



Record of Decision for the Prescott National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan

Yavapai and Coconino Counties, Arizona



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Yavapai and Coconino Counties, Arizona

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Introduction

This public record of decision (ROD) documents my decision and rationale for approving the new land and resource management plan (plan) for the Prescott National Forest (Prescott NF or forest). This revised plan provides forest-specific guidance and information for project and activity decisionmaking and will guide all resource management activities on the forest for the next 10 to 15 years. It replaces the previous plan, which was approved in 1987 and has been amended 17 times.

Forest Setting

The Prescott NF occupies 1.2 million acres in a mountainous section of central Arizona located mostly within Yavapai County, with a small portion in Coconino County. The forest includes two geographically separate areas and three ranger districts. Ranger district offices are located in Camp Verde, Chino Valley, and Prescott. The Prescott NF shares boundaries with the Coconino, Kaibab, and Tonto National Forests; the Agua Fria National Monument and other Bureau of Land Management lands; Arizona State Trust lands; the Yavapai-Prescott Indian Reservation; and several rural communities.

The supervisor's office is located in the city of Prescott, the former Arizona Territorial Capital and home to the world's oldest rodeo. Traditional western lifestyles still influence the values and cultures found within Yavapai County. Local residents rely on public lands for resources to help sustain western traditions and lifestyles but also look to the Prescott NF to provide opportunities for helping to sustain retail businesses and tourism associated with modern-day vibrant cities and towns. In 2010, the mostly rural Yavapai County included more than 211,000 residents making it the third largest metropolitan statistical area in Arizona after Phoenix (4.2 million) and Tucson (1 million).

American Indian tribes and people in nearby communities have long-standing connections to the forest. The Prescott NF has lands traditionally used by the Fort McDowell Yavapai Nation, Hopi, Hualapai and Tonto-Apache Tribes, the Yavapai-Apache Nation, and the Yavapai-Prescott Tribe.

The Prescott NF contains a diversity of vegetation types due to its range of elevation and soil types. Semi-desert grasslands cover 24 percent of the forest and are found at lower elevations. As elevation increases, grasslands transition to chaparral (24 percent) and piñon-juniper woodlands (40 percent) and then ponderosa pine forests (10 percent) at the higher elevations. Desert shrub communities, riparian gallery forests, and wetland vegetation are present in small, yet important, areas. This range of vegetation provides for a variety of wildlife habitat and recreation settings.

The purpose of the original forest reserves, now part of the Prescott NF, was to protect and conserve water supplies for communities of central Arizona. The rugged topography of the Prescott NF provides essential watersheds for both the Verde and Colorado River systems. Within these watersheds are many important continuously or seasonally flowing streams which provide habitat for riparian and aquatic species and water supply to local communities, including the Phoenix metropolitan area downstream.

A variety of year-round recreation opportunities exist on the Prescott NF. Visitors and local citizens alike enjoy having such opportunities nearby, and during the summer, recreate in the Prescott NF where temperatures are moderate. In the winter, people visit the Verde Valley and other snow-free areas to recreate where temperatures are mild. Recent increases in population have led to increased demand for trails and other recreation opportunities.

Land and Resource Management Planning

Nature of Forest Plan Decisions

The nature of forest plan decisions is outlined in the 1976 National Forest Management Act (NFMA). NFMA requires all forests in the National Forest System to develop plans that direct resource management activities on the Forests. These plans are to be revised when conditions have changed significantly, or on a 10- to 15-year cycle.

The revised plan establishes a framework for future decisionmaking by outlining a broad, interdisciplinary program for achieving the desired goals, objectives, and future conditions of the forest. It represents decisions that are strategic in nature, does not make a commitment to the selection of any specific project, and does not dictate day-to-day administrative activities needed to conduct the Forest Service's internal operations (e.g., personnel matters, law enforcement, fleet management, organizational changes). By applying programmatic management direction, the plan is carried out through the design, implementation, and monitoring of site specific activities such as relocating a trail, conducting a prescribed burn, or harvesting timber. Subsequent decisions for these activities will be designed to be consistent with the strategic decisions made in the revised plan and are subject to separate analysis under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

The revised plan is accompanied by a final environmental impact statement (FEIS), which provides analysis that discloses the environmental consequences of the alternative management strategies considered and discusses how these alternatives respond to issues and concerns raised during internal and collaborative processes.

