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Recreation and Wilderness Specialist Report

Submitted by:

Christopher J. Brown
Natural Resource Planner,
Prescott National Forest

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Introduction

The purpose of this report is to evaluate the potential environmental consequences on the recreation program resource that may result from the adoption of a revised land management plan. It examines the consequences of taking no action to revise the current plan and of three different alternatives: the proposed revision of the current plan, an alternative that emphasizes vegetation and wildlife habitat restoration, and an alternative that emphasizes dispersed recreation opportunities.

This report will describe:

- The laws that are relevant to recreation management on the Prescott National Forest
- The current recreation environment on the forest
- The Needs for Change addressed in the forest plan revision
- The sections of each alternative considered in detail that are relevant to recreation
- The process and assumptions used in the analysis of these alternatives
- The environmental consequences of these alternatives
- The relationship between the short-term and long-term potential consequences of each alternative
- The cumulative consequences to the environment of the alternatives

Relevant Laws that Apply

Relevant laws that apply to recreation management on the Prescott National Forest include:

- **Granger-Thye Act (1950)** – This act allows concessionaires operating under permit to use facility maintenance expenditures to off-set permit fees.
- **Multiple-Use Sustained-Yield Act of 1960 (1960)** – This act mandates that National Forests be "administered for outdoor recreation, range, timber, watershed, and wildlife and fish purposes", thus establishing outdoor recreation as a stated purpose of the Forest Service.
- **Land and Water Conservation Fund Act of 1965 (1965)** – This act establishes fee authority at certain recreation areas and establishes a fund to subsidize state and federal acquisition of lands and waters for recreation and conservation purposes.
- **National Forest Roads and Trails Act (1964)** – This act authorizes the construction and maintenance of a system of roads and trails on the National Forests for the purposes of use, protection, and management of these lands.
- **Wilderness Act (1964)** – The act dictates that Wilderness is an area of Federal land that will be managed to retain its primeval character and influence. It is protected and managed so as to preserve its natural condition and the imprint of man's work must be substantially unnoticeable. This guides the management of the eight designated wilderness areas on the Prescott NF.
- **Wild and Scenic Rivers Act (1968)** – The outstandingly remarkable values of rivers eligible or suitable to be included in the system must be carefully managed. Any management activities that could negatively impact these values should not be conducted.

- **National Trails System Act (1968)** – This act and its subsequent amendments authorized a national system of trails and defined four categories of national trails: National Scenic Trails, National Recreation Trails, National Historic Trails, and Connecting or Side Trails.
- **Youth Conservation Corps (1970)** – This act established the Youth Conservation Corps. The purpose of this program is to give participants hand-on experience managing public lands through development and maintenance projects. These projects often involve working in recreation settings such as developed sites or on system trails.
- **Volunteers in the National Forests Act of 1972 (1972)** – This act provides the authority to recruit, train, and accept volunteers. Volunteers working directly for the Forest and through cooperative programs are important contributors to the management of the recreation program.
- **Arizona Wilderness Act of 1984 (1984)** This act expanded the National Wilderness Preservation System in the state of Arizona and established six of the eight designated wilderness areas on the Prescott NF.
- **Americans with Disabilities Act (1990)** – This act established standards for the elimination of discrimination against individuals with disabilities by mandating reasonable accommodations be made to provide access to recreation and administrative facilities on the forest.
- **Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act (2004)** – The act provides Federal land-managing agencies with long-term recreation fee authority. It specifically authorizes these agencies to reinvest recreation fees at the local recreation sites where they were collected to benefit visitors through enhanced facilities and services.

Affected Environment

Prescott National Forest – Where the Desert Meets the Cool Pines

The Prescott's unique mix of climate zones provide for "cool zone" heat relief from the Arizona sun in the summer and a "warm zone" in the winter. The Forest offers short duration day use recreation on trails supported by development that provides staging areas and resource protection. Adventure activities are strategically managed to be compatible with one another to preserve the natural setting and the ecosystems of the forest.

- Prescott National Forest Recreation Niche

As noted in the Prescott National Forest Recreation Niche statement (Forest Service, 2006), the mild climate encourages year round recreation on the forest. The primary activities center around day use and include viewing scenery, driving for pleasure, and trail use by off-highway vehicles (OHVs), hikers, bicyclists, and horseback riders. Most of the visitors are local, from Yavapai or Maricopa County. The majority of the forest is located within Yavapai County, and the southern portion of the forest is less than 90 miles from Maricopa County and the Phoenix metropolitan area.

The developed sites on the Prescott National Forest (Prescott NF) encompass campgrounds, picnic areas, lake access, equestrian areas, rental cabins, and a recreational shooting range. The Forest also contains almost 800 miles of both motorized and non-motorized trails and over 100,000 acres of designated wilderness. The Prescott NF strives to offer an range of opportunities for recreation experiences. Recreation experiences are shaped by the activity performed and the

setting in which it is pursued. Examples of different experiences include camping within a developed campground, driving for pleasure along a dirt road, or horseback riding within a designated wilderness. The Prescott NF cannot directly create or provide experiences, although through differences in management and level of development it can provide a range of settings in which to pursue different activities, and thus provide the opportunity for these experiences.

Visitors to the Prescott National Forest

The most recent data available indicates the Prescott NF received approximately 1,278,600 visits during Fiscal Year 2007 (Forest Service, 2009a). A majority of visitors to the Prescott NF are male (57%), predominately Caucasian (98%), and non-Hispanic (96%). About one-third of visitors are under the age of sixteen, another third are between sixteen and forty-nine, and one-third are fifty years or older. Primary activities on the Forest include hiking/walking, viewing natural features/scenery, driving for pleasure, and relaxing. According to National Visitor Use Monitoring Results (NVUM) gathered in 2007 and published in 2009, the largest percentage of respondents who provided zip code information was from Yavapai County, accounting for 61% of the survey respondents. Twenty-six percent of the visitors were from Maricopa County and only 1% of the visitors were from the Flagstaff area (Forest Service, 2009a). All of the other visitors were from throughout the nation.

Visitors to the Prescott NF can find information about the forest on the website or in venues on and around the forest. Visitor information, maps, and brochures are available at the district offices in Prescott, Chino Valley, and Camp Verde. In addition, there are bulletin boards and informational signs at developed sites and a uniformed presence, in the form of staff and volunteers, throughout the forest.

Arizona Office of Tourism (AZOT) provides tourism information for the state. The Central Territory of Arizona, an area approximately bounded by Maricopa County on the south, Highway 260 on the East, Highway 93 on the west, and Coconino County to the North, showed a 41% increase in domestic overnight leisure visitors from 1993 to 2003 (AZOT, 2004). Further, AZOT data show that the Central Territory is a predominantly outdoor-based activity destination, with 52% of visitors participating in nature activities such as camping, eco-travel, and visiting national and state parks.

Recreation Use on the Prescott National Forest

Visitor numbers at Prescott NF developed recreation sites have remained stable or increased slightly over time. Between 2002 and 2007, information on numbers of users paying fees at developed sites ranged from a low of 204,900 in 2005 to a high of 219,300 in 2004 (Forest Service, 2009c). The developed recreation facilities have remained in good condition, and between 2002 and 2010 the maintenance backlog was reduced 88%, from just over \$1,000,000 to just over \$120,000. The current capacity of developed recreation day-use sites is adequate for the levels of visitation; almost 93% of visitors to developed day-use sites rated crowding as a six or less on a scale of one to ten, with ten representing “overcrowded” and one representing “hardly anyone there”. The overnight developed sites such as campgrounds appear to be under greater pressure from visitation; only 59% of visitors to overnight developed sites rated crowding as a six or less on the same scale. Still, visitors to both day-use and overnight developed sites generally expressed satisfaction with the facilities, with 88% indicating that they were either somewhat or very satisfied with the condition and cleanliness (Forest Service, 2009a).

In the Prescott Basin, the forest requires that camping outside of developed campgrounds only take place in designated sites. At the moment, there is not enough NVUM data available to identify a trend, however, field observations indicate increasing use of designated dispersed camping sites over the past five years. In addition most, if not all, designated dispersed sites are full on the weekends in the summer. This would indicate that demand may be nearing capacity, at least seasonally. Outside of the Prescott Basin, dispersed camping is not restricted to designated sites and is allowed with a limit of 14 days within any 30 consecutive day period.

Almost five percent of the visitors to the Prescott NF participate in fishing as their primary activity on the forest, and an additional three percent of visitors fish in conjunction with other activities during their visit (Forest Service, 2009a). The fishing opportunities include developed day use sites at three lakes and access points along the Verde River for boat launching or bank fishing. Fishing opportunities have benefitted from the dredging of Granite Basin Lake and Mingus Lake in the 1990s, and more recently from the tamarisk eradication projects along the Verde River between 2007 and 2010.

Participation rates for hunting on the Prescott NF are low – only one-half of one percent of visitors. However, hunting is considered part of the cultural tradition of the area by some participants and was repeatedly mentioned in the community vision statements (Forest Service, 2009c). Although there are no use figures available for recreational shooting, the Prescott NF offers a developed target shooting range in the Prescott Basin. As residential development has expanded in the Prescott area, there has been an increase in public concern with noise and safety issues associated with this facility. Discussions have been raised over the discharge of firearms adjacent to residential areas and over the potential for groundwater contamination from the spent lead bullets. It is slated for closure at the end of 2014 when the current special use permit expires and there are no plans for a replacement venue within the Prescott Basin.

The majority of visitors to the forest use the trails; there is high demand for desired experiences on this finite resource. The trail system on the Prescott NF includes 386 miles of non-motorized trail and 409 miles of multiple-use trail that allows motorized access. The size of the trail system, combined with its popularity - 44.5% of 1.27 million visitors reported hiking or walking as their primary activity (Forest Service, 2009a) - has led to a decline in the condition of the trails. From 2002 to 2010, the backlog of maintenance needed on the trails increased by 18 percent. As trail conditions deteriorate, they create safety issues for visitors and cause damage to other resources.

The potential for conflict on the trails and at the trailheads is compounded by the diversity of trail users. Because of the mild climate, trail use by hikers, bicyclists, horseback riders, and off-highway vehicles (OHVs) occurs year round, rather than the seasonal use found on higher elevation forests (Forest Service, 2009a), and so there is no “off-season” for conflict. Potential issues include horses becoming spooked by bicycles or OHVs, speed related collisions between bicycles or OHVs and other trail users, and noise impacts from motorized trail use. There can also be competition between user types for parking at trailheads, causing resentment from hikers or bicyclists towards horse or OHV trailers taking up additional space.

