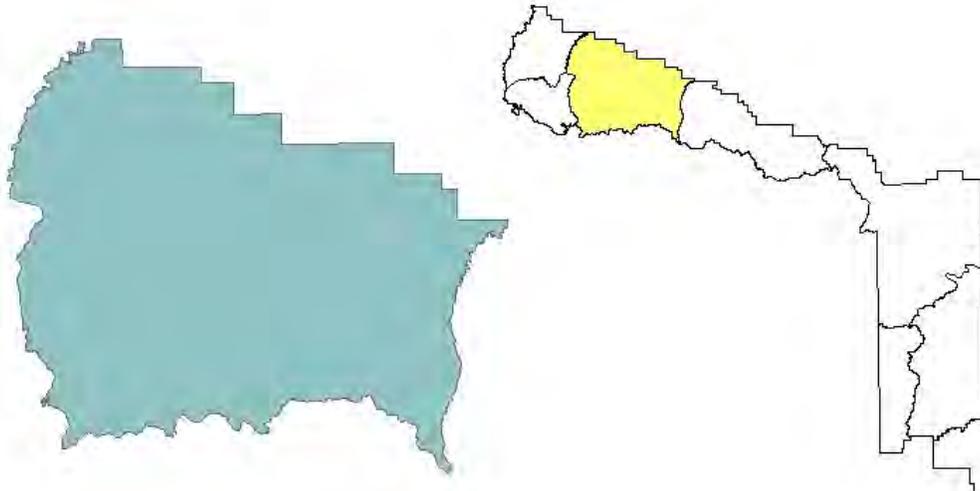
MOGOLLON

- **Urban Influence/Issues** : Interface with Heber/Overgaard, opportunities for access, infrastructure, land exchange, issues: dumps, atvs, firewood, shooting areas, etc
- **Highway Corridor Influences**
- **Motorized Recreation** – increasing conflicts, especially in P.J.
- **Fire Recovery Area Issues** – species diversity, fire management, forage, maintain seral stages (use fire rather than thinning?), benefit to grazers/browsers
- **Fire Use Opportunities**

Adjacent land entities: Ft. Apache Indian Reservation, BLM, Arizona State Lands

MOGOLLON - CONCERNS, ISSUES, AND NEED FOR CHANGE

- Fire Recovery Area
 - Continued restoration to fire-adapted ecosystem
 - Maintain browse for deer habitat
 - Need to manage elk population so doesn't explode
 - How do we maintain appropriate seral stages? Need a plan.
 - Opportunities for research
- Highway improvement conflicts – hazard trees, wildlife, archaeology, fire, drug distribution, salt (water table, loss of trees, animal attractant)
- Feral Horses
- Unsatisfactory Watershed Condition in PJ Zone



SITGREAVES EAST

- **Community Interface:** support community growth and development, demand for easements, utility sites, infrastructure, access, and special uses, watershed and water quality affected by development encroachment. Half of the community is still on septic systems.
- **Fuels, Fire, and Smoke Mgmt:** interface with community, need for increased community involvement, education, participation in fire planning and fire ‘proofing’, smoke management and conflicts with local communities.
- **Vegetation Management:** type and relationship to development, wildlife habitat, fire
- **Wildlife:** conflicts with development (increased traffic, habitat loss), conflicts with vegetation management (thinning, etc), burn area has seen a six fold increase in deer, turkey populations have also increased.
- **Archaeological Resources**

Adjacent land entities: Ft. Apache Indian Reservation, Arizona State Lands

SITGREAVES EAST - CONCERNS, ISSUES, AND NEED FOR CHANGE

- What is the Niche? Does/should the Forest serve as “Green Belt” or “City Park”?
- Infrastructure is not adequate for changing demand (commuter routes)
- Smoke management – consideration from ADEQ, public education
- Management for wildlife conflicts (traffic, houses, etc)
- Communication sites – Porter Mountain Site.
- Cultural resources: conflicts with development, vegetation management, etc.
- Unsatisfactory Watershed Condition in PJ Zones
- Historic Grasslands lost (TNC report)



