



United States Department of Agriculture

4FRI Rim Country Project DEIS

Reader's Guide for the Draft Environmental Impact Statement



Forest Service

Apache-Sitgreaves, Coconino, Tonto National Forests

October 2019

Document Organization

How to get started with the Rim Country DEIS

Why are there two volumes?

The analysis area is very large and located on portions of three national forests (Apache-Sitgreaves, Coconino, and Tonto). Because of this the DEIS is lengthy and complex and required two volumes. Each volume has its own table of contents though pages are consecutively numbered.

Start with the following to understand basic project components:

- Chapter 1: Purpose and Need for action
- Chapter 2: Alternatives, Including the Proposed Action
- Chapter 3: Affected Environment and Environmental Consequences
- Chapter 4: List of Preparers and Consultants
- Chapter 5: Distribution List
- Appendix A: Maps
- Appendix B: Forest Plan Amendments
- Appendix C: Design Features, Best Management Practices
Mitigation, and Conservation Measures
- Appendix D: Alternatives 2 and 3 Implementation Plan
- Appendix E: Monitoring and Adaptive Management Plan
- Appendix F: Glossary
- References

For background on the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program (CFLRP) and how the 4FRI Rim Country DEIS fits into it see:

- Abstract (Vol. 1, front matter) and Summary (Vol.1, pp. i-ii)

Portions of the DEIS that may be of key interest to the reader include the following:

- **Design Features, Best Management Practices, Mitigation and Conservation Measures** (Vol. 2, pp. 535-598)
- **Implementation Plan for Alternatives 2 and 3** (Vol. 2, pp. 599-661), which includes:
 - Implementation Checklist (p.600)
 - Management Direction (pp. 601-616)
 - Old Tree Implementation Plan (pp. 617-618)
 - Large Tree Implementation Plan (pp. 619-626)
 - Density Management and Treatment Crosswalk Tables (pp. 627-630)
 - Flexible Toolbox Approaches (pp. 631-661)

Rim Country DEIS **Document Organization**

Volume 1

Chapters 1 and 2 (pp. 1-78)

Chapter 3

Laws, Regulations, and Policy, Forest Plan Amendment Substantive Requirements, Assumptions and Methodology (pp. 79-87)
Effects Analysis (pp. 87-101)
Water and Riparian (pp.101-117)
Soils (pp. 118-136)
Vegetation (pp.136-197)
Fire Ecology and Air Quality (pp. 197-269)
Climate Change (pp. 269)
Heritage Resources (pp. 269-277)
Socio-Economics (pp. 277-288)
Lands and Minerals (pp. 289-297)
Tribal Relations (pp. 297-299)
Range (pp. 299-304)
Transportation (pp. 304-311)

Volume 2

Chapter 3 continued;

Terrestrial Wildlife (pp. 312- 415)
Aquatics (pp.416-447)
Rare Plants & Noxious & Invasive Weeds (pp. 448-471)
Recreation (pp. 471-490)
Scenery (pp. 490-518)

Chapter 4 List of Preparers and Consultants

(pp. 519-525)

Chapter 5 Distribution List (pp. 526-528)

Appendices

Appendix A-Maps
Appendix B- Forest Plan Amendments
Appendix C-Design Features, Best Management Practices, Mitigation, and Conservation Measures
Appendix D- Alternatives 2 and 3 Implementation Plan
Appendix E- Monitoring and Adaptive Management Plan
Appendix F- Glossary
References

Summary

The Rim Country Project is a project of the Four Forest Restoration Initiative (4FRI), which is a planning effort designed to restore ponderosa pine forest resilience and function across four national forests in Arizona: the Apache-Sitgreaves, Coconino, Kaibab, and Tonto National Forests. In 2010, 4FRI

