

Preliminary Alternatives for the 4FRI Rim Country Project

No Action

This is the no action alternative required by NEPA. It represents no changes to current management, and the forest plans would continue to be implemented. Ongoing vegetation treatments and fire management activities, as well as road maintenance, recreation, firewood gathering, authorized livestock grazing, and other activities already authorized in separate NEPA decisions would continue. There would be no other restoration activities approved with the Rim Country Project, but the direct, indirect, and cumulative effects from no action will be analyzed. The no action alternative is the baseline for assessing the action alternatives.

Proposed Action (Modified)

This is the Proposed Action as presented for scoping, with additional detail, clarifications, corrections, and modifications in response to public comments received during the scoping period.

This alternative, as modified, will respond to the Dwarf Mistletoe Mitigation issue, and will include:

- Mechanical thinning and/or Rx fire on approximately 952,330 acres
- Decommission about 250 miles of roads, improve approximately 150 miles of roads, construct about 350 miles of temporary roads
- Restore approximately 9,570 acres of meadows
- Restore about 184 springs
- Restore up to 470 miles of stream and up to 360 miles of stream habitat
- Construct up to 200 miles of barriers or fence around springs, aspen, willows, maples
- Add specific aquatic and wildlife habitat restoration activities
- Add details on flexible toolbox approach

Alternative 3

This alternative would be designed to increase the intensity and/or frequency of mechanical and fire treatments in order to maximize functional restoration across the Rim Country project area. Treatments would be designed to treat more acres at the higher intensity of the treatment range to lower the basal area, to move treated stands closer to their natural range of variation (NRV), and move the project area farther and faster toward the desired conditions in the Apache-Sitgreaves, Coconino, and Tonto Forest Plans. Prescribed fire would be used across the project area to restore fire regimes and reduce the risk of undesirable fire behavior and effects.

Alternative 3 is being drafted to respond to the Economics and Dwarf Mistletoe Mitigation issues and will include:

- Mechanical thinning and/or Rx fire on approximately 952,330 acres
- More aggressive mechanical thinning and higher intensity to lower BA and move toward DCs farther and faster
- Specific dwarf mistletoe mitigation treatments in individual stands
- Develop specific aquatic and wildlife habitat restoration activities
- Develop flexible toolbox approach

Alternative 4

This alternative would be designed to optimize restoration treatments in areas that are the most highly departed from the natural range of variation (NRV) of ecological conditions, and/or put communities at risk from undesirable fire behavior and effects. High value assets will be better protected and burn boundaries will be designed to create conditions safe for personnel and to ensure fire can meet objectives. Treatment areas would be chosen to optimize both ecological restoration and economics, focusing first on areas that can be moved the furthest toward desired conditions and be done so most cost-effectively, whereby industry is able to economically treat these acres and maximize products produced profitably. Focusing on where the higher priority ecological restoration overlaps with areas where treatments are more economically viable would result in fewer acres being treated.

Alternative 4 is being drafted to respond to the Smoke/Air Quality, Economics, Roads, and Dwarf Mistletoe Mitigation issues and will include:

- Optimizing ecological restoration and economics (high priority restoration and economically viable)
- Focusing Rx fire to protect high value assets (people and property)
- Less mechanical thinning and Rx fire
- Develop specific aquatic and wildlife habitat restoration activities
- Develop flexible toolbox approach