The Revised Forest Plan

Forest plan revision on the Prescott NF was initiated based on legal requirements and significant changes that have occurred in conditions, demands, and scientific understanding since the 1987 plan went into effect. Need for revision is based on the following:

- The plan is beyond the 10- to 15-year duration provided by the National Forest Management Act (16 U.S.C. 1606(e)(5)(A)).
- Assessment of the sustainability of social, economic, and ecological forest resources in light of continued management under the 1987 plan indicated several needs for change, which are documented in the "Analysis of the Management Situation" (AMS), as required by the 1982 Planning Rule. The "Needs for Change" section later in this ROD provides further detail.
- New science and information has become available since the current plan was developed more than 25 years ago.

With this decision, the selected alternative will become the new "Prescott National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan." This revised plan replaces the 1987 plan. This new plan is part of the long-range resource planning framework established by the Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resources Planning Act of 1974 (RPA), the Government Performance and Results Act of 1993 (GPRA), and the 2012 Revision of the USDA Forest Service Strategic Plan. The FEIS and revised plan were developed according to the NFMA, its implementing regulations at 36 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 219; the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA), the Council of Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations at 40 CFR 1500-1508, and the Forest Service NEPA regulations at 36 CFR 220.

According to transition language of the 2012 Planning Rule at 36 CFR 219.17(b)(3), the responsible official may elect to complete and approve the plan revision in conformance with the provisions of a prior planning regulation (36 CFR part 219, published at 36 CFR parts 200 to 299, revised as of July 1, 2010). For this revision of the Prescott National Forest's Land and Resource Management Plan, I have elected to follow these provisions, referred to collectively in this document as the 1982 rule.

This decision applies only to National Forest System lands of the Prescott NF located in the aforementioned counties. It does not apply to any other Federal, State, or private lands, although the effects of activities occurring on these lands and the effects of my decision on lands that surround the national forest are also considered.

Collaboration and Public Involvement

A variety of opportunities for meaningful dialogue and collaboration were provided throughout the plan revision process, including the initial ecological and socioeconomic sustainability assessments, development and finalization of the plan, and the consideration of effects in the FEIS. The Prescott NF hosted multiple public meetings in nearby communities; attended meetings with local, state, federal, and tribal governments; and provided topic-based meetings on outdoor recreation opportunities and challenges, wilderness, ecological sustainability, wildlife, and watershed management.

In addition to traditional public involvement activities, the forest utilized human geographic mapping (areas defined by human interactions with nature), and identified informal community networks and community leaders. Three local area interest groups organized themselves to assist the forest with plan revision efforts (Stewardship Forum, Verde Front, and Community Forest Trust). These groups along with the Upper Agua Fria Watershed Partnership hosted cross-community gatherings where the forest could listen in as citizens shared their values and desires for the forest and could explore ways to support and sustain stewardship of the Prescott NF. As an outcome of these listening sessions, 11 community landscape vision statements were developed which informed the creation of new management area boundaries, desired conditions and guidelines for the revised plan. These community groups also hosted several well-attended workshops where citizens provided specific content suggestions as plan components were iteratively developed.

Participants in the meetings and workshops included individuals and representatives from local user groups, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Arizona State Game and Fish Department, Arizona Wilderness Coalition, Arizona and Yavapai Cattle Growers Associations, Friends of Arizona Rivers, Mingus Area Preservation Society, Public Lands Council, Sierra Club-Yavapai Group, and the Upper Agua Fria Watershed Partnership.

Key partnerships with local area interest groups (Stewardship Forum, Verde Front, and Community Forest Trust, Upper Agua Fria Watershed Partnership) provided valuable analysis and support throughout the plan revision process. They remain active today, assisting the forest with ongoing stewardship activities.

The notice of intent (NOI) to prepare an EIS was published in the Federal Register on January 9, 2010. At that time, the draft plan was posted to the Prescott NF planning Web site¹ and made available for review. Comments were used to iteratively make adjustments to the draft plan,

¹ www.fs.usda.gov/land/prescott/landmanagement

identify issues, and develop alternatives. All five versions of the draft plan were posted on the Prescott NF planning Web site and made available to the general public for comment.