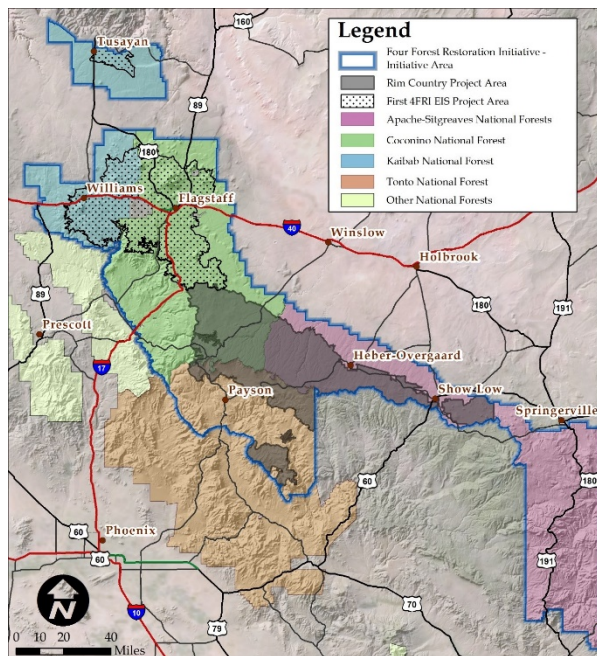


Figure 1. Rim Country Vicinity Map

was selected to receive Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program (CFLRP) funding under Title IV of the Omnibus Public Land Management Act of 2009.

The purpose of the Rim Country Project is to restore and maintain the structure, pattern, health, function, and vegetation composition and diversity in ponderosa pine ecosystems, thus moving the project area toward the desired conditions in the respective land and resource management plans (LRMPs) and increasing ecosystem resilience.

To meet the purpose and need for action, the Apache-Sitgreaves, Coconino, and Tonto National Forests are proposing a suite of restoration activities on approximately 953,100 acres over a period of 20 years or when activities can be funded or completed. The area affected by the proposal includes approximately 540,020 acres on the Black Mesa and Lakeside Ranger Districts of the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests, 398,880

acres on the Mogollon Rim and Red Rock Ranger Districts of the Coconino National Forest, and 299,710 acres on the

Payson and Pleasant Valley Ranger Districts of the Tonto National Forest.

The Forest Service is currently preparing an environmental impact statement (EIS) for the Rim Country Project. A Notice of Intent was published in the Federal Register on June 27, 2016, and publication of a Notice of Availability for the draft EIS is anticipated in the Federal Register on **October 18, 2019**.

The draft EIS documents the analysis of three alternatives: Alternative 1 is the no-action alternative. Alternative 2, the modified proposed action and preferred alternative, would mechanically treat vegetation on up to 889,340 acres and would treat up to 953,130 acres with prescribed fire. Alternative 3 would mechanically treat up to 483,160 acres and burn up to 529,060 acres. Both of the action alternatives propose significant project-level amendments to the 1985 Tonto National LRMP in order to align it with the best available scientific information and the 2012 Mexican Spotted Owl Recovery Plan, and to account for advances in mechanized thinning technology and capabilities that allow for ground-based treatment on slopes above 40 percent.

The draft EIS includes, as appendices, project design features that minimize or avoid effects from the proposed activities; an implementation plan with guidance that will be used by Forest Service personnel to ensure that treatments and activities are implemented to meet the purpose and need and LRMP standards and guidelines; and a monitoring and adaptive management plan that details the framework and process for monitoring restoration activities.

For more information, contact the 4FRI Planning Coordinator, Robbin Redman, (928) 527-3635, robbin.redman@usda.gov

To Participate in a Public Meeting and to Comment

How to Comment and Timeframe

We anticipate that the Environmental Protection Agency will publish the Notice of Availability (NOA) for the DEIS in the Federal Register on Friday, October 18, 2019. Written, facsimile, hand delivered, oral and electronic comments concerning this action will be accepted for 90 days following that date. The publication date of the NOA in the Federal Register is the exclusive means for calculating the 90-day comment period for a proposed action documented in a DEIS. Those wishing to comment should not rely upon dates or timeline information provided by any other source.

We invite you to provide any substantive comments you might have regarding the 4FRI Rim Country Project DEIS that are within the scope of the project and the decision to be made, are specific to the proposed activities and the project area, and have a direct relationship to the project. Please provide supporting reasons for us to consider. If you cite or include references with your comments, please state specifically how those references relate to the proposed activities or effects analysis. Please include hard copies or internet links to any references to which you refer. It is important that reviewers provide their comments at such times and in such manner that they are useful to the agency's preparation of the environmental impact statement. Therefore, comments should be provided prior to the close of the comment period and should clearly articulate the reviewer's concerns and contentions. Please keep in mind that comments are not counted as votes (an alternative is not selected simply because it is most referenced in individual or form letters).

