

**Gila National Forest  
Reserve, NM  
June 13, 2017  
FOREST PLAN REVISION COMMUNITY MEETING**

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**FIRE UPDATE**

Emily Irwin, Quemado District Ranger, updated participants on two nearby wildfires on the Reserve Ranger District.

- The Teacher Fire is west of Snow Lake. It is currently burning in the footprint of the Bear Fire, which happened ten years ago. The District's strategy is not to suppress it but to identify the road system that they can use to successfully contain the fire. The fire is currently burning 750 acres.
- The Gravel fire is west of the Teacher fire and is burning 1,000 acres. It is burning in the Whitewater-Baldy fire scar from 2012. There are a lot of snags in the area. The fire will be managed within an area and the progression, weather, and fire behavior will be continually monitored

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**PLANNING PROCESS OVERVIEW**

Matt Schultz, Forest Planner, introduced the Gila National Forest planning process and summarized the current phase.

- The current forest plan, which was last revised in 1986, provides management guidance for the US Forest Service (USFS) and all the resources on the Gila National Forest.
- The planning process is embedded in an adaptive management framework that consists of assessing, planning, and monitoring. The revision is currently in the planning phase.
- The Gila National Forest planning team has completed the assessment phase and has posted final versions of the Assessment Report and Need for Change Document on the website. The Notice of Intent has also been published. This marks the beginning of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process.
- The Need for Change Document provides focus for the next phase of planning. The goal is to develop a Forest Plan that provides vision, strategy, and guidance. Components of the Forest Plan will be developed to meet desired conditions. Desired conditions are the drivers of the Forest Plan.
- The Forest Plan will also include:
  - Objectives
  - Standards
  - Guidelines
  - Suitability
  - Management approaches
  - Geographical areas
  - A monitoring plan
  - Timber suitability
  - Priority watersheds

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- An inventory of lands that may have potential wilderness characteristics
- A wild and scenic river eligibility study
- A list of significant issues and alternatives
- An environmental analysis
- The plan components will be integrated to provide for multiple use, sustainability, ecological integrity, and ecosystem services. The plan components will provide a strategic and practical framework for managing the Gila National Forest that best meets the needs of the people while remaining within the inherent capability of the land and Forest Service authority/fiscal capacity.
- Stakeholder engagement is critical to developing a plan that can be successfully implemented. Engagement will ensure that the process is inclusive and transparent. For this phase of the plan, the Gila National Forest is planning to hold:
  - Community meetings
  - Technical meetings
  - Open houses
  - Field trips
  - Desired conditions workshops (early August)
  - Review and comment periods
- The timeline is as follows:
  - Initial plan components: completed winter of 2017/2018 for feedback
  - Development of preliminary alternatives: early 2018
  - Environmental analysis (EIS): 2018/2019
  - Record of decision: 2019
- It is important that community members are active participants in developing a future vision for the Forest. Please tell the Gila National Forest planning team what is valuable about the Forest and offer ideas on forest management. The Gila National Forest planning team hopes to build on existing partnerships and explore new ways to accomplish land management goals throughout this process.
- For more information, visit the Gila National Forest Plan website: <http://go.usa.gov/h88k> or e-mail [gilaplan@fs.fed.us](mailto:gilaplan@fs.fed.us).

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### **MEETING PLAN OVERVIEW**

- Participants were encouraged to provide field trip suggestions for areas, issues, management activities, or resources that they would like to visit with a Gila National Forest Service representative. There will be one field trip per district with multiple site visits.
- Participants rotated through three “stations,” each with a different focus related to the Forest Plan Revision.
  - **Station One** asked participants to write desired conditions for the Forest related to different topics (e.g., wildlife, infrastructure, vegetation, etc.).

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- **Station Two** asked participants to assess visual improvements based on whether they were “substantially noticeable.” “Substantially noticeable” is an important term for the Gila National Forest planners to define during the inventory of lands that may have potential wilderness characteristics.
- **Station Three** asked participants to prioritize the benefits from the forest that are most important to them.

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## **DESIRED CONDITIONS**

Nessa Natharius, Forest Ecologist, described the importance of desired conditions in the Forest Plan Revision.