Different user types do not have to be present at the same time for conflict to occur, often the problem is related to the perception of the impacts of another group, rather than actual interaction with other users. Examples include accelerated trail widening caused by users walking or riding abreast, increased erosion from users displacing water bars, or erosion and de-vegetation from

users short-cutting switchbacks. These types of impacts can be caused by any type of user, but are often attributed to a conflicting use.

According to Arizona State Parks (2003), nearly 1.2 million OHV Recreation Days occurred in Yavapai County in 2003, and Arizona residents from outside of Yavapai County accounted for 65% of those days. OHV recreational use across the state increased by approximately 350% between 1998 and 2003 (Arizona State Parks 2003), and it is assumed that OHV use on the Prescott NF will continue to increase. The 1987 forest plan instituted prohibitions on cross-country travel by vehicles. Additional guidance was provided in the Prescott National Forest Motor Vehicle Use Map published in 2009.

The forest has eight Wilderness Areas, comprising over 104,000 acres. Visitors to the wilderness have a similar profile to the general Prescott NF visitor - majority male (59%), predominately Caucasian (97%), and non-Hispanic (97%). They also tend to be older, with only about three percent 16 years old or younger, and 38% at least 50 years old (Forest Service, 2009a). Overall wilderness visitation on the Prescott NF was estimated at approximately 16,000 visits annually in 2002 and approximately 40,000 annual visits in 2007 (Forest Service, 2009c). Based on use categories developed by the Forest Service Wilderness Advisory Group, this level of visitation (2,000 to 5,000 annual visits per wilderness) is considered low use (Forest Service, 2009b). Although visitation data for individual areas are not available, field observations suggest that Granite Mountain Wilderness receives the most use due to its close proximity from Prescott. Crowding in the designated Wilderness Areas is not an issue; 94% of visitors to wilderness rated crowding as a six or less on a scale of one to ten (Forest Service, 2009a).

Trends

There is potential for higher demand for recreation resources due to population growth in the area. Population growth in Yavapai County far exceeded the rate of increase in overall state population from 1980 to 2000 (146% versus 89% respectively). Of the increase of 167,517 residents in Yavapai County between 1990 and 2000, 32% moved into Yavapai County from another place. Over the last two decades OHVs have become more popular for recreation; consequently their use on the Forest has increased. If not properly managed, overcrowding, visitor conflict, and resource damage could occur in many areas.

The increase in retirement age citizens may also increase the demand for age specific recreation such as more walking trails located near population centers or more motorized recreation opportunities. (Cordell et al., 2002). The median age in Yavapai county was 45 years in the 2000 Census, up from 42 years in the 1990 Census, and was higher than Arizona's median age of 34 years in 2000. The percentage of county residents 65 years and older was 22%, substantially higher than the 13% that they represent at the state level.

Access to Forest land may be directly affected by increases in population and development. Residents who live near the Forest boundary may create social trails and unintentionally create resource damage. In addition, access for Forest management may be affected as lands change hands and informal agreements to use roads that cross land under non-Forest Service land ownership may require obtaining easements.

Changes in the climate could lead to increased use resulting from more people seeking heat relief during a longer, hotter, drier summer. Climate change also increases the potential for higher

winter season visitation as warmer winters and reduced snow pack allow for greater accessibility to the high country and milder temperatures in the lower elevations. This potential shift in use patterns could create a demand for different types of recreation opportunities and facilities than are currently offered on the forest.

Overall wilderness use is expected to decline by 15 percent on a per capita basis between 2006 and 2056 because of increases in population proportions for categories that are currently negatively correlated with participation in wilderness recreation. Over the next 50 years, the total number of wilderness participants is predicted to increase by 26 percent, while the Census Bureau growth predictions in Arizona are that its population will increase by 109 percent between the years 2000 and 2030 (Forest Service, 2009b). Although recreation pressure is expected to increase proportionally with population, designated wilderness on the Prescott NF is expected to experience slower demand growth than recreation in general.

Revision Needs for Change Addressed

The Prescott National Forest Analysis of the Management Situation identified a list of eight possible Needs for Change covering topics that had not been adequately addressed in the current forest plan. Five of these became topics for the forest plan revision, and include the following Need for Change related to recreation:

Provide sustainable, diverse recreation experiences that consider population demographic characteristics, reflect desires of local communities, avoid overcrowding and user conflicts and minimize resource damage.

This was deemed a priority based on the fact that “providing sustainable recreation opportunities was the number one concern at public meetings in both the Verde Valley and Prescott” (Forest Service, 2009c). It was also stated that “with increasing population and numbers of visitors to the Prescott NF, conflicts between various types of activities, over-crowding, and over-use leading to resource impacts need to be addressed” (Forest Service, 2009c).

As noted above, the number of recreationists on the Prescott NF has increased in recent years due to an increase in the local population and an influx of visitors from the Phoenix metropolitan area. This has increased the potential for conflict among all recreationists and can lead to unmet expectations for recreation experiences. The increase in recreation use has also impacted ecosystems by causing changes in habitat, wearing away vegetation, and spreading seeds of non-native plant species to new locations.

Below is a list of issues related to the recreation program. These include both external public and internal management concerns that need to be addressed during the plan revision.

- Recreation sites and trails need to be improved to trend toward desired conditions, including decreasing maintenance backlog, improving trailheads and signage, and addressing conflicts on trails.
- There is a desire for designated recreational target shooting, as well as for limiting this activity where potential safety concerns exist.
- Recreational fishing opportunities need to be retained and improved.
- Methods of sharing information with visitors need to be expanded.

- Potential resource impacts due to dispersed recreation activities need to be mitigated or restoration methods applied; boundary markings for designated wilderness boundaries need to be improved.
- Additional areas that potentially provide wilderness character should be identified, if present.
- Resilience to implications of climate change, such as increasing numbers of visitors and changes in timing of visits, needs to be promoted.

Summary of Alternatives

A full summary of the alternatives considered in detail can be found in Chapter Two of the Draft Environmental Impact Analysis. Below is a summary of how each alternative relates to recreation.

Alternative A (No action)

Alternative A represents the guidance provided by the current plan for the Prescott NF. The current plan places an emphasis on the maintenance of the capacity and condition of existing developed and dispersed recreation facilities.

In Alternative A, the number of developed recreation sites and designated dispersed camping areas would stay at existing levels. All of the designated dispersed camping areas is currently confined to the Prescott Basin. There is also one developed target shooting range that is slated for closure at the end of 2014 and that is not due to be replaced. Opportunities for recreational fishing in developed and natural settings would remain unchanged. The maintenance backlog for recreation would continue on its current trends, an 88% decrease for developed sites and an 18% increase for trails between 2002 and 2010.

About three to five percent of trail signage would be maintained annually, but there would be no emphasis on improving trailheads. There would be little emphasis on marking wilderness boundaries in areas with high risk of motorized incursion, as well as little emphasis on mitigating recreation impacts to watersheds. Distributing information to visitors would focus on existing methods such as signs and bulletin boards, paper maps and brochures, and on-site contacts.

None of the potential wilderness areas would be recommended for wilderness designation. The existing eight designated wilderness areas would continue to be managed for wilderness values.

Alternative B (Citizen Collaboration Emphasis)

Alternative B is the proposed revision for the forest plan. It places an emphasis on providing a balance between developed and dispersed recreation opportunities. It also addresses conflict between user groups and responds to the anticipated consequences of climate change.

Alternative B would increase developed recreation opportunities by creating two to five new areas. Designated dispersed camping would be expanded to areas outside of the Prescott Basin; one to four new areas would be developed. At least two, and up to five, areas that have been impacted by recreation use would be relocated, improved, or rehabilitated to mitigate the damage. The developed recreation maintenance backlog would decrease by 80 to 90% over ten years.

The forest would pursue a partnership with the Arizona Game and Fish Department to create and operate a new designated target shooting area to replace the existing range. Target shooting would be restricted in areas where such shooting would have the potential to create safety problems.

The opportunities for recreational fishing would be enhanced in two ponds or lakes on the forest. There would also be an emphasis on improving communications by developing two to five new methods to share information or provide education to visitors.

Trails would be better maintained, with 5 to 20 improved trailheads, 10 to 20% of signs maintained annually, and between 5 and 10 management actions designed to move trails towards their desired conditions. The trails maintenance backlog would be reduced by 50 to 70% over ten years. Between 20 and 100 miles of designated motorized roads or trails that impact watershed integrity would be repaired or maintained, and 15 to 25 stream or drainage crossings would be improved to facilitate water flow and sediment transport. The boundaries on portions of two to five wilderness areas would be marked in areas where the risk of motorized incursion is high.

Eight potential wilderness areas, totaling over 43,000 acres, would be recommended for wilderness designation. Of these eight, two would be new wilderness areas, the remaining six would be expansions of designated wilderness. The eight current designated wilderness areas would continue to be managed for wilderness values.

Alternative C (Vegetation & Wildlife Emphasis)

Alternative C is an alternative to the proposed revised plan that places an emphasis on the restoration of declining vegetation types and wildlife habitat. It also responds to the anticipated consequences of climate change.

Alternative C is very similar to Alternative B with respect to recreation, except for the following :

Within Alternative C, the emphasis on reducing the maintenance backlog for trails would be less than Alternative B; it would be reduced by 35 to 50% over ten years. In addition, only 5 to 10 trailheads would be improved.

None of the potential wilderness areas would be recommended for wilderness designation in Alternative C, however, the eight designated wilderness areas would continue to be managed for wilderness values.

Alternative D (Dispersed Recreation Emphasis)

Alternative D is an alternative to the proposed revised plan that places an emphasis on providing dispersed recreation opportunities. It also addresses conflict between user groups and responds to the anticipated consequences of climate change.

Alternative D would provide a smaller increase in developed recreation opportunities by creating just one or two new areas. Designated dispersed camping would be emphasized in areas outside of the Prescott Basin; two to six new areas would be developed. As in Alternative B, at least two, and up to five, areas that have been impacted by recreation use would be relocated, improved, or rehabilitated to mitigate the damage. However, the developed recreation maintenance backlog would be decreased by only 50 to 60% over ten years.

This alternative would have the same provisions for replacing the shooting range and developing fishing opportunities as Alternative B.