Following the release of the draft EIS and proposed plan on August 25, 2012, the planning team hosted public meetings in the communities of Camp Verde, Chino Valley and Prescott to inform local residents and solicit comments. Presentations were also made at the request of the Yavapai County Board of Supervisors and the Yavapai Cattle Growers Association. Meetings were also held with the Arizona Game and Fish Department, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Arizona Wilderness Coalition to discuss comments.

Tribal Consultation

The Prescott NF has coordinated with area tribes, in particular the tribal governments that have a special connection with the area encompassed by the forest. Meetings were held with tribal elders, government representatives, and community members from the Fort McDowell Yavapai Nation, the Hopi Tribe, the Hualapai Tribe, the Tonto Apache Tribe, the Yavapai-Apache Nation, and Yavapai-Prescott Tribe. Discussions addressed a wide range of resources including springs, ceremonial sites, piñon and traditionally used plants, and opportunities for developing wildland firefighting skills. Tribal concerns were primarily focused on the private development along the forest edge and concern for having continued access to ceremonial sites and forest products for traditional/cultural use; resource damage from extractive undertakings such as mining; and providing increased campground capacity for area visitors during area events and festivals.

Needs for Change

In light of the changing circumstances on the forest and availability of new information, five priority needs for change to the 1987 plan emerged from the “Analysis of the Management Situation.” These needs for change reflect aspects of management that would benefit most from updated forest plan direction. They are:

1. **Restoring vegetation structure, composition and desired fire characteristics of selected ecosystems.** In forest and woodland vegetation types, tree cover and fuels are far denser and more continuous across the landscape than in reference conditions. When wildfires occur under current conditions, they are increasingly likely to result in severe fire effects such as sterilizing soils, increasing the spread of invasive plants, and killing large, old trees, which take many years to replace. There has also been significant tree and shrub encroachment into grassland ecosystems over the past 100 years. This change has reduced the quantity and quality of available habitat for grassland-associated species. Many rural communities are adjacent to the Prescott NF creating more than 43,000 acres of wildland-urban interface and concern for human health and safety from the impacts of wildfire and smoke emissions. The multiple ecological, social, and economic benefits of restoring historic ecosystem structure and composition and reducing the risk of uncharacteristic fires are primary areas of focus.
2. **Retaining or improving watershed integrity and hydrological function.** The Prescott NF includes essential watersheds for the Verde and Colorado River systems. Surface waters and groundwater dependent ecosystems provide habitat for riparian and aquatic species as well as municipal water supplies for several communities of central Arizona. The 1987 Forest Plan offers little guidance for managing these important resources. Aquatic and riparian areas are centers of high biological diversity, have historical cultural significance, and are popular recreation destinations.

3. **Providing for varied but sustainable recreation opportunities.** This was the most common concern raised by the public and Prescott NF partners during plan revision. This is due in part to the mild climate of the area that encourages year-round recreation activity and the increased levels of Forest visitation in recent years. The 1987 Forest Plan offers little guidance for managing these important resources in light of changing population demographics, community-based values, conflicts between various types of recreation activities, and contributions from adjoining lands and outdoor recreation partners.
4. **Providing desired habitat for native fish species.** Native fish and other aquatic species are in decline in several Prescott NF watersheds. Furthermore, native aquatic species are no longer known to be present in five watersheds where historically they were present. In responding to the decline in native fish species, the Prescott NF can manage habitat and watershed characteristics that will support these species and address the control of nonnative species in partnership with the US Fish and Wildlife Service and the Arizona Game and Fish Department.
5. **Enhancing the value of open space provided by the Prescott NF.** Retention of open space (i.e., undeveloped land near or within sight of local communities) is highly valued by citizens for its scenic value and contribution to low population density. The Prescott NF has a unique opportunity to enhance value and identify desired visual character on its lands as population density may increase on other ownership through acquisition or exchange of lands within areas near or viewed by those in local communities.

In addition to these needs for change, there is a need to provide for sustainable uses that support vibrant communities and honor the forest's human history, while meeting current management demands. There is also a need for clearer direction related to livestock grazing and special uses on the forest. Finally, there is a need to establish a monitoring framework that enables adaptive management. Monitoring in the 1987 plan was focused on outputs rather than progress toward attainment of desired conditions. Monitoring in the revised plan uses the best available information and focuses on outcomes and progress toward desired conditions through an iterative process that specifies data acquisition, assessment, and adaptive response.