- Desired conditions will be the driver of the Forest Plan Revision. Framing forests in terms of desired conditions is a paradigm shift from the 1986 forest plan, which was driven by standards and guidelines.
- Desired conditions are management outcomes (not actions). They must be achievable and within the inherent capability of the land. They must also be clear and concise and have enough detail to measure progress.
- Participants were first asked to individually write down several desired condition statements for the topic areas that mattered most to them (Section A, below). Participants then had a more in-depth discussion about their desired management outcomes (Section B, below).

### **A. DESIRED OUTCOMES PROPOSED BY INDIVIDUALS IN WRITTEN FORM**

Participants were asked to write desired condition statements for as many or as few of the following topics as they preferred. Below are the participants’ written statements.

#### **Vegetation**

- Riparian areas are properly functioning or if functioning at risk or non-functioning are in an upward trend
- Multiple use will help maintain vegetation, i.e., timber, grazing, trails in specific areas.
- Invasive species populations are identified, monitored, prioritized, and treated
- Invasive vegetation species of weeds that occurred due to post-fire treatment will be studied. A New Mexico survey stated it is beyond controlling and would be a multi-million-dollar problem that is beyond the scope of a solution. There needs to be a study to determine if benefits outweigh negatives of seeding and strawing.

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**Soils and Watersheds**

- Watersheds are properly functional or if functioning at risk or non-functioning are in an upward trend
- Soils are retained on the land through vegetation management and conservation efforts

**Timber, Fuelwood and Other Forest Products**

- Bring back multiple use
- Make sure areas do not become fire hazards
- There is a thriving and sustainable supply of wood products for jobs
- The USFS needs to adopt forest management practices that are modeled after the Wisconsin Indian reservation where their forest looks like ancient forests and makes more money
- Provide sustainable commercial timber and firewood products for local demand
- There are more timber sales

**Wildland Fire and Other Fuels Management**

- Do not start fires to manage trees. The Wallow Fire was started in New Mexico by the USFS
- Erosion is an issue. High water impacts the destruction of watersheds. Topsoil is totally gone and it will take centuries to reestablish.
- Wildland fires are managed to ensure retention of fire-sensitive habitats such as riparian areas
- Wildland fires are managed to maximize retention of timber resources in suitable lands

**Wildlife**

- There are no more wolf programs
- Game animals are abundant and well-distributed without risking endangerment of other native species
- Stream fishery degradation, water temperature, lack of pools/breeding areas, and the deer population explosion is due to an expansion of forbes

**Recreation and Scenery**

- There is no more “wilderness”
- Available recreation resources include opportunities outside of wilderness for dark sky night viewing

**Livestock Grazing**

- Bring back multiple use; the Gila National Forest is dying without it
- Livestock allotments go up for bid every three years and are not kept in families for 100 plus years
- Use livestock grazing so that that areas do not become overgrown and become potential fire hazards

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- Range condition is fair or better, or if it less than fair then it is on an upward trend

**Infrastructure (Roads, Trails, Campgrounds, etc.)**

- Keep up campgrounds. Maintain and build restrooms, fire pits, etc.
- There is no more Travel Management Rule (TMR)
- There is access to healthy forests via well-maintained roads and trails
- Open roads are maintained so cultural heritage resources are not threatened and are more accessible to the public
- Campground facilities are well-maintained and expanded
- Areas are kept open and used (not overused)
- The USFS should continue to operate with the Continental Divide Coalition to improve and maintain the Continental Divide Trail (CDT).
- There should be substantial road-less areas

**Designated Areas**

- There is a west and south designation for the Gila
- Designated areas are vital to protect
- Recently purchased Bear Creek Ranch needs a new gate and a “Road Closed” sign so people must walk in to protect it. All-terrain vehicles (ATVs), motorcycles, and other vehicles are damaging it.

**Traditional Cultural Uses**

- Camping, hunting, fishing, woodcutting, grazing, etc., keep forest areas active
- Archaeological sites are protected

## **B. GROUP DISCUSSION**

The group discussed desired conditions for infrastructure, timber/fuelwood/other forest products, and vegetation. The themes from their discussion are captured below.