Trails would receive more emphasis than in any of the other alternatives, with 10 to 25 improved trailheads, 10 to 20% of signs maintained annually, and between 5 and 15 management actions designed to move trails towards their desired conditions. The trails maintenance backlog would still be reduced by 50 to 70% over ten years, and in addition, Alternative D would propose the construction of 10 to 20 miles of new system trail and would include the decommissioning of five miles of un-needed trails. The objectives for mitigating road and trail impacts to the watershed, improving stream crossings, and marking wilderness boundaries are the same as in Alternative B.

Alternative D would recommend sixteen potential wilderness areas, totaling over 116,000 acres, for wilderness designation. Three of these areas would be new wilderness and thirteen would be expansions of designated wilderness. The eight current designated wilderness areas would continue to be managed for wilderness values.

Alternative E (The Preferred Alternative)

Recreation site/trail improvement: Alternative E removed direction that specified an increase in the number of developed recreation sites. The costs associated with the deferred maintenance within developed sites would not likely be reduced, rather the direction would be to contain any increase in deferred maintenance costs to 20 percent of the established baseline. The direction for additional designated dispersed camping areas outside of the Prescott Basin is the same as that in alternative B (1 to 4 areas), as is the direction for improving trailheads (5 to 20 trailheads), maintaining signage (10 to 20 percent), and carrying out management actions to meet desired conditions for trails (5 to 10 actions). However, alternative E removed the direction to reduce the maintenance backlog for trails.

Recreational target shooting: Alternative E emphasizes the development and implementation of strategies to raise awareness of responsible target shooting practices as a means of promoting visitor safety.

Recommended wilderness: Eight potential wilderness areas (PWAs), encompassing 23,137 acres, would be recommended for wilderness designation.

Recreation management response to climate change: The ability to respond to increasing numbers of visitors and extended seasons of use would be limited compared to alternatives B, C, and D. This is due to the removal of the commitment to add new developed recreation areas and reduce the maintenance backlog for developed sites and trails.

Methodology and Analysis Process

The analysis of the environmental consequences of the proposed actions was based on professional judgment and in consultation with the Recreation Program Managers on the Prescott NF. Results from the National Visitor Use Monitoring (NVUM) program were used to develop visitor profiles and use patterns. The NVUM results were obtained using a methodology that has been developed and employed nationally. Trends for maintenance backlog were derived from the Deferred Maintenance reports in the Forest Service Infrastructure corporate database. Although

deferred maintenance figures are reported directly for developed recreation, the trails deferred maintenance figures are based on a nationally implemented sampling methodology.

Assumptions

In the analysis of the plan revision alternatives, the following assumptions have been made:

- These land management plans provide programmatic frameworks for future site-specific actions.
- These land management plans do not have direct effects. They do not authorize or mandate any site-specific projects or activities (including ground-disturbing actions).
- These land management plans may have implications for, or longer term environmental consequences from, management on the Prescott NF under these programmatic frameworks.
- The plan decisions (desired conditions, objectives, standards, guidelines, management areas, monitoring) will be followed when planning or implementing site-specific projects and activities.
- Law, policy, and regulations will be followed when planning or implementing site-specific projects and activities.
- Monitoring will occur and the land management plan will be amended, as needed.
- The planning period is 10 years.
- Figures derived from nationally implemented sampling methods are statistically valid.

Environmental Consequences

The land management plan provides a programmatic framework that guides site-specific actions but does not authorize, fund, or carry out any project or activity. Because the land management plan does not authorize or mandate any ground-disturbing actions, there are no direct effects. However, there may be implications, or longer term environmental consequences, of management on the Prescott NF under this programmatic framework.

Recreation Program

The issues that relate to all aspects of the recreation program include:

- expand the methods for sharing information with visitors
- plan resilience to the implications of climate change

Table 1. Information sharing and climate change resilience, by alternative

	<u>Alternative A</u>	<u>Alternative B</u>	<u>Alternative C</u>	<u>Alternative D</u>	<u>Alternative E</u>
Expand methods of information sharing	No	Yes			
Match visitors to opportunities	No Change	Increase			

	<u>Alternative A</u>	<u>Alternative B</u>	<u>Alternative C</u>	<u>Alternative D</u>	<u>Alternative E</u>
Visitor satisfaction	No Change	Increase			
Adapt to climate change	Additional effort required	Integrated into plan			

Alternative A (No action)

Alternative A would continue to provide guidance established in the current forest plan, which was approved in 1987 and amended seventeen times as of June, 2008. This plan was developed under an older management framework and is outdated in its approach. As such, it is not well suited to addressing the social, ecological, and technological changes that are occurring. Information sharing is focused on traditional methods, such as the distribution of printed material and on-site visitor contacts, and does not include any provisions for the extended use of electronic or social media. This can place constraints on the ability of visitors to match their desired experiences with the opportunities available on the forest. If visitors are not able to find out about the opportunities provided before they arrive on the forest, they may find that the forest does not provide the type of experience that they desire, or they may choose to not visit the forest at all. The results would be a mismatch between the visitors desired and actual experience for those who come, or the loss of potential visitors for those who do not.

The current plan does not recognize the potential impacts, such as an increase in both summer and winter visitation, that could result from changes to the climate. There is no guidance for addressing this issue within the plan; subsequent policy direction would need to be integrated into current management. The extent of this effort is unknown, but would involve, at the minimum, an amendment to the monitoring section of the plan. The result would be that increased effort would be needed to adapt management practices to respond to changes brought on by increased temperatures, longer heat waves, and reduced precipitation.

Alternative B (Citizen Collaboration Emphasis)

Alternative B proposes increasing both the number of outlets and methods of delivery to expand visitor access to information. By developing two to five new methods of providing information, the forest would provide better service by making information available to visitors pre- and post-trip, as well as on-site. Easier access to information would help visitors better match their desired experiences to the available opportunities on the forest. This, in turn, should result in a reduction in visitor conflicts and an increase in visitor satisfaction.

This alternative recognizes that there will be implications from climate change that need to be addressed at the strategic level. As a result, it provide guidance that can accommodate the changes in management that may be needed to adapt to changes in conditions.

All of the plan revision alternatives integrate climate change assumptions into their management approach. The revised plan contains the flexibility needed to respond to the potential for increased use. The higher end of the range for each objective anticipates the increase in capacity needed to accommodate this increased use. There would be an increase in the number and variety of developed recreation sites that could accommodate increased visitation . New sites could be situated at a higher elevation for more cool relief or at lower elevation for increase winter

capacity, depending on what use trends demand. Dispersed camping would be increasingly controlled in certain popular areas to mitigate the effects of increased use. Improved trailheads and trail signage, as well as a reduction of the maintenance backlog, would help improve resilience to increased visitor numbers and potential for extended recreation seasons.

The action alternatives also establish a revised monitoring framework to provide managers with the information needed to adapt the recreation program and facilities to respond to the anticipated changes. Specific direction is to monitor the management actions, measures, or decisions that the Forest Service is taking to enhance ecosystem resilience in response to changing environmental conditions. The monitoring plan incorporates information from the Forest Service infrastructure database and the cyclical National Visitor Use Monitoring surveys to provide feedback on progress towards meeting the plan objectives and responding changes in use and visitation.

Alternative C (Vegetation & Wildlife Emphasis)

The consequences with regard to information sharing and responding to climate change are the same as those in Alternative B.

Alternative D (Dispersed Recreation Emphasis)

The consequences with regard to information sharing and responding to climate change are the same as those in Alternative B.

Alternative E (The Preferred Alternative)

The consequences with regard to information sharing are the same as those in Alternative B. Alternative E is similar to the other three action alternatives in that they address the implications from climate change at a strategic level and establish a revised monitoring framework. While it does contain some flexibility for dispersed recreation and trailheads to respond to the potential for increased use, it does not commit the forest to any increase in the number and variety of developed recreation sites. It also does not contain a commitment to reduce the deferred maintenance backlog, rather it seeks to limit the growth of deferred maintenance costs for developed recreation sites. In these respects, it is not as accommodating to the changes in management that may be needed to adapt to changes in conditions.

Developed Recreation

The issues that relate to developed recreation include:

- improve developed recreation facilities
- reduce the developed recreation maintenance backlog
- provide a recreational shooting venue
- retain and improve fishing opportunities

Table 2. Comparison of Developed Recreation across alternatives

Developed Recreation	Alternative A	Alternative B	Alternative C	Alternative D	Alternative E
Improve facilities	Yes no new facilities	Yes more new facilities		Yes fewer new facilities	Yes no new facilities
Reduce backlog	Yes at current pace			Yes but at a slower pace	No, cap increase at 20 percent
Replace shooting venue	No	Yes			No
Improve fishing	Maintenance only	Yes			
Quantity of opportunities	Decrease	Increase most		Increase least	Decrease
Quality of opportunities	Decrease	Increase			Increase Less

Alternative A (No action)

Guidance for developed recreation in the current plan is to operate developed sites at the standard service level and to maintain facilities in a safe and operable condition. This alternative would address the need to reduce the maintenance backlog, but does not address the need for additional facilities or improvements to fishing opportunities. This could mean a reduction in the quantity and quality of the available developed recreation opportunities on the Forest as increased future demand surpasses the existing capacity.

Between 2002 and 2010, the maintenance backlog for developed recreation facilities was reduced by 88%, from approximately \$1 million to \$120,000. Although the current plan recognizes a projected increase in recreation use, the direction is to maintain the capacity and improve existing facilities, rather than the development of new areas to meet future demand. It is expected that the emphasis would be on the continued reduction of the maintenance backlog for existing facilities.

Under the direction of this alternative, recreation users could expect an increase in the difficulty of finding available developed campsites, especially during peak use on holiday weekends. This could place increased pressure on the designated dispersed campsites and general dispersed camping areas because they do not require reservations and are a logical alternative for those users who would not be able to find campsites within developed campgrounds. Satisfaction with the experience would likely decrease among both those who were displaced from developed camping opportunities and those subsequently displaced from the dispersed camping opportunities.

Predicted increases in recreation use, combined with predicted increases in average mean temperatures could place additional pressure to provide water-based and water adjacent recreation opportunities. Along the upper Verde River, a lack of adequate developed overnight and day use capacity could lead to an increase in the number of negative interactions between recreation visitors as they compete for the desirable areas. This additional visitation could also contribute to

human health and safety issues such as the improper disposal of human waste or accumulations of trash in the area if facilities were not created to help manage these impacts.