This proposed project is subject to the objection process described in 36 CFR 218 Subparts A and B. As such, individuals and organizations wishing to be eligible to file a predecisional objection must meet the information requirements in 36 CFR 218. Names and contact information submitted with comments will become part of the public record and may be released under the Freedom of Information Act. Anonymous comments and comments submitted after the close of business on the last day of the comment period will be accepted and considered; however, anonymous commenters will not be eligible to file a predecisional objection.

Public Meetings: Attend one of three Forest Service public meetings to learn more about the Rim Country Project:

- November 12, 2019, 5:30-7:30pm at the Payson District Office-1009 East Highway 260-Payson, AZ
- December 2, 2019, 5:30-7:30pm at the Black Mesa District Office-2748 East Highway 260-Overgaard, AZ
- December 3, 2019, 5:30-7:30pm at the Arizona Game and Fish Office at 3500 S. Lake Mary Rd-Flagstaff, AZ

Submitting Comments

We encourage you to use our electronic options for providing comments. Electronic comments including attachments, may be submitted using the web form at <https://cara.ecosystem-management.org/Public/CommentInput?project=48210>. Please note, this option will not accept comments until the formal 90-day comment period has started. Comments may also be submitted by email, mail fax or in person. Commenters may also e-mail electronic comments, including attachments, in Word (.doc or .docx), portable document format (pdf), rich text format (.rtf), text (.txt), and hypertext markup language (html) to 4fri_comments@fs.fed.us. Please note there is an underscore (“_”) between the words “4fri” and “comments”.

Written comments must be submitted to: 4FRI Rim Country DEIS c/o Coconino National Forest Supervisor's Office, 1824 South Thompson Street, Flagstaff, AZ 86001. The fax number is (928) 527-3620. The office hours for those submitting hand-delivered comments are 08:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Monday through Friday, excluding holidays.

Contact Us: If you have a question about the Rim Country DEIS or want to know how to get involved, contact:

4FRI Planning Coordinator, Robbin Redman: 9828-527-3635, robbin.redman@usda.gov

4FRI NEPA Specialist, John Souther: (928) 226-4686, john.souther@usda.gov

Public Involvement and Issues

Collaboration

Collaboration has been integral to the 4FRI, and in 2010, stakeholders began refining their vision for ponderosa pine forest restoration across 2.4 million acres on four national forests in Arizona including the Apache-Sitgreaves, Coconino, Kaibab and Tonto.

The 4FRI Stakeholders developed a comprehensive restoration strategy for the first analysis area on the Coconino and Kaibab National Forests. The landscape strategy documented existing conditions, identified potential treatment areas, and desired post-treatment conditions. The Forest Service used the stakeholders' landscape strategy to inform the purpose and need and proposed action for both the 1st 4FRI EIS and this Rim Country Project DEIS.

Stakeholder and Public Involvement

The Rim Country Project has been published in the Coconino, Apache-Sitgreaves, and Tonto National Forest's Schedule of Proposed Actions (SOPA) since January 2016. As the Rim Country project area was developed, the Forest Service worked with stakeholders to define the project boundary as well as the extent of the analysis in different portions of the project including multiple meetings, presentations, and field visits. The notice of intent (NOI) to prepare an environmental impact statement was published in the Federal Register on June 27, 2016. The Forest Service continues to work with stakeholders and others who are interested in the Rim Country Project and the Four Forest Restoration Initiative.

Cooperating Agencies

On July 15, 2015 the Arizona Game and Fish Department (AZGD) became a cooperating agency. AZGD specialists attended interdisciplinary team meetings, held workshops to gather aquatic and terrestrial wildlife data, and provided existing condition and location information (tabular and spatial) for priority species. AZGD specialists have served on the interdisciplinary team for the Rim Country Project; helped develop the proposed action and other action alternatives; co-developed design features and conservation and mitigation measures; provided existing conditions for species and their habitat; and reviewed, edited, and augmented species analysis. This cooperation will continue.

