

1. Why do researchers need special use permits to conduct research on National Forest Lands?

- Federal Regulations mandate that all commercial and non-commercial uses of Forest Lands be accounted for by special use permits. All research proposals require an assessment of whether the action is subject to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). If the action requires NEPA, coordination with the forest will be required and a NEPA decision signed before the actions can take place.
- Many activities occur on the forest that may conflict with research projects, such as group recreational events, routine utility corridor maintenance, tree thinning, Christmas tree cutting, prescribed burns, habitat restoration, new land designations, and proposed land exchanges. Knowledge of research activities by Forest Service staff and regular communication can help minimize undesirable impacts to research projects.
- The Forest Service has a wealth of information about its land and resources. Resource specialists can direct researchers to areas most appropriate for their needs, as well as offer information on management history or historical events, such as wildfires. Research permits facilitate this communication.
- The Forest Service benefits from data that researchers provide. New information from researchers can be incorporated into Forest Service databases and used to improve forest management. Consequently, a summary of findings (e.g., copies of theses, dissertations, papers) from permitted research on the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests SHALL be provided to the Forest Service upon completion of the study.
- It is important to promote and facilitate integration and coordination of complementary research projects. Spatial data on the location of all permitted research projects will be maintained on a forest-wide GIS map. Efforts will be made to link complementary projects and promote interdisciplinary research.

2. Who should apply?

Principal Investigators (PIs) of all research projects located on lands managed by the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests should apply for research permits. Research by graduate students must also list their major professor as a PI. Failure to obtain a special use permit for research violates Forest Service Policy and Federal environmental regulations, and may jeopardize completion of the research.

3. When do I apply?

There are two application dates each year to allow project proposals to be incorporated into the Forest's program of work:

A. Proposals that do not require archaeological clearance or biological assessment/evaluation should be submitted by March 15 or July 15 in the year of planned implementation of the research, and should have an expected NEPA decision generally within four weeks after submission, depending on the complexity and volume of proposals received.

B. Proposals that require archaeological clearance or consultation with US Fish & Wildlife Service should be submitted only by July 15 in the year **prior** to planned implementation of the research, so the projects can be incorporated into the program of work for the following federal

fiscal year, which begins in October. Moreover, large or complex, but currently unfunded research proposals should be submitted for review on this date to allow the Forest Service time to plan for additional analysis if the project receives grant funding in mid-year.

Proposals submitted at these times will receive priority by Forest Service staff over proposals submitted at other times of the year.

4. How do I know if my proposal requires archaeological clearance, biological assessment, or other evaluations such as 401/404 permitting?

If your project meets the criteria below, archaeological clearance and biological assessment/evaluation are probably not needed. In this case, proposals can be submitted in either March or July of the year implementation is planned.

- Cumulative ground disturbance less than 1 m² (may still require nepa)
- No use of noisy, mechanized equipment
- No equipment, instruments, or sampling devices stored overnight at study area
- No live trapping or destructive sampling of animals
- Measurement and sampling of vegetation will not kill individual plants directly or indirectly
- A permit to collect plants is required by the Regional Office, through the Regional Botanist.

If your project meets the criteria below, archaeological clearance and biological assessment/evaluation may be needed; this need will be evaluated by Forest Service staff. In this case, proposals can be submitted only in July of the year prior to planned implementation of the research.

- Cumulative ground disturbance greater than 1 m²
- Includes prescribed fire
- Occasional or continuous use of noisy, mechanized equipment
- Equipment, instruments, or sampling devices stored overnight (or longer) at study area in temporary containers (e.g., small enclosures, boxes)
- Live trapping or destructive sampling of animals
- Vegetation sampling or measurement that kills individual plants
- Construction of new or modification of existing buildings or other permanent structures at the research area
- Research personnel live or camp at the research area for more than two weeks per year

5. Can researchers arrange archaeological and biological surveys for their projects?

The Forest Service must consider a variety of issues, including potential impacts to archaeological and cultural resources. If an archaeologist reviews a proposal and it includes potential impacts to archaeological and cultural resources, the Section 106 process in compliance with the National Historic Preservation Act must be completed prior to approval and implementation. The Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests funds a limited number of days each year for their archaeologists to provide surveys, consultations with potentially affected tribes, and clearances in support of research permit proposals. However, this work must be scheduled into the existing workload, and timelines to complete this process can vary from a few days to months. If the timeline for the Forest Service to prepare a clearance is too

long, the research applicant has the option of paying an archaeological consultant to conduct a survey and prepare an archaeological clearance for the proposal (if no significant places of traditional cultural importance are involved). A list of consultants permitted to conduct archaeological work on the forest is available upon request. This work will need to be coordinated with the Forest Service archaeologists well in advance, as they will need to review, accept, and submit any "out service" work to the State Historic Preservation Officer.

Similarly, some projects may require biological surveys that cannot be quickly incorporated into planned workloads of Forest Service staff. To avoid delay in such projects, the research applicant can arrange for the required biological survey and analysis of project impacts to be completed by non-Forest Service personnel if approved by the Forest Service. In this case, survey and analysis information will be submitted to the Forest Service for review.

6. What information is needed to process your proposal?

- ✓ **PI name**, phone number, and email address; name and address of PI's research organization/department.
- ✓ Statement of the **scope and purpose** of the research: Please be concise and avoid non-essential jargon as several different resource specialists will review the proposal.
- ✓ **Exact** location of the project: We can't stress this requirement enough. GIS maps and topographic maps at a 1:24,000 scale are recommended. The location of your project needs to be compared with maps of archaeological sites and threatened and endangered species (TES). If you have large plots, the perimeter must be defined. If you have small plots or sites, place dots on the map.
- ✓ **Methods** used: Please provide specific information about how the research will be accomplished on the ground. This includes the following information:
 - The **area** encompassed by the research: how it will be designated, laid out on the ground, and identified.
 - **Activities** associated with the research: measurements, sampling methods, frequency and duration of entry into an area, equipment used, and the specific amount and nature of ground disturbance (depth, and dimensions). Providing detailed information about methods will facilitate review. Failure to provide sufficient details may result in a delay in review.
 - **Time** of the year and **frequency** of site visits, including the number of visitors: This information is critical to evaluate potential research impacts to TES and other forest resources. If research is in the proximity of a known TES, consideration of the number of people in the area and the timing and frequency of their visits is important.
 - **Duration** of research: Estimate the likely duration of the research activities.

PLEASE NOTE: Failure to provide this information may delay review of your proposal.

7. What is the review process, and where do I submit proposals for review?

Proposals are first reviewed by the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests Research Permit Committee, which consists of an interdisciplinary team of Forest Service specialists. The purpose of this review is to check proposals for completeness, and place proposals into categories of potential impacts on Forest

resources and uses (low, medium, high). Information from proposals will not be shared outside the Forest Service committee unless permission is given by the researcher. The review committee may recommend integration of small, similar projects into one proposal to facilitate Forest Service analysis. The evaluation committee will meet with Forest Service staff at least twice each year (March, July) to present proposals that need special permits from the Forest Service, and will help Forest Service staff interpret the purpose and potential impacts of the proposed research. Decision on the need for archaeological clearance and biological evaluation/assessment and approval of the special use permit will be made by Forest Service staff.

You may apply online at: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/asnf/passes-permits/?cid=stelprdb5339167>

For hardcopy submissions: Five copies of each proposal should be submitted to the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests Research Permit Committee:

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