The forest has one designated target shooting venue, located in the Prescott Basin. Due to encroaching development and associated safety issues, it is scheduled for decommission. It is operated under special use permit by the Prescott Sportsman's Club, however the permit is set to expire at the end of 2014 and will not be renewed. Management direction in the current plan states that recreation users enjoy a full spectrum of experiences and benefits, but there is no specific mention of providing a venue for recreational shooting. The loss of this venue could lead to an increase in informal target shooting, which has been identified as a source of concern in a number of community vision statements. Unregulated target shooting can create perceived and actual danger to other recreation users, and can displace them to other areas in which they feel more secure, or off of the Forest altogether.

This alternative would maintain the existing fishing opportunities in a safe and operable condition. There are four lakes on the forest that provide opportunities for recreational fishing. Three of these lakes - Horsethief Lake, Lynx Lake, and Mingus Lake – have developed recreation facilities. The fourth lake, Granite Basin Lake, has available parking, but no facilities. The current plan has no provisions for the expansion or improvement of fishing opportunities. This could lead to a decline in the quality of the fishing experience, as increased use puts more pressure a finite resource. The consequence of this would be a low likelihood of meeting visitors expectations for a desired experience.

Alternative B (Citizen Collaboration Emphasis)

Alternative B focuses on a balance between developed and dispersed recreation. It addresses the need to improve developed recreation facilities by continuing an aggressive reduction in the maintenance backlog and creating new developed sites where needed. It also has provisions to replace the existing shooting venue that is slated for closure, and provides direction to enhance the recreational fishing opportunities on the forest. This alternative would increase both the quantity and quality of the developed recreation opportunities on the Forest by creating more capacity and improving the condition of the existing infrastructure.

Under this alternative, two to five new developed recreation sites would be created on the Forest within ten years and the maintenance backlog would be reduced a further 80% to 90%. These sites would increase the developed recreation capacity on the Forest and could add the types of developed recreation opportunities needed to move the Forest towards desired conditions for recreation. These desired conditions envision facilities that can adapt to expected changes in visitor demographics and demand, protect natural resources, and provide a clean and safe recreation experience.

Additional developed recreation sites located in popular, but less developed, areas such as along the Verde River would help prevent resource damage due to unregulated camping and other activities. The increase in developed recreation capacity could reduce the effects of displacement and increase the ability of visitors to reserve campsites in their desired setting type. These in turn would help to reduce impact to human health and safety due to the improper disposal of human waste, accumulations of trash, or conflicts between visitors over limited resources.

Alternative B would give direction to develop a partnership with the Arizona Game and Fish Department to create a new shooting range to replace the existing range that is scheduled for closure at the end of 2014. A new range at a different site would address the safety concerns raised by the encroaching development around the existing range and would continue to provide a regulated shooting venue. There is public support for a designated shooting range to help reduce the conflict caused by unregulated recreational target shooting on the Forest. By providing a new designated shooting area, the Prescott NF could maintain an opportunity for recreational target shooting but still retain the option of closing certain areas to recreational shooting if safety issues emerge.

In addition to developing a new shooting range, this alternative directs the forest to work with partners to enhance the recreational fishing opportunities at two lakes or ponds. These enhancements would increase the quality and capacity of the fishing opportunities and reduce the potential impacts caused by unmanaged access along the shoreline.

Alternative C (Vegetation & Wildlife Emphasis)

The objectives for developed recreation are the same for Alternatives B and C, thus the consequences with regard to developed recreation are also the same.

Alternative D (Dispersed Recreation Emphasis)

Alternative D would create only one or two new developed recreation sites in the next ten years. In this alternative, the emphasis of the recreation program is shifted from developed recreation to dispersed recreation. This would result in one or more potential developed campground areas being managed instead for designated dispersed camping.

Under this alternative, only one or two new developed recreation sites would be created on the Forest within ten years and the maintenance backlog would be reduced by 50% to 60%. This would provide the forest with the direction to create additional developed recreation sites to respond to changes in demand and maintain a diversity of recreation opportunities. It would also continue the trend of reducing the maintenance backlog, but at a slower pace so that more resources could be devoted to dispersed recreation. This alternative would fall between Alternatives A (no new sites) and Alternatives B and C (two to five new sites), providing direction for the creation of one to two new developed recreation sites. It would have the same potential consequences, but their magnitude would be less than Alternative A and more than Alternatives B and C.

Alternative D contains the same objectives as Alternative B with regard to developing partnerships to promote shooting and fishing opportunities. It is assumed that the consequences would be the same.

Alternative E (The Preferred Alternative)

Alternative E is similar to alternative B, but does not include a commitment to build any new developed recreation areas and places less of an emphasis on addressing deferred maintenance. In this alternative, developed recreation is de-emphasized with the elimination of objective 7 and changes to Objectives 9 and 10.

Objective 9 in alternative E focuses on preventing the developed sites maintenance backlog from increasing more than 20 percent over the baseline in the 10 years following plan approval. This is in contrast to alternatives B, C, and D, which provide direction to reduce deferred maintenance.

In alternative E, Objective 10 provides direction to develop strategies for raising awareness of responsible shooting. The language to pursue a partnership to develop a new shooting range found in Objective 10 under alternatives B, C, and D was moved to the supporting background and rationale in alternative E and thus is not part of the plan component.

Similar to alternative A, this alternative does not address the need for additional facilities. The quantity of developed recreation opportunities would decrease with the loss of the existing shooting venue and no plan direction for new developed recreation site. The quality of developed recreation opportunities would increase with the expansion and improvement of recreational fishing opportunities; however, less emphasis on deferred maintenance could result in lower levels of visitor satisfaction at developed sites.

Designated Dispersed Camping

The issues that relate to designated dispersed camping include:

- mitigate resource impacts due to dispersed recreation activities

Table 3. Comparison of Designated Dispersed Camping across alternatives

Designated Dispersed Camping	<u>Alternative A</u>	<u>Alternative B</u>	<u>Alternative C</u>	<u>Alternative D</u>	<u>Alternative E</u>
Mitigate impacts by designating campsites	In Prescott Basin only	Yes fewer new areas across forest		Yes more new areas across forest	Yes fewer new areas across forest
Quantity of opportunities	No Change	Increase		Increase most	Increase
Quality of opportunities	Decrease	Increase		Increase most	Increase

Alternative A (No action)

Alternative A would continue with designated dispersed camping in the Prescott Basin but would not provide direction to develop designated dispersed camping opportunities in other parts of the forest. Areas near streams or water sources in particular are very popular places to camp on the forest, and due to their riparian vegetation they are vulnerable to impacts such as trampling and erosion. This alternative would not provide the managers with the option of designating camping sites as a means to mitigate resource damage in areas where dispersed camping is causing impacts to the natural environment. The result could be decrease in the ability of managers to contain or mitigate recreation impacts and an increased likelihood that visitors would encounter the effects of the impacts, leading to a decrease in the quality of the recreation opportunities provided. There would be no displacement of campers who want a less regulated experience, however, there would continue to be displacement of campers who seek a more pristine, less impacted setting.

Alternative B (Citizen Collaboration Emphasis)

Alternative B proposes the creation of up to four new designated dispersed camping areas on the forest. The goal is to manage camping in areas that show high impact from recreation use, but still provide the opportunity to camp without the development and regulation of a traditional campground. The result could be an increase in the ability of managers to contain or mitigate recreation impacts and a decreased likelihood that visitors would encounter the effects of the impacts, leading to an increase in the quality of the recreation opportunities provided.

Some of the popular dispersed camping areas on the forest show signs of impact that include soil compaction, trampling of vegetation, and site expansion. By regulating the use in these areas through the designation of sites, these impacts could be managed. Restricting the extent of these sites would allow for mitigation efforts to aid in the recovery of areas from the impacts of overuse. Designating camping sites could also act as a preventive measure. By channeling use onto sites that are more resistant to use, the extent of the impacts could be minimized before they become a problem. In some areas, designating sites would increase the capacity of the area by making acceptable camping spots more easily identifiable to visitors. However, these restrictions could also lead to a loss of capacity in some areas where use would have to be contained. This type of management could also result in the displacement of some of the current users who seek a less regulated camping experience.

Alternative C (Vegetation & Wildlife Emphasis)

The objectives for designated dispersed camping are the same for Alternatives B, C, and E, thus the consequences with regard to developed recreation are also the same.

Alternative D (Dispersed Recreation Emphasis)

Alternative D proposes the creation of at least two, and up to six new designated dispersed camping areas on the forest. The goal is to manage camping in areas that show high impact from recreation use, but still provide the opportunity to camp without the development and regulation of a traditional campground. As with Alternatives B and C, the result could be an increase in the ability of managers to contain or mitigate recreation impacts and a decreased likelihood that visitors would encounter the effects of the impacts. Alternative D would also provide managers with additional options to extend protection to popular dispersed camping areas while potentially causing less displacement of visitors.

Alternative D focuses on increasing the opportunities for dispersed recreation and favors the creation of designated dispersed camping areas over the construction of developed campgrounds. Designated dispersed sites provide users the option of less regulated, less developed camping. For many, this is the preferred setting. Designated dispersed sites offer few amenities – features such as tent pads or fire rings are generally for the protection of the resource, rather than the convenience of the user. As the level of development for a designated dispersed site is less than for a developed campsite, it is expected that there would be less displacement of visitors who seek out these areas as an alternative to the developed campgrounds.

The low level of development for designated dispersed sites means that their initial cost and on-going maintenance is lower than a developed campground. However, these types of sites generally do not charge for use and therefore could not generate revenue for their maintenance.

They also require more frequent patrolling, as they generally do not have a host on-site to provide presence.

Alternative E (The Preferred Alternative)

The objectives for designated dispersed camping are the same for Alternatives B, C, and E, thus the consequences with regard to developed recreation are also the same.

General Dispersed Recreation

The issues that relate to dispersed recreation include:

- improve trails, trailheads, and signage
- reduce the trail maintenance backlog
- address conflicts on trails
- mitigate resource impacts due to dispersed recreation activities
- improve boundary markings for designated wilderness

Table 4. Comparison of Dispersed Recreation across alternatives

Dispersed Recreation	<u>Alternative A</u>	<u>Alternative B</u>	<u>Alternative C</u>	<u>Alternative D</u>	<u>Alternative E</u>
Improve trails	Few	Some		Most & creates new trails	Some
Improve trailheads	No	More	Fewer	Most	More
Improve signage	Yes	Yes at a faster pace			
Reduce backlog	No	Yes	Yes at a slower pace	Yes	No
Address conflict	No	Yes			
Mitigate impacts	Yes	Yes with stronger direction			
Mark boundaries	Yes	Yes at a faster pace, with stronger direction			
Quantity of opportunities	No Change	Increase	Increase less	Increase most	Increase least
Quality of opportunities	Decrease	Increase	Increase less	Increase most	Increase least

Alternative A (No action)

Dispersed recreation in Alternative A would continue under the direction set forth in the current forest plan. Current plan focus is on managing dispersed recreation areas at the standard service level and maintaining facilities in a safe and operable condition. Although it describes an access

policy, it provides very little guidance for trails management. Alternative A would result in a decrease in the quality of available dispersed recreation opportunities due to trail maintenance not keeping pace with user impacts and an increased potential for conflict from vague policy and competing uses.