Issues

Seven issues, including treatments in Mexican spotted owl (MSO) protected activity centers (PACs), treatments in northern goshawk habitat, large tree retention, dwarf mistletoe mitigation, smoke/air quality, economics, and temporary roads, helped refine the proposed action, focused the analysis, and informed the development of Alternative 3 and design features/mitigation measures common to both action alternatives.

Alternatives

A range of alternatives has been developed for the DEIS. These alternatives are the result of public and partner engagement since 2016 and lessons learned from the previous 4FRI EIS that was completed in 2015. The alternatives for this DEIS consist of:

Alternative 1: No Action

Alternative 2: Modified Proposed Action- it is also the preferred alternative

Alternative 3: Focused Restoration Alternative

Alternative 1

Alternative 1 is the no action alternative as required by 40 CFR 1502.14d). It represents no changes to current management, and current 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 activities approved through the Rim Country Project. The no action alternative is a baseline for assessing the action alternatives (Alternatives 2 and 3).

Alternative 2

Alternative 2, the preferred alternative, is the proposed action as presented for scoping, with additional detail, clarifications, corrections, and modifications in response to public comments received. This alternative as modified, responds to the dwarf mistletoe mitigation issue through the use of intermediate thinning (IT) treatments and/or the application of prescribed fire to address moderate and high levels of mistletoe infection. The presence of dwarf mistletoe will not be used to prioritize areas for treatment, but it will be addressed where it exists. Considerations for implementing IT treatments and prescribed fire will be included in the implementation plan as they continue to be developed with the 4FRI Stakeholder Group. Other restoration activities in Alternative 2 include vegetation treatments (mechanical thinning and burning) using the Flexible Toolbox Approach for Mechanical Treatments (see appendix D of the DEIS), as well as comprehensive restoration treatments for meadows, springs, streams, and riparian habitat using the Flexible Toolbox Approach for Aquatic and Watershed Restoration Activities (see appendix D of the DEIS). This alternative proposes up to 889,340 acres of mechanical thinning at varying levels of openness and up to 953,130 acres of prescribed fire. Alternative 2 responds to the following issues: treatments in MSO PACs, treatments in northern goshawk habitat, large tree retention, dwarf mistletoe mitigation, and economics.

Alternative 3

This alternative is designed to focus restoration treatments on areas that are the most highly departed from the natural range of variation (NRV) of ecological conditions, and/or on areas where communities may be at risk of undesirable fire behavior and effects. Areas proposed for treatment in this alternative were chosen to optimize ecological restoration and community protection, by focusing on areas that are most important to treat and can be moved the furthest toward desired conditions. By focusing proposed on these high-priority areas, this alternative would result in treatment of fewer acres compared to Alternative 2. Like Alternative 2, Alternative 3 includes comprehensive restoration treatments for meadows, springs, streams, and riparian habitat using the Flexible Toolbox Approach for Aquatic and Watershed Restoration Activities (see appendix D of the DEIS). This alternative includes approximately 483,160 acres proposed for mechanical thinning at varying levels of openness and roughly 529,060 acres of prescribed fire. Alternative 3 responds to the following issues: treatments in MSO PACs, treatments in northern goshawk habitat, large tree retention, dwarf mistletoe mitigation, economics, smoke/air quality, and concerns about construction of temporary roads.

Elements Common to Both Action Alternatives

Both action alternatives include the following suite of restoration activities:

- Restore approximately 184 springs.
- Restore function and habitat in up to 777 miles of streams, including stream reaches with habitat for threatened, endangered, and sensitive aquatic species.
- Decommission up to 200 miles of existing system roads on the Coconino and Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests, and up to 290 miles on the Tonto National Forest.

- Decommission up to 800 miles of unauthorized roads on the Apache-Sitgreaves, Coconino, and Tonto National Forests.
- Construct or improve approximately 330 miles of temporary roads (new and/or occurring on existing unauthorized roads) to facilitate mechanical treatments; decommission all temporary roads when restoration treatments are completed.
- Relocate and reconstruct existing open roads adversely affecting water quality and natural resources, or of concern to human safety.
- Construct up to 200 miles of protective barriers around springs, aspen, native willows, and big-tooth maples, as needed for restoration.