Alternatives

This section describes the alternatives considered in this ROD in order to provide important context for the decision being made. The Prescott NF analyzed five alternatives in detail: no action, the proposed revised plan, two alternatives developed in response to issues raised by the public, and the final revised plan, which was developed in response to public concerns raised during the 90-day comment period on the draft proposals.

Alternative A

Alternative A is the no action alternative, and recommends the continuance of the 1987 plan (as amended) for the next 10 to 15 years. The 1987 plan:

- Provides for timber and forage production, lands, special uses and minerals management, wildlife and fish habitat, recreation and visual resources, wildland fire management, and improvement of soil resources.
- Is focused on outputs rather than outcomes that should be attained.

- Addresses uses and resources separately, without recognition of interrelationships between the two and lacks management direction to emphasize ecosystem resilience and adaptation to climate change.
- Does not address the priority needs for change
- Provides no or limited desired conditions for many important resources and uses, including watershed integrity and hydrological function, aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems structure and function, open space, scenery, and special areas.
- Contains standards and/or guidelines that are often unnecessarily prescriptive about how to implement a project, instead of focusing on the project's outcome; do not support attaining desired conditions or accomplishing outcomes; are sometimes duplicative and conflict with or reiterate direction found in other law, regulation, and policy; are based on outdated policy, science, and information; require the use of metrics that are difficult to use; and provides minimal guidance for the protection of air and water resources.

Alternative B: Proposed Revised Plan

In light of the needs for change and major themes outlined above and the iterative collaboration process, the Prescott NF developed alternative B, the proposed revised plan. This alternative:

- Restores vegetation structure, composition and desired fire characteristics of selected ecosystems by providing:
 - Desired conditions for how terrestrial ecosystems should look and function including: species composition, frequency and severity of fire disturbance events; structural characteristics such as vegetation density, arrangement, age distribution; and key habitat features that provide for the viability of associated terrestrial wildlife species.
 - Objectives to use fire, mechanical treatments, domestic goats, and weed treatments to facilitate ecosystem restoration.
 - Standards and guidelines that limit forest uses or activities affecting vegetation and wildlife habitat to: 1) ensure that minimum management requirements are met, and maintain or establish a trajectory toward the desired vegetation composition and structure; 2) retain important habitat features such as old growth trees, snags, logs, woody debris, margins of seeps and springs, canyon cliffs and ledges, and animal movement corridors; 3) prioritize fuel reduction treatments near values at risk; and 4) minimize the spread of non-native invasive plants.
- Retains or improves watershed integrity, hydrological function and desired habitat for native fish species by providing:
 - Desired conditions of the hydrological and soil functions to be retained including: water quality, quantity and natural flow regimes; stream channel and flood plain features; upland soil and vegetation characteristics that support precipitation infiltration and groundwater recharge; and riparian features that support survival, growth, reproduction, and migration of native fish and other aquatic species.
 - Objectives that emphasize implementing projects within high-priority watersheds to manage towards Class 1 Conditions; and countering critical threats to riparian systems and proper functioning condition.
 - Standards and guidelines that limit forest uses or activities affecting watersheds, soils and riparian and aquatic habitat to: 1) maintain or establish a trajectory toward the

desired upland, riparian and aquatic ecosystem functions; 2) and retain important habitat features such as vegetative ground cover, logs and woody debris, pools, riffles and stream bank shade.