Under Alternative A, resource impacts caused by trail location and visitor use would continue to increase. Although the maintenance backlog for developed recreation decreased by almost 90% from 2002 to 2010, the trails maintenance backlog increased by 18% during that same time. This lack of maintenance affects not only the trail users, but also the health of the watershed. Erosion from poorly located trails and improper stream and drainage crossings is adding to the sediment load and impacting watershed integrity.

Alternative A is vague on the policy for using motorized vehicles for cross-country travel to retrieve big game. Current policy allows for big game retrieval with a valid permit, but does not define either “big game”, or “valid permit”. This lack of clarity has the potential to create conflict due to differing interpretations of these guidelines by hunters and managers.

Conflicts that currently exist between and among different user groups would go unaddressed and could worsen. This could lead to a decline in use by groups that felt that they had been displaced, or increased impacts to trails from use that they were not designed to accommodate. Examples might include trail widening from horse use on hiking trails, or motorized incursion into designated wilderness areas. Although these types of conflict may actually be uncommon, there is a perception that they occur frequently.

Alternative B (Citizen Collaboration Emphasis)

Alternative B balances the development of dispersed and developed recreation to provide a diverse set of recreation opportunities. It provides more emphasis on trails than the current plan and clarifies the policy for the use of motorized equipment for big game retrieval. Alternative B would increase both the quantity and the quality of the dispersed recreation opportunities provided by improving and expanding the facilities and providing clear policy and guidance to the visitors to help reduce conflicts and resource impacts.

This alternative reverses the trend for trail maintenance by emphasizing improvements to trailheads and a commitment to reducing the maintenance backlog. Improvements to the trailheads and signage help to mitigate the potential for conflict among trail users. By clearly signing the intended use for each trail, managers could reduce conflict that arises from unintended use, and users would cause less impact while achieving a better experience on a trail that has been designed to suit their needs. Improvements to trailheads could also physically separate different user groups to avoid conflict, and reduce impacts by providing adequate facilities to meet the needs of different groups. Examples would include larger parking spots for vehicles with trailers, or hitching posts for horses.

Alternative B also places an emphasis on mitigating and rehabilitating the impact of dispersed recreation. Its importance is highlighted by the fact that there is direction to address this issue in both the recreation and watershed objectives. Actions to relocate or rehabilitate recreation areas or trails that show evidence of resource damage would foster numerous benefits for both the recreation users and the surrounding ecosystem. Trails or recreation sites relocated to more durable surfaces would require less maintenance and would reduce the amount of sedimentation

due to run-off. Watershed integrity would be improved by reduced sediment load from recreation sites and trail crossings. Riparian vegetation and sensitive plants would be better protected from trampling if recreation sites were relocated away from sensitive areas. In turn, the protected vegetation would enhance the recreation setting.

Part of the strategy to reduce conflict and mitigate recreation impacts is to avoid them in the first place. Alternative B would address this in part by marking, or remarking where needed, the wilderness boundaries in areas where there is a high risk of motorized intrusion. Motorized use in these areas could cause resource damage and provoke conflict with wilderness visitors. Although clear boundaries would not stop intentional illegal use, it would help to keep unintended motorized use out of the designated wilderness. Outside of designated wilderness areas, Alternative B would establish clear direction for the use of motorized equipment for big game retrieval. By placing restrictions on the timing and routing of motorized access, the alternative would limit the off-trail impacts of this use. These impacts include both the physical disturbance to the environment and the potential conflicts from off-trail encounters between motorized and non-motorized users.

Alternative C (Vegetation & Wildlife Emphasis)

Alternative C, similar to Alternative B, balances the development of dispersed and developed recreation. They provide the same guidance with regard to reducing user conflict, mitigating dispersed recreation impacts, and marking wilderness boundaries, but Alternative C directs fewer resources to trails and trailheads than Alternative B. The result would include an increase in the quality of the dispersed recreation opportunities and a potentially smaller expansion of the quantity of dispersed opportunities.

This alternative still would reverse the trend for trail maintenance, just to a lesser degree than Alternative B. Alternative C would reduce the maintenance backlog at a slower pace, with a target of a 35% to 50% reduction over ten years, rather than the 50% to 70% reduction in Alternative B. This reduction in the final target might change the process for prioritizing the schedule to address the backlog, and could involve more public participation to determine which priorities had the most public support.

This alternative would also potentially improve fewer trailheads, although the difference in the alternatives is at the upper end of the range, with Alternative B allowing for improvements at up to twenty trailheads over the next ten years and Alternative C allowing for improvements at up to ten. The difference would most likely be felt in those projects that were not a priority, either because they did not mitigate current resource damage issues or did not respond to current user demands. Examples might include projects developed in response to anticipated shifts in use types or visitor demographics.

Alternative D (Dispersed Recreation Emphasis)

Alternative D provides a greater emphasis on trails and trailheads than any of the other alternatives. It contains the same guidance with regard to reducing user conflict, mitigating dispersed recreation impacts, and marking wilderness boundaries as Alternatives B and C. It also includes additional direction to create new trails and decommission trails that receive little to no use, are located in ecologically sensitive areas, or have unsafe conditions. This alternative would

provide a greater increase in both the quantity and the quality of the dispersed recreation opportunities than Alternatives A, B, or C.

Alternative D provides guidance for a stronger response to the public comments for increased trail opportunities. Direction is for improvements to at least twice as many trailheads as either Alternatives B or C, with a range from 10 to 25. This expansion would allow the forest to accommodate improvements for a number of different trail use types to respond to the priorities of different user groups. This in turn would help to reduce conflict between the groups, both at the trailheads and on the trails.

This alternative also places an emphasis on improving the trail system as a whole by directing the managers to create new trails and decommission existing trails where appropriate. Additional trail mileage would allow the forest to improve the existing system through the creation of loop trails that return users to their starting point and connector trails that help to link communities. New trail construction would insure that the trails were properly designed and located to minimize the impact that they would have on the landscape. There is a desire for these types of trails, as expressed in the public feedback received in comments, and if not created by the Forest, they might become nuisance trails created informally by users .

Alternative E (The Preferred Alternative)

Alternative E is similar to alternative B, but it would not direct resources toward reducing the backlog of needed trail maintenance. It would result in a lesser increase in the quality of the trail recreation opportunities and a potentially smaller expansion of the quantity of trail opportunities.

Potential Wilderness

The issues that relate to potential wilderness include:

- identify additional areas with wilderness characteristics
- mitigate resource impacts due to dispersed recreation activities

Table 5. Comparison of Potential Wilderness across alternatives

Potential Wilderness	<u>Alternative A</u>	<u>Alternative B</u>	<u>Alternative C</u>	<u>Alternative D</u>	<u>Alternative E</u>
Mitigate impacts	Yes through actions	Yes through restrictions	Yes through actions	Yes through restrictions	Yes through restrictions
Number of areas recommended	None	8 areas	None	16 areas	8 areas
Total acres recommended	0 acres	43,440 acres	0 acres	116,262 acres	23,137 acres
Recommended PWAs	None	Apache Creek A Apache Creek B Bald Mountain Black Canyon	None	Apache Creek A Apache Creek B Arnold Mesa Ash Creek	Apache Creek A Castle Creek Cedar Bench A Cedar Bench B

Potential Wilderness	<u>Alternative A</u>	<u>Alternative B</u>	<u>Alternative C</u>	<u>Alternative D</u>	<u>Alternative E</u>
		Castle Creek Juniper Mesa Sycamore Canyon A Sycamore Canyon C		Castle Creek Cedar Bench A Cedar Bench B Fritsche B Juniper Mesa Muldoon Pine Mountain B Pine Mountain C Sycamore Canyon A Sycamore Canyon B Sycamore Canyon C Woodchute	Juniper Mesa Pine Mountain B Sycamore Canyon A Woodchute

Alternative A (No action)

There are no Potential Wilderness Areas (PWAs) recommended for wilderness designation in Alternative A (Appendix A, Figure 1). As noted in the Prescott National Forest Potential Wilderness Evaluation (Forest Service, 2011), there are many acres of public land that are managed to provide primitive recreation experiences where the visitor can experience solitude in an unconfined setting. It was concluded that there is a low need to create additional wilderness to address the need for primitive and unconfined recreation opportunities on or near the Prescott NF. It was also determined that there is a low need to establish new wilderness to address capacity issues, as the Prescott NF is considered to have low wilderness use (Forest Service, 2009b). The existing wilderness areas are currently well within their social and biological limits and could experience an increase in use without unacceptable depreciation or changes in management. If there was a need for additional capacity, this could be accomplished through improvements to access, including new trails and trailheads.

Under the current plan, there would be no change in the management guidance of the PWAs. The result would be that there would be no restrictions on the development of recreation opportunities that are incompatible with designated wilderness. Examples include system trails for mountain bikes or OHVs, new or improved access roads, or additional developed recreation facilities. However, there would also be no increase in the number of acres protected for wilderness character.

Alternative B (Citizen Collaboration Emphasis)

Alternative B would recommend eight Potential Wilderness Areas (PWAs) for designation (Appendix A, Figure 2). The additional 43,000 acres recommended is approximately 40% of the existing wilderness acreage, and would strengthen and expand the opportunities for undeveloped recreation and increase the number of acres protected for wilderness character. This would,

however, result in the potential loss of these areas for motorized and mechanized use and the development of new recreation facilities.

Apache Creek A, Apache Creek B, Bald Mountain, and Juniper Mesa were selected because they complement the desired non-motorized emphasis for the Williamson Valley North Management Area. The additions of Apache Creek A, Apache Creek B, and Bald Mountain to the existing Apache Creek Wilderness would create an area of almost 19,000 acres. This combined area would be split by Forest Road 95A, which is in poor repair and practically impassible other than by foot, horse, or motorcycle. Sections of wilderness trails already pass through these units to access the existing wilderness, and designation would ensure continued and expanded wilderness recreation opportunities for hikers and equestrians.