Comparison of Alternatives by Activity

Proposed Activity	Alternative 1 No Action	Alternative 2 Modified Proposed Action (Preferred)	Alternative 3 Focused Alternative
Mechanical Treatment	No treatments would occur as a result of this alternative being selected	152,270	114,280
Intermediate thinning	No treatments would occur as a result of this alternative being selected	62,720	32,290
Stand improvement	No treatments would occur as a result of this alternative being selected	12,510	5,630
Single tree selection	No treatments would occur as a result of this alternative being selected	226,520	113,350
Uneven-aged group selection	No treatments would occur as a result of this alternative being selected	1,230	1,010
Aspen restoration	No treatments would occur as a result of this alternative being selected	123,700	47,880
Facilitative operations	No treatments would occur as a result of this alternative being selected	25,290	19,590
MSO recovery - replacement nest/roost	No treatments would occur as a result of this alternative being selected	17,460	15,750
MSO PAC - mechanical	No treatments would occur as a result of this alternative being selected	18,570	2,470
Savanna restoration	No treatments would occur as a result of this alternative being selected	132,240	31,760
Severe disturbance area treatment	No treatments would occur as a result of this alternative being selected	63,930	46,260
Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) & Infrastructure Protection	No treatments would occur as a result of this alternative being selected	36,280	36,280
Grassland restoration*	No treatments would occur as a result of this alternative being selected		

Proposed Activity	Alternative 1 No Action	Alternative 2 Modified Proposed Action (Preferred)	Alternative 3 Focused Alternative
Wet meadow restoration*	No treatments would occur as a result of this alternative being selected	6,400	6,400
Riparian restoration*	No treatments would occur as a result of this alternative being selected	13,060	13,060
Total mechanical treatment (acres)	No treatments would occur as a result of this alternative being selected	889,340	483,160
Prescribed Fire	No treatments would occur as a result of this alternative being selected	889,340	483,160
Prescribed fire along with mechanical treatment			
Prescribed fire only	No treatments would occur as a result of this alternative being selected	63,790	45,900
Total prescribed fire (acres)	No treatments would occur as a result of this alternative being selected	953,130	529,060
Grassland Restoration	No treatments would occur as a result of this alternative being selected	36,280	36,280
Mechanical and Prescribed Fire			
Prescribed fire only	No treatments would occur as a result of this alternative being selected	40	40
Total grassland restoration* (acres)	No treatments would occur as a result of this alternative being selected	36,320	36,320
Wet Meadow Restoration	No treatments would occur as a result of this alternative being selected	6,410	6,410
Mechanical and Prescribed Fire			
Prescribed fire only	No treatments would occur as a result of this alternative being selected	310	310
Total wet meadow restoration* (acres)	No treatments would occur as a result of this alternative being selected	6,720	6,720
Riparian Restoration	No treatments would occur as a result of this alternative being selected	13,060	13,060
Mechanical and Prescribed Fire			
Prescribed fire only	No treatments would occur as a result of this alternative being selected	1,500	1,500
Springs restored (number)	No treatments would occur as a result of this alternative being selected	184	184

Proposed Activity	Alternative 1 No Action	Alternative 2 Modified Proposed Action (Preferred)	Alternative 3 Focused Alternative
Protective barriers around springs, aspen, native willows and bigtooth maples (miles)	No treatments would occur as a result of this alternative being selected	200	200
Stream restoration (miles)	No treatments would occur as a result of this alternative being selected	777	777
Existing road decommission (miles)	No treatments would occur as a result of this alternative being selected	490	490
Unauthorized route decommission (miles)	No treatments would occur as a result of this alternative being selected	800	800
Temporary road construction and decommission (miles)	No treatments would occur as a result of this alternative being selected	330	170
Road relocation and reconstruction (miles)	No treatments would occur as a result of this alternative being selected	As needed	As needed
Total riparian restoration* (acres)	No treatments would occur as a result of this alternative being selected	14,560	14,560

Planning Timeline

The final EIS and draft record of decision (ROD) are anticipated to be completed in late 2020. A final ROD is anticipated in late spring of 2021, following an administrative review process.

USDA Non-Discrimination Policy Statement [DR 4300.003 USDA Equal Opportunity Public Notification Policy \(June 2, 2015\)](#)

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