**Infrastructure**

- The USFS has a limited budget and must decide what should be kept and what should be offloaded
- The Gila National Forest should not be degrading. The Forest should be distinguished by no fallen snags, continued support of the CDT, accommodation for different forms of use, drainage features, and chainsaw use in the wilderness.
- The Washington Office should let the local USFS representatives do their job.

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**Timber, Fuelwood and other Forest Products**

- The Mescalero Indian Reservation makes more money than the surrounding USFS lands. The USFS should do what needs to be done to maintain a healthy forest but should also look at more creative models to generate funding. The Mescalero Indian Reservation also has logging capacity that the USFS could utilize. The USFS could partner with them.
- The USFS should try not to burn commercial timber.

**Vegetation**

- Erosion is a big issue. In some places there are two-foot drops down to sand.
- Create a management balance that allows naturally-occurring processes to happen but requires the USFS to step in when there are impacts from frequent use such as erosion or water siltation.

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**INVENTORY OF LANDS WITH POTENTIAL WILDERNESS CHARACTERISTICS**

Eric Flood, Recreation Planner, explained the process for identifying and evaluating lands that may be suitable to recommend to Congress for Wilderness Designation. When Congress passed the original Wilderness Act in 1964, they instructed the Secretary of Agriculture to periodically assess wilderness characteristics on national forests.

- It is required by law and policy that every national forest undertaking forest plan revision must undergo this process, which involves four steps. Each step in the process reduces the number of acres being evaluated:
  - **Step one:** The USFS performs a broad and inclusive inventory of lands that may have potential wilderness characteristics.
  - **Step two:** Sites are evaluated for wilderness characteristics. They are evaluated for apparent naturalness, opportunities for solitude or primitive and unconfined recreation, and manageability to protect wilderness characteristics.
  - **Step three:** A range of alternatives are analyzed. Inclusion in alternatives is based on the compatibility with the “theme” of each.
  - **Step four:** The Forest Supervisor decides which, if any, lands to recommend to Congress for designation. Congress may or may not act upon this recommendation.
- The Gila National Forest planning team is currently in the first step of the process. First, any areas that contain any open roads are excluded, with a 300-foot buffer (which can be adjusted on a case-by-case basis). The planning team will then identify and remove all areas with “substantially noticeable” improvements and installations. Finally, the planning team will remove areas that are “unmanageable as wilderness areas due to their size.” Areas less than 5,000 acres that do not border an existing wilderness area are not generally considered manageable unless they have unique circumstances due to terrain, location, natural barriers, etc.

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- As part of the inventory of lands with potential wilderness characteristics process, the Gila National Forest must determine what existing structures and improvements are “substantially noticeable” and exclude them from the inventoried areas.
- Participants were asked to write their responses to the following 3 questions on a sticky note for each of 11 pictures with a manmade structure or improvement in it:
  - Do you think the structure or improvement in this picture is substantially noticeable?
  - Why or why not?
  - Can you think of any change in circumstance that would change your answer to question number one?

**RESULTS OF GROUP EXERCISE (Letters before responses do not connote meaning or value; they have been added to facilitate reading the table below. Each letter corresponds to a single person’s response for that picture.)**

| <b>Improvement or Structure</b>     | <b>Do you think this picture is substantially noticeable?</b> | <b>Why or why not?</b>   | <b>Is there any change in circumstance that would change your answer to #1?</b>   |
|-------------------------------------|---|--|---|
| <b>Wildlife Guzzler (with bear)</b> | a. Yes<br>b. Yes<br>c. Yes<br>d. Yes<br>e. Yes<br>f. Yes      | a. It is a rubber tire<br>b. Keep it<br>c. It is a man-made structure<br>d. It is man-made<br>e. Leave it<br>f. It is a man-made structure   | a. It is needed for water<br>b. It is good for wildlife!<br>c. Neutral colors<br>d. It is for water storage<br>e. Water is good<br>f. N/A |
| <b>Wildlife Guzzler</b>             | a. Yes<br>b. Yes<br>c. Yes<br>d. Yes<br>e. Yes<br>f. Yes      | a. It is an improvement for water and fencing<br>b. It benefits livestock and wildlife<br>c. It stands out<br>d. It is a man-made drink tank<br>e. It is a man-made structure<br>f. It is necessary for wildlife | a. No<br>b. Leave it alone. No more “wilderness”<br>c. No<br>d. N/A<br>e. The benefits outweigh the negatives<br>f. Keep it               |
| <b>Aging Cabin</b>                  | a. Yes<br>b. Yes<br>c. Yes<br>d. Yes                          | a. It is a man-made structure<br>b. It is a man-made structure<br>c. It is a man-made structure<br>d. Leave it alone   | a. N/A<br>b. Leave it alone<br>c. No. Is this a heritage site?<br>d. No wilderness  |