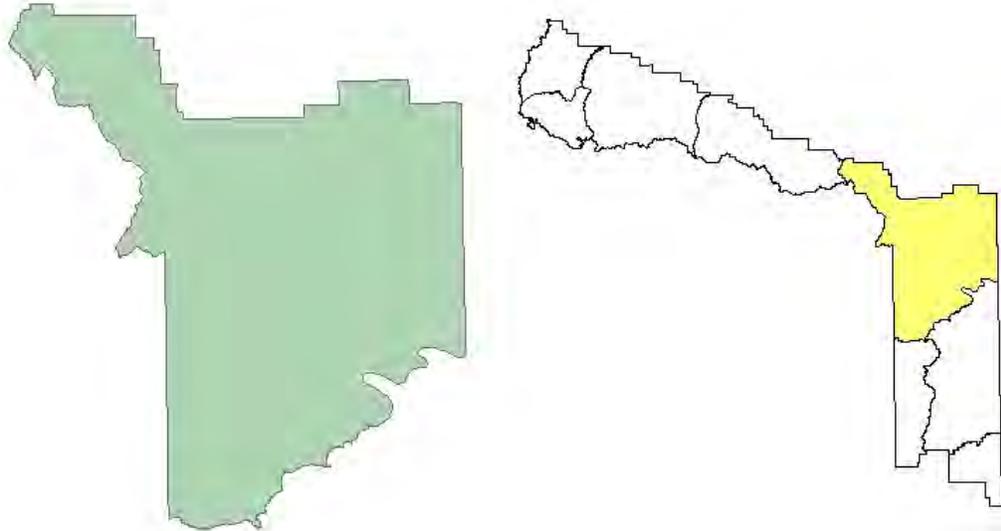
APACHE HIGHLANDS

- **Recreation – dispersed and high intensity developed:** Summer users from desert areas. Dispersed Recreation Use (concentrated on water) vs. water integrity, Increasing use and demand, Big Lake highway improvement, changing trends – aging population, accessibility needs, winter recreation, scenery management, attraction – water, cool temperature, trees, hunting, recreation residences and isolated cabins
- **Motorized Travel Management:** OHV use increasing
- **Urban Interface:** WUI influence and community action plan guidance (development, infrastructure needs, etc), municipal watershed management, and community growth/development planning
- **Grazing/Range Management:** considerable amount of livestock grazing, conflict with winter range & WUI, unauthorized grazing in Mt. Baldy
- **High Elevation Grasslands:** integrity of grasslands, loss of grassland
- **Water:** important aquatic habitat, eligible wild and scenic rivers
- **Need for Vegetation Management:** species diversity (many unique and rare)
- **Species Management:** many unique species (chiricahua leopard frogs, springsnails, floaters, loach minnow, little colorado spinedace, and non-native aquatic invasives)
- **Special Areas:** Mt. Baldy Wilderness, Bear Wallow Wilderness, Escudilla Wilderness, Research Natural Areas, eligible wild and scenic rivers

Adjacent land entities: Ft. Apache Indian Reservation, Arizona State Lands

APACHE HIGHLANDS - CONCERNS, ISSUES, AND NEED FOR CHANGE

- Need capacity and plan to manage growing demand for recreation.
- Infrastructure not meeting current demands
- Development – work closely with county road management, infrastructure, and access
- Lack of day use trails on Alpine RD
- Evaluate Alpine submontane grasslands – impacts from people, erosion areas, invasives, conifer encroachment, and antelope
- Need to address municipal watersheds – groundwater capacity
- Potential conflicts with cultural resources and increased development in the area. The more people who know about the locations, the more likely the sites will be looted or damaged.



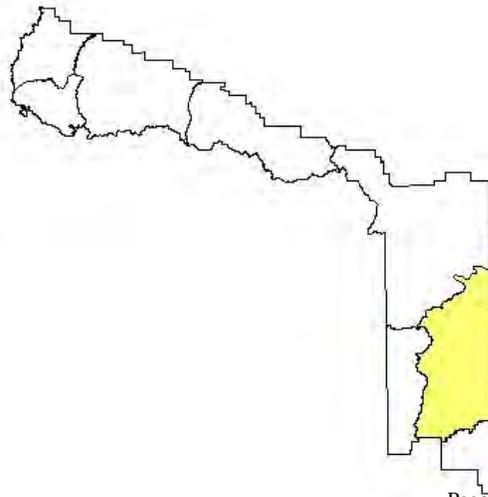
BLUE

- **Rugged Backcountry:** minimum road access, dispersed use (hiking, horseback riding, hunting), overnight use vs. day use, trail system.
- **Traditional Local Use and Ties to Land:** active grazing, land exchange and consolidation opportunities, outfitter-guides
- **Fire Issues:** fire use opportunities, Rx burning opportunities, lack of escape routes
- **River Corridor:** high aquatic diversity, flooding issues, impact of road on river, eligible wild & scenic river