Castle Creek PWA was selected because it is contiguous to both the existing Castle Creek Wilderness and a Bureau of Land Management parcel that is “Managed for Wilderness Characteristics”. Wilderness designation for this area would expand the land base for the existing Castle Creek Wilderness and enhance backcountry camping opportunities during the winter, spring, and fall in this low-elevation unit.

Sycamore Canyon A and Sycamore Canyon C were selected to expand the existing Sycamore Canyon Wilderness. Wilderness designation for these areas would increase the land base of the Sycamore Canyon Wilderness and providing more opportunities for an extended back-country wilderness experience.

Black Canyon PWA was selected because there was strong support from residents of the Verde Valley for wilderness designation, and it would help support the wilderness system in the Southwest Region. Designation would bring the opportunity for a wilderness experience closer to the residents of the Verde Valley and provide protection from development within the Black Canyon viewshed.

It is assumed that these areas would contribute little additional visitation because in many cases visitors are already passing through them to access the wilderness. Black Canyon PWA is the only separate parcel to be recommended in this alternative. It could be reasonably expected to increase wilderness visitation if it were to become designated, as it is located in close proximity to the Verde Valley. It would most likely receive sustained local use as well as an initial bump in visitation upon designation.

Because Black Canyon would be a new, separate area, it could be reasonably expected to add about 5,000 additional wilderness visits if it were to be designated – the average number of visits per wilderness area on the Prescott NF (Forest Service, 2009a). It is estimated that the other seven PWAs could add an additional 1,000 visits combined, mainly due to the fact that they are expansions of existing wilderness areas and would receive little in the way of unique visitation. This total estimated increase of 6,000 visits, about a 15% increase, is based on the average number of visits per wilderness area. It is not known how much of this increase in wilderness visitation would represent new visitors to the areas versus simply reclassifying the existing visitation as wilderness use.

Recommended wilderness areas would be managed to maintain their wilderness characteristics, including their scenic beauty, natural conditions, solitude, and identified special features. However, the Forest Supervisor may allow the continued use of mechanized and motorized equipment in the area if it does not permanently impair the area’s wilderness character. This

would allow for the use of mechanized and motorized equipment for projects designed to mitigate resource impacts caused by recreation. New road construction or improvement in a recommended area would be discouraged due to its impact on wilderness character.

Alternative C (Vegetation & Wildlife Emphasis)

There are no Potential Wilderness Areas (PWAs) recommended for wilderness designation in this alternative (Appendix A, Figure 1). Its focus is on progressing towards ecological desired conditions at a faster pace by increasing the use of management activities such as prescribed fire, mechanical removal of vegetation, and aquatic habitat improvements, over more areas of the forest. Because the restrictions imposed on wilderness prohibit the use of mechanized equipment, it was determined that wilderness designation was incompatible with the goals of this alternative. The consequences with regard to potential wilderness are similar to those in Alternative A.

The alternatives differ, however, in that the Alternative C provides plan direction to add additional developed recreation sites and designated dispersed camping, improve road and trail stream crossings, and repair roads and trails that are impacting watershed integrity. Some of the actions required to meet these objectives could permanently impair the wilderness character of the surrounding landscape. These activities would not be restricted in any of the identified potential wilderness areas, as none of them would be recommended for wilderness designation.

Alternative D (Dispersed Recreation Emphasis)

The consequences with regard to recommended wilderness are similar to those in Alternative B, the difference being a greater quantity of potential wilderness recommended. Alternative D would recommend sixteen Potential Wilderness Areas (PWAs) for designation (Appendix A, Figure 3). These PWAs contain over 116,000 acres, about 110% of the existing wilderness acreage, which would result in the largest increase in the number of acres protected for wilderness character for any of the alternatives. This would also mean the largest potential loss of motorized, mechanized, and developed recreation opportunities among the alternatives, if the proposed areas were to become designated wilderness.

All of the contiguous potential wilderness areas would expand the land base for their associated designated wilderness areas. Sections of wilderness trails already pass through these units to access the existing wilderness, and designation would ensure continued and expanded wilderness recreation opportunities for hikers and equestrians. For the larger areas such as Sycamore Canyon, Cedar Bench, or Pine Mountain, the additions would also provide more opportunity for extended back-country wilderness use. In Castle Creek, the potential wilderness area would enhance backcountry camping opportunities during the winter, spring, and fall due to its low elevation.

Alternative D would also recommend designation for three new stand-alone potential wilderness areas; Ash Creek PWA, Fritsche B PWA, and Muldoon PWA. Ash Creek was recommended due to its close proximity to both the Verde Valley and the Prescott Basin. It would be well situated to serve future demands for Wilderness opportunities from the local population, the Phoenix metro area, and Flagstaff. Fritsche B would create a new Wilderness area outside of the Paulden community and help to meet a regional need for more wilderness in the Coconino Plateau Woodland. The upper Verde River is eligible for Wild and Scenic River designation (Forest

Service, 1981) and Wilderness designation for Muldoon would complement the Wild river characteristics of this section.

Four of the twenty potential wilderness areas would not be recommended for designation in this alternative. This includes Bald Mountain PWA, Black Canyon PWA, Fritsche A PWA, and Pine Mountain A PWA. It was determined that their designation as wilderness was not compatible with the focus in Alternative D on expanding dispersed recreation opportunities.

Bald Mountain PWA is not recommended in this alternative because it currently contains about one and a half miles of motorized trail. Wilderness designation would require that this trail be closed to motorized use – thus representing an actual, not potential, loss of a motorized recreation opportunity.

Wilderness designation for the Black Canyon PWA would preclude the future development of mountain biking opportunities in a prime area adjacent to the towns and communities within the Verde Valley.

The restriction associated with wilderness designation for Fritsche A PWA would limit the future development of motorized recreation opportunities in the vicinity of the Paulden community. Current use includes Off-Highway Vehicle use on area trails and for hunting access.

Pine Mountain A PWA is not recommended for wilderness designation in this alternative because, in conjunction with Wilderness designation for Pine Mountain C, it would result in private property being surrounded by Wilderness. The existing private property and access road occurs within the boundaries for Pine Mountain A, therefore, it would be better to designate Pine Mountain C, north of FR 68, and maintain FR 68 for access to the area.

It is estimated that the thirteen contiguous potential wilderness areas would contribute little additional visitation, about 2,200 visits combined. Of the three new stand-alone parcels, Muldoon could be expected to add the most visitation because it contains a section of the Verde River that is eligible for Wild & Scenic designation. Muldoon's expected visitation was estimated to be 20% higher than average at about 6,000 visits per year, while Fritsche B and Ash Creek were estimated to add an additional 5,000 visits each. In total, this would represent an approximate 45% increase in wilderness visitation. As noted above, it is not known how much of this increase in wilderness visitation would represent new visitors to the areas versus simply reclassifying the existing visitation as wilderness use.

Recommended wilderness areas would be managed to maintain their wilderness characteristics, with the same caveats noted in Alternative B.

Alternative E (The Preferred Alternative)

The consequences with regard to potential wilderness areas recommended for designation are similar to those in alternatives B and D; however, alternative E contains the lowest recommended acreage. Alternative E would recommend 23,137 additional acres for designation across 8 PWAs, equal to about 22 percent of the existing wilderness acreage.

None of these recommended PWAs overlap with any of the inventoried roadless areas identified in the 2001 Roadless Area Conservation Rule. If designated, it is estimated that these areas could increase wilderness visitation by approximately 3 percent (Forest Service, 2011g). However,

since these 8 PWAs are contiguous to existing wilderness, like alternative B, it is not known how much of this increase in wilderness visitation would represent new visitors to the areas.

Apache Creek A and Juniper Mesa were selected because they complement the desired non-motorized emphasis for the Williamson Valley North Management Area. Sections of wilderness trails already pass through these units to access the existing wilderness, and designation would ensure continued and expanded wilderness recreation opportunities for hikers and equestrians.

Castle Creek PWA was selected because it is contiguous to both the existing Castle Creek Wilderness and a Bureau of Land Management parcel that is “Managed for Wilderness Characteristics”. Wilderness designation for this area would expand the land base for the existing Castle Creek Wilderness and enhance backcountry camping opportunities during the winter, spring, and fall in this low-elevation unit.

Cedar Bench A, Cedar Bench B, and Pine Mountain B were selected expand the land base for the existing Cedar Bench and Pine Mountain Wildernesses to increase the opportunities for extended back-country wilderness use.

Sycamore Canyon A was selected to expand the existing Sycamore Canyon Wilderness. Wilderness designation for this area would increase the land base of the Sycamore Canyon Wilderness by approximately 4,400 acres.

Woodchute was selected to expand the existing Woodchute Wilderness. Wilderness designation for this area would increase the land base of the Sycamore Canyon Wilderness by approximately 1,500 acres.

Cumulative Consequences

Cumulative consequences are those consequences of foreseeable activities on lands that are not managed by the Prescott NF that, in conjunction with management activities likely to occur on the Forest, may intensify, negate, improve or otherwise affect the recreation opportunities on the Forest.

The cumulative consequences area includes public and private lands within Yavapai County. The Prescott NF plays a central role in providing outdoor recreation opportunities within Yavapai County as it accounts for approximately 23% of the 5.2 million acres, but it is not the sole provider. There are outdoor recreation opportunities provided by other federal agencies, the State of Arizona, and some of the municipalities that range from developed day-use areas to back-country dispersed opportunities.

To evaluate the cumulative consequences to recreation opportunities, the proposed changes to recreation management on the Prescott NF were examined in the context of the contributions to recreation opportunities provided by other jurisdictions within Yavapai County.

On the Federal level, one of the foreseeable future actions that would have cumulative consequences on recreation opportunities in Yavapai County is direction within the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Bradshaw-Harquahala Resource Management Plan (RMP) to complete the Black Canyon National Recreation Trail to connect with trails on the Prescott NF. This plan also contains guidance to locate and develop staging and camping areas to service the north

section of this non-motorized trail and to locate a motorized route that generally parallels the Black Canyon Trail.

In addition, under the Bradshaw-Harquahala RMP, the Black Canyon Management Unit manages 13,490 acres adjacent to the Castle Creek PWA that have been “Allocated to Maintain Wilderness Characteristics”. If the Castle Creek PWA were recommended for wilderness designation, the cumulative effect would be over 43,000 acres managed for wilderness character, including the designated Castle Creek Wilderness.

The government of Yavapai County has developed the Yavapai County Master Trails Plan that would enhance trail-based recreation by creating links between the forest trail system and other trail systems in the county. The forest trails could provide use corridors between communities, and by connecting with the trails in other jurisdictions there would be increased access to the trail system. Participants in the Master Trails Plan would include the BLM, the State of Arizona, the Prescott and Coconino National Forests, the cities of Prescott and Sedona, and the town of Prescott Valley, all of which have existing trail systems or trail plans.