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| <b>Improvement or Structure</b>             | <b>Do you think this picture is substantially noticeable?</b>                                | <b>Why or why not?</b>   | <b>Is there any change in circumstance that would change your answer to #1?</b>  |
|---|--|--|--|
|   | e. Yes<br>f. Yes   | e. It looks old so it adds to the wilderness experience<br>f. Leave it   | e. Leave it<br>f. It shows history   |
| <b>Lookout Tower and Communication Site</b> | a. Yes<br>b. Yes<br>c. Yes<br><br>d. Yes<br>e. Yes   | a. It is man-made<br>b. It is man-made<br>c. It may be a necessary edifice<br><br>d. It is a man-made structure<br>e. It is a tower structure  | a. No<br>b. N/A<br>c. Keep it if the rest of the proposed wilderness is very important<br>d. No<br>e. Eliminate it   |
| <b>Solar Panel</b>                          | a. Yes<br><br>b. Yes<br>c. Yes<br><br>d. Yes<br>e. Yes<br>f. Yes<br><br>g. Yes<br><br>h. Yes | a. It is unnatural<br><br>b. It is man-made<br>c. It is very noticeable<br><br>d. It is a man-made structure<br>e. It is unnatural<br>f. It is a solar panel<br><br>g. Is there a better location for it?<br>h. It is man-made | a. Roof mount solar panels<br>b. No<br>c. Either disguise it or take it out<br>d. N/A<br>e. N/A<br>f. Their use would impact the decision<br>g. N/A<br>h. It could probably be removed, but why is it there? Is it powering water? |
| <b>Clear-Cut Area</b>                       | a. Yes<br><br>b. Yes<br>c. Yes<br>d. Yes<br><br>e. Yes                                       | a. It is awful! Make the logging company restore this<br>b. It is caused by man<br>c. There are nice sized trees<br>d. It is a timber cut<br><br>e. Clear-cut area   | a. It will return to natural if restoration is done<br>b. It will eventually heal<br>c. Replant post-logging<br>d. Do not "clear cut;" selectively thin<br>e. Clean-cut stumps or do not have clear-cuts                           |

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| <b>Improvement or Structure</b> | <b>Do you think this picture is substantially noticeable?</b>     | <b>Why or why not?</b>   | <b>Is there any change in circumstance that would change your answer to #1?</b>   |
|---------------------------------|---|--|---|
|                                 | f. Yes<br>g. Yes<br>h. Yes  | f. It shows mans' action for timber sale<br>g. It is a clear-cut<br>h. Erosion clear-cut   | f. Would not be okay with it until it is back to natural<br>g. Erosion control<br>h. Thin it instead of clear-cutting   |
| <b>Fish Barrier</b>             | a. Yes<br>b. Yes<br>c. No<br>d. No<br>e. No<br>f. No<br>g. No     | a. It is a man-made cross stream structure<br>b. It is beautiful!<br>c. The dam is not visible<br>d. It looks natural<br>e. If it serves a necessary function: fish?<br>f. It is beautiful<br>g. Cannot see it   | a. N/A<br>b. Yes, if water dries up<br>c. N/A<br>d. Leave it as it is<br>e. Leave it as it is<br>f. Keep it the same<br>g. Leave it                                 |
| <b>Windmill</b>                 | a. Yes<br>b. Yes<br>c. Yes<br>d. Yes<br>e. Yes<br>f. Yes          | a. It is a man-made structure<br>b. It is a man-made drinker<br>c. N/A<br>d. Windmill is very noticeable<br>e. It is man-made<br>f. It is a man-made structure   | a. It may be necessary in dry climate to serve wildlife; keep it<br>b. No<br>c. Leave it alone<br>d. Replace the windmill with solar<br>e. N/A<br>f. Leave it alone |
| <b>Range Fence</b>              | a. Yes<br>b. Yes<br>c. Yes<br>d. Yes<br>e. Yes<br>f. Yes<br>g. No | a. There is a fence and highway<br>b. This is wilderness?<br>c. There is a highway, fence, posts, buildings<br>d. There is a road and man-made structure<br>e. It is a man-made structure and fence<br>f. There is a fence and a road<br>g. It is surrounded by grasslands | a. N/A<br>b. No way<br>c. Underground utilities<br>d. No<br>e. It would have to be taken out of consideration<br>f. No<br>g. No                                     |