Adjacent land entities: Gila National Forest

BLUE - CONCERNS, ISSUES, AND NEED FOR CHANGE

- OHV unauthorized use – XXX Ranch, Up Blue River, Alma Mesa from NM
- Wilderness Recommendation – no longer private inholdings in southern part, opportunity to move boundary south, coordinate with Gila, mgmt problems @ Alma Mesa – motorized use, fuelwood
- Wilderness/primitive area boundaries need to be marked on the ground.
- Need assessment of "capacity" for commercial operations
- Isolated Cabins & buildings – how to manage?
- Poor quality trails – especially in creek bottoms
- Potential to further consolidate land
- Blue Road – river crossings, landslides, conflict with Primitive Area, emergency ingress/egress - can we relocate?
- Fences not being maintained or accurately placed and livestock into unauthorized areas
- Need more fire use
- Rattlesnake Cabin – Strayhorse Allotment & Sandrock Allotment – need to resolve
- Potential for grassbanks
- Soil erosion – natural erosion rates exceed tolerance, current rates even more so
- Coordination of forest management with wolf recovery and continued coordination with the IFT interagency wolf team
- Gila Trout reintroduction (in planning state)– Raspberry Creek with Spruce Creek lineage
- Archaeological (historical & prehistorical) site potential –especially along Blue River
- UDIs (Undocumented Immigrant)



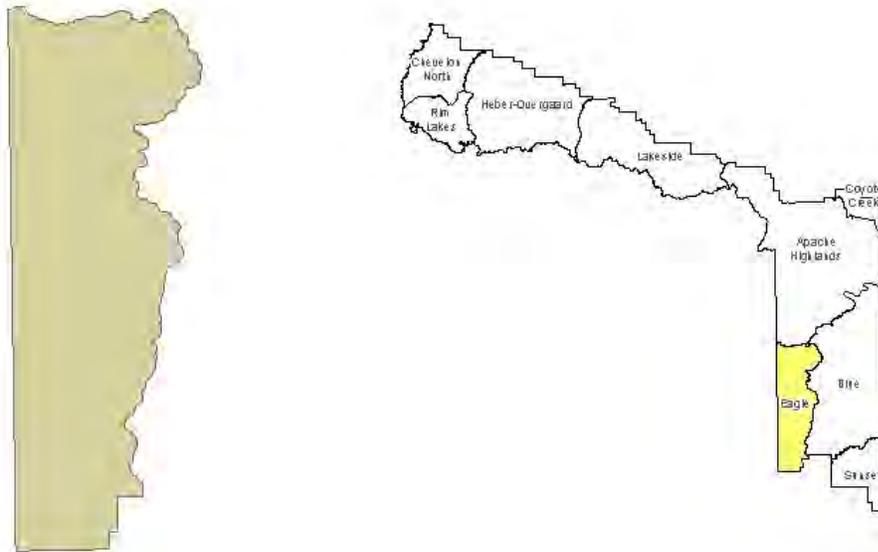
EAGLE

- **Dispersed Recreation Use:** hunting, birding, scenic driving, OHV use, etc
- **Grazing:** conflicts, management, restoration, permittee coordination/consolidation
- **Biodiversity**
- **Ecosystem Restoration Treatment - Potential for landscape-scale**
- **Coordination with Tribe:** access, fence issues, livestock trespass, feral horses, fire management, vehicle incursions into Bear Wallow Wilderness

Adjacent land entities: San Carlos Indian Reservation, BLM, Arizona State Lands

EAGLE - CONCERNS, ISSUES, AND NEED FOR CHANGE

- This area contains vegetation types and plant associations that were not identified in current plan - may need unique objectives/guidelines.
- Minimize impact of road crossing on watershed
- Inholding owned by Phelps Dodge – if we acquire would help protect visuals
- Coordinate livestock permittees to have similar management objectives – Upper Eagle Creek group – good example
- Potential grassbank: Strayhorse, AD Bar, Hog Trail Allotments
- Potential for large scale restoration treatments – need a plan
- Potential Gila Trout Reintroduction – Chitty Creek
- Archaeological (historical & prehistorical) site potential –especially along Eagle Creek
- Potential wilderness: Dark Canyon, has major archaeology site.



SUNSET

- **Motorized Influence:** more opportunities and use than other areas below the Rim
- **Urban Influence:** Greenlee Mountain Acres, development at south end. Expect continued urban interface growth. Private Inholdings.
- **Fire Issues:** fire use, WUI influence especially from south
- **T&E Species Management/Issues:** migratory birds

Adjacent land entities: Gila National Forest, BLM, Arizona State Lands

SUNSET - CONCERNS, ISSUES, AND NEED FOR CHANGE

Trail opportunities

Lessen impacts/potential of flooding – has a direct affect on Town of Clifton

Transmission corridor – protection from fire

Opportunity to consolidate management of allotments

Harden Cienega Allotment – Gila manages – does this still make sense?

Potential grassbank

Water diversion problems

UDIs (Undocumented Immigrant)