The cumulative consequences to recreation opportunities would be greatest for Alternative D and least for Alternative A. The action alternatives provide direction to expand the existing recreation program, and by implementing a collaborative approach based on coordination and communication with other jurisdictions, the forest could direct its efforts towards providing recreation opportunities that were unique to the forest or that complemented the efforts of other entities. Alternative D would have the most potential to expand the available recreation opportunities in the County because its emphasis best aligns with proposed foreseeable actions. Alternative B has the second most potential, and Alternative C has the least potential of the three action alternatives.

Alternative A would contribute the least overall to the cumulative recreation opportunities available because it does not provide direction for the expansion of the recreation program. There is also no plan direction to develop collaborative efforts or coordinate recreation opportunities with other jurisdictions. Collaboration and coordination would take the pressure off of recreation providers to offer as many different opportunities as possible and instead provide better service within a well-defined recreation niche. This would also provide the flexibility to adapt to changing conditions such as shifts in use patterns or demographics, changes in seasons of use, or declines in budgets or revenue sources.

Relationship of Short-Term Uses and Long-Term Productivity

Short-term uses are those that generally occur for a finite time period. Long-term productivity refers to the ability of the land to produce a continuous supply of a resource, in this case, recreation opportunities.

Alternative A (No action)

The current forest plan places its emphasis on maintaining existing recreation facilities and service levels. Most of the disruption would occur during scheduled maintenance on trails and facilities. These actions tend to be of short duration, cause little to no short-term disturbance, and help to sustain the long-term productivity of recreation opportunities.

Alternative B (Citizen Collaboration Emphasis)

There are a number of objectives in Alternative B that would cause short-term disruption of recreation opportunities. Some of these disruptions would come from the vegetation treatments and could range from a few hours to an entire season. Prescribed burning requires the closure of the area to be burned and also creates issues with smoke in areas downwind. Mechanical vegetation treatment also requires closure of the area, often for a longer period of time while the equipment is in operation. Both methods may impact trails if personnel are not made aware of their presence and protective measures are not implemented. New informal trails can also be inadvertently created along cleared fire line if steps are not taken to rehabilitate it. Vegetation treatments can leave landscapes in a condition that that some visitors might find unattractive in the short-term.

There would also be some short-term disruptions from recreation management actions. Users could be displaced, temporarily or permanently, in areas where management is increased through the creation of new developed recreation site or designated dispersed camping areas. Users would also be disrupted on trails and at trailheads during improvements or upgrades, and to a lesser extent during trail maintenance activities.

The short-term impacts of the vegetation treatment would provide long-term benefits to recreation by returning the vegetation to a more natural condition, reducing the chances of catastrophic wildfire, and creating a more natural recreation setting. The recreation management actions would improve recreation settings in the long-term and help to reduce the impacts to the watershed and ecosystem caused by recreation use. These actions would also help to reduce conflicts between users over the long term.

Alternative C (Vegetation & Wildlife Emphasis)

Alternative C places an emphasis on restoring vegetation types that are in decline. The short-term impacts, compared to Alternative B, would be greater from vegetation treatments and fewer from recreation. Alternative C emphasizes the increased use of fire for vegetation treatments, increasing the potential for short-term impacts from smoke. This alternative would also cause fewer disruptions on trails and at trailheads, due to the reduction in the number of trailhead improvements and the maintenance backlog targets. Recreation would still benefit from an increase in the long-term productivity of recreation opportunities.

Alternative D (Dispersed Recreation Emphasis)

Alternative D emphasizes the creation of more dispersed recreation opportunities. It contains the same vegetation restoration objectives as Alternative B, and so would experience the same short-term disruptions and long-term benefits from them. The short-term impacts from recreation would be greater for trailheads and dispersed camping, the same for trails, and fewer for developed recreation than in Alternative B. This would mean less overall disruption, as the designation of dispersed camping sites versus the creation of a developed campground would involve the less permanent displacement and a shorter period of temporary displacement of users.

Alternative E (The Preferred Alternative)

Alternative C places an emphasis on restoring vegetation types that are in decline. The short-term impacts, compared to Alternative B, would be greater from vegetation treatments and fewer from

recreation. Alternative C emphasizes the increased use of fire for vegetation treatments, increasing the potential for short-term impacts from smoke. This alternative would also cause fewer disruptions on trails and at trailheads, due to the reduction in the number of trailhead improvements and the maintenance backlog targets. Recreation would still benefit from an increase in the long-term productivity of recreation opportunities.

Unavoidable Adverse Impacts

The land management plan provides a programmatic framework that guides site specific actions but does not authorize, fund, or carry out any project or activity. Before any ground-disturbing actions take place, they must be authorized in a subsequent environmental analysis. Therefore none of the alternatives cause unavoidable adverse impacts. Mechanisms are in place to monitor and use adaptive management principles in order to help alleviate any unanticipated impacts that need to be addressed singularly or cumulatively.

Irreversible and Irretrievable Commitment of Resources

The land management plan provides a programmatic framework that guides site-specific actions but does not authorize, fund, or carry out any project or activity. Because the land management plan does not authorize or mandate any ground-disturbing actions, none of the alternatives cause an irreversible or irretrievable commitment of resources.