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| <b>Improvement or Structure</b> | <b>Do you think this picture is substantially noticeable?</b>              | <b>Why or why not?</b>   | <b>Is there any change in circumstance that would change your answer to #1?</b>  |
|---------------------------------|--|--|--|
|                                 | h. No  | h. No change   | h. N/A   |
| <b>Aging Corral</b>             | a. Yes<br>b. Yes<br>c. Yes<br><br>d. Yes<br>e. Yes<br><br>f. Yes           | a. It is man-made<br>b. It is man-made<br>c. It is not awful since it is historical and maybe usable for horse packers<br>d. It is man-made<br>e. Leave it alone<br>f. It is a man-made object   | a. It looks neat<br>b. N/A<br>c. Leave it<br><br>d. No<br>e. Too bad no one uses it anymore<br>f. Leave it alone   |
| <b>Aging Range Fence</b>        | a. Yes<br>b. Yes<br><br>c. Yes<br>d. Yes<br>e. Yes<br><br>f. Yes<br>g. Yes | a. It is man-made<br>b. We do not need more "wilderness"<br>c. It is a man-made fence<br>d. It is man-made<br>e. It is man-made<br><br>f. It is man-made<br>g. It looks old and represents farmer inhabitants. It presents historic information. | a. No<br>b. N/A<br><br>c. Do not change<br>d. It is historic<br>e. Leave it alone to decompose<br>f. N/A<br>g. Leave it as it is and do not maintain it. |

**VALUES AND PRIORITIES ON FOREST SERVICE LAND**

Chris Armatas and Bill Borrie from the University of Montana led a prioritization exercise. Participants were asked to prioritize the benefits from the forest that are most important to them. The final report from Chris Armatas and Bill Borrie will present the diversity of opinions as well as the similarities among participants.

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**PUBLIC COMMENT CARDS AND MEETING EVALUATION**

On a scale from “not good” to “very good,” four people indicated that the meeting was “very good,” two people indicated that the meeting was close to “very good,” and two people indicated that the meeting was in the middle, between “not good,” and “very good.” Written public comments are below.

- Absolutely fabulous presentation! Terrific energy of facilitators; clever ideas for organizing our input; very educational. However, very bad job of advertising. I thought it was an open house, so I was late. Should have been in newspapers like Desert Exposure, Catron Courier, El Defensor Chieftain, etc.
- Mitchell White has functioned as a hatchet man for reduction of ranching forest areas in the state of Nevada and in the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests (ASNF) (where much of the Forest Plan direction was developed directly by Mr. White). The ASNF Plan’s direction is an aggressive gradualism against human use and access of the forests. His plan for the forest was presented in a public working group quite early in the process and indeed the final plan reflected this direction substantially. Interviews with those ranchers negatively affected by his range “management” activities on the ASNF uncovered fraud and falsified reports to the demise of ranching families. He was never appropriately called to task for these egregious crimes of fraud and misrepresentation against federal procedures and the historic family-based cultures there, but was rewarded instead by the offer of a timely transfer to the nearby Gila National Forest so he could use his “skills” to promote similar cultural depredations there as well. Though Mr. White has retired now, he was surely with the Gila Forest planning process long enough to apply his particular “skills” toward corrupting it.

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**FIELD TRIP SUGGESTIONS**

Participants provided the following field trip suggestions.

- Willow Creek’s post-fire effects
- Conflict avoidance for wolves
- Managing the forest for the benefit of ecosystem health