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Appendix A - Maps

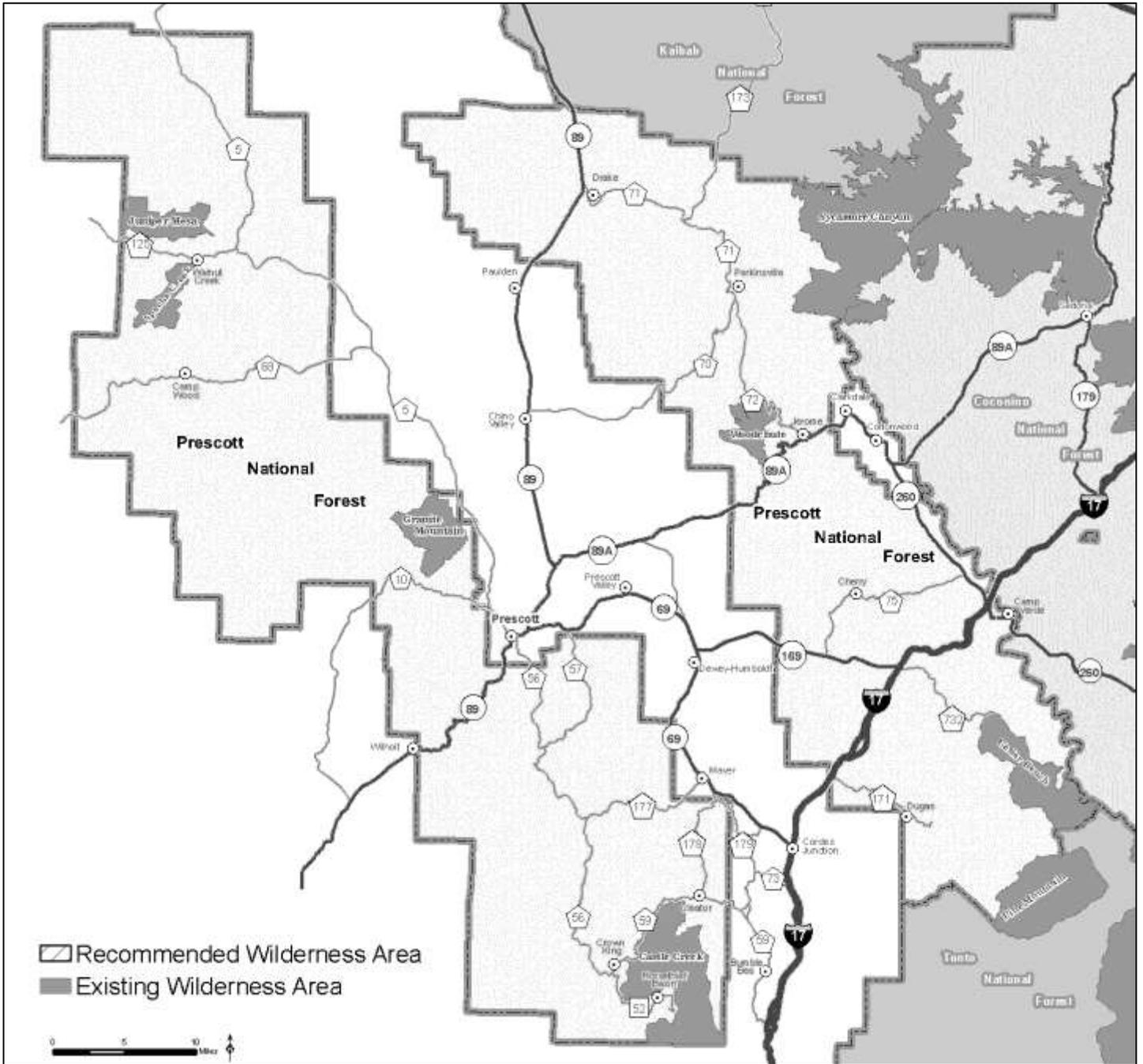


Figure 1. Recommended Wilderness for Alternatives A and C

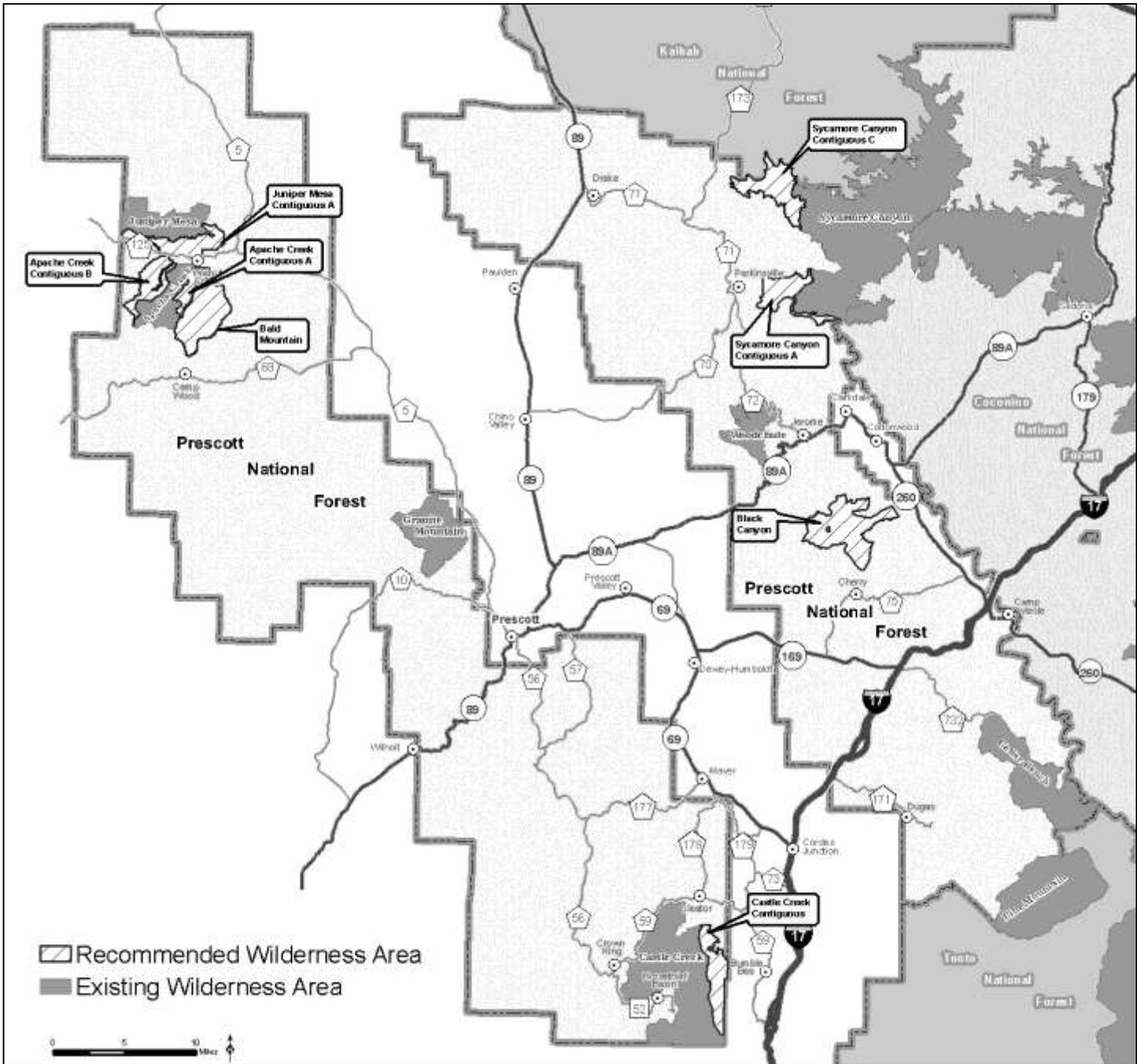


Figure 2. Recommended Wilderness for Alternative B

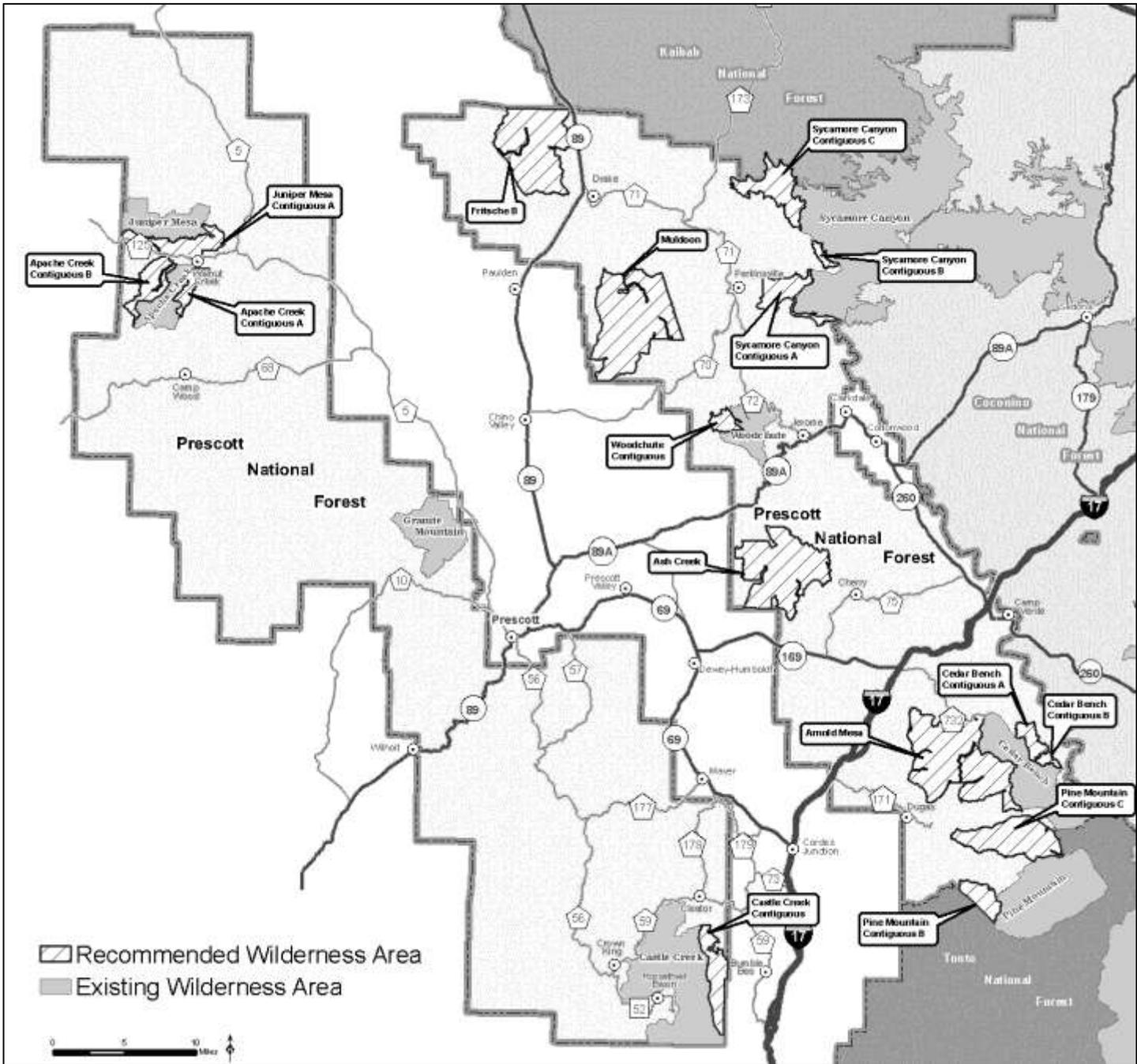


Figure 3. Recommended Wilderness for Alternative D

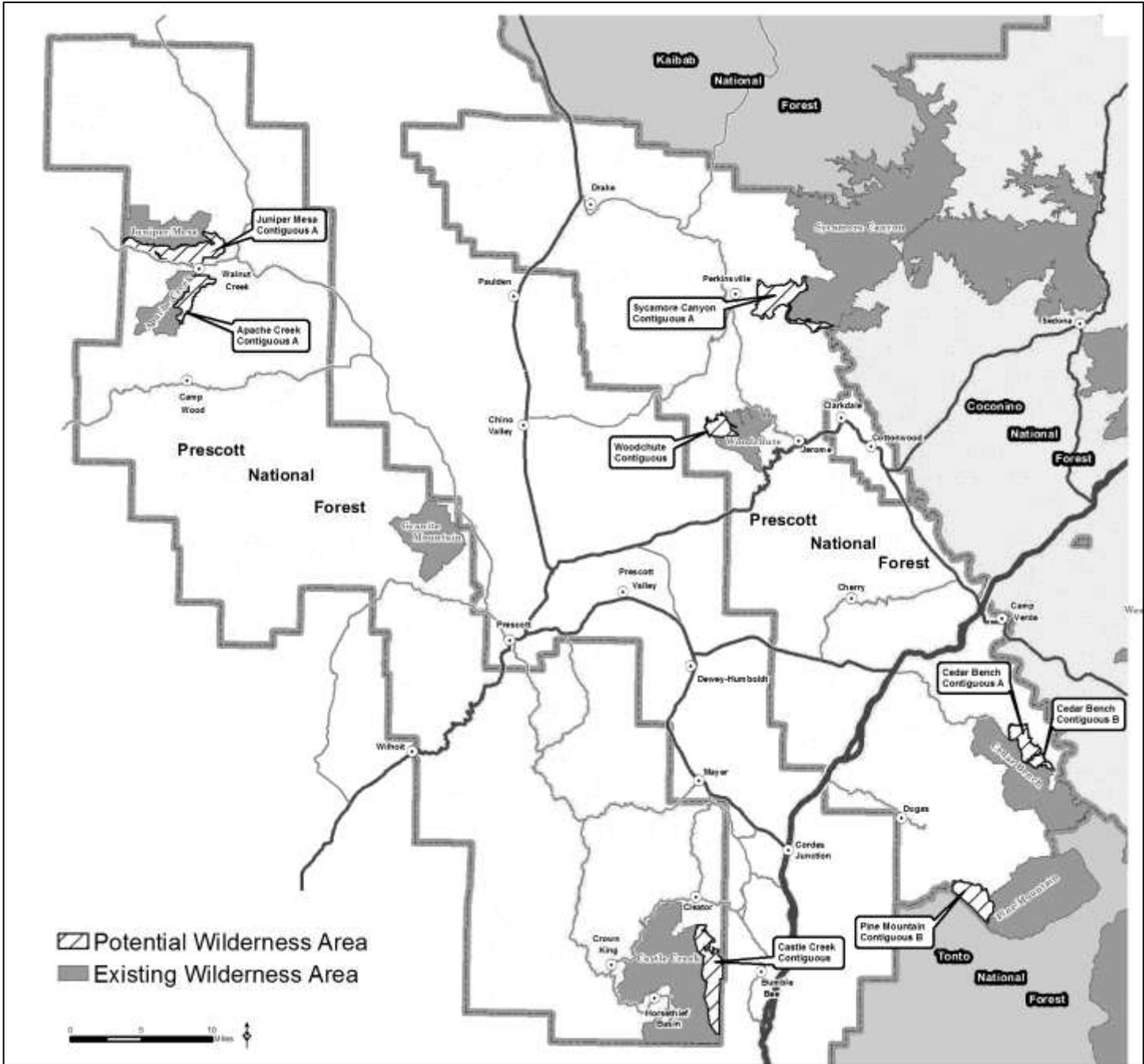


Figure 4. Recommended Wilderness for Alternative E