- Provides for varied but sustainable recreation opportunities by providing:
 - Desired conditions describing the number, locations and types of year-round recreation opportunities provided on Forest considering current and future funding, demographics, and contributions from adjoining lands and outdoor recreation partners.
 - Objectives that emphasize improving, maintaining or creating dispersed and developed recreation sites with an emphasis on providing a mix of developed and dispersed recreation and wilderness solitude opportunities; relocating or rehabilitating recreation areas or features (including trails) that show evidence of resource damage; and developing strategies to reduce trail use conflicts (e.g. non-motorized trail use by bikers, hikers and equestrians).
 - Standards and guidelines that limit forest uses or activities affecting recreational opportunities and settings across the Forest.
- Enhances the value of open space provided by the Prescott NF by providing:
 - Desired conditions that consider the role and contributions of Prescott NF resources to the social, economic, and cultural structure and stability of rural communities; describe scenery and open space values inherent to the landscapes of the Prescott NF, and those community and place-based values expressed in the 11 community landscape vision statements.
 - Objectives that emphasize acquiring lands within and around the Prescott NF to retain open space values, protect scenery, and provide a richer sense of place.
 - Standards and guidelines that limit forest uses or activities affecting land uses, open space and scenery across the Forest.
 - Seven management areas that consider geographically-oriented social and economic concerns and community landscape vision statements in the site-specific management of social and ecological resources.
- Establishes a monitoring framework that enables adaptive management by providing an overall monitoring strategy and identifying the monitoring questions and data acquisition methods. The monitoring framework was developed with the 2012 planning rule in mind to facilitate the transition to the 2012 rule monitoring requirements.
- Identifies 8 potential wilderness areas (43,440 acres) for wilderness recommendation.

Alternative C: Vegetation and Wildlife Emphasis

Alternative C was developed in response to issues related to placing more emphasis on and concern for terrestrial and aquatic species viability. Alternative C is similar to alternative B with these exceptions:

- Several objectives were modified to place greater focus on the improvement of ecological conditions and wildlife habitats in those vegetation types that are most severely departed from desired conditions. Specifically, restoration treatment activities are increased within the ponderosa pine and grassland potential natural vegetation types (PNVTs) during the

life of the plan. Additional projects to improve habitat for native fish and pronghorn antelope are identified.

- Less emphasis is given to trails-related recreation objectives.
- Identifies no potential wilderness areas (0 acres) for wilderness recommendation.

Alternative D: Dispersed Recreation Emphasis

Alternative D was developed in response to issues related to providing a greater quantity and diversity of recreation. Alternative D is similar to alternative B with these exceptions:

- Several objectives were modified to increase opportunities for sustainable and diverse recreation through additional trail mileage, more designated dispersed camping, and more trailhead improvement.
- Less emphasis is given to the improvement of ecological conditions and wildlife habitats within piñon-juniper and chaparral PNVTs.
- Identifies 16 potential wilderness areas (116,260 acres) for wilderness recommendation.

Alternative E: Final Revised Plan

Alternative E was developed after the release of the DEIS in response to several issues and concerns heard during the public comment period. Alternative E is similar to alternative B, but with less emphasis on developed recreation opportunities and wilderness, and additional guidance for watersheds and forest access. The components of alternative E (final revised plan), differ from alternative B (proposed revised plan) in the following ways:

- Modified a recreation objective to reduce the number of new developed sites to be constructed and maintained.
- Modified a recreation objective to refocus efforts towards implementing strategies that address safe shooting practices across the forest, rather than developing a new target shooting area.
- Added an objective to obtain instream base flows to enable the Prescott NF to provide for watershed functionality, channel and floodplain maintenance and recharge of riparian aquifers.
- Added an objective to pursue legal access to areas of the forest where historic access has been lost.
- Identifies 8 potential wilderness areas (23,137 acres) for wilderness recommendation.

Alternatives Considered but Eliminated From Detailed Study

In addition to the five alternatives described above, several alternatives were considered but not given detailed study. These alternatives considered public comments received in response to the proposed action and provided suggestions for alternative methods for achieving the purpose and need. Some of these alternatives may have been outside the scope of the plan revision process or already addressed by the alternatives considered in detail. The following alternatives were considered, but dismissed from detailed consideration for reasons summarized below. Further detail on these alternatives can be found in the FEIS chapter 2.

Resource Planning Act Alternative

The provisions of the 1982 planning rule regulations at 219.12(f)(6) require forest plans to respond to and incorporate the Renewable Resource Planning Act Program objectives for each national forest as displayed in regional guides. There is no longer a regional guide for the Southwestern Region. This was withdrawn as required by the 2000 planning rule at 219.35(e)(2000 rule). The last Renewable Resource Planning Act Program was developed in 1995. In lieu of the Renewable Resource Planning Act Program, the Forest Service Strategic Plan 2007–2012 provides broad overarching national guidance for forest planning and national objectives for the agency as required by the Government Performance Results Act. All alternatives in this FEIS address these broad strategic objectives.

Alternative that Responds to a Changing Climate

During the comment period, an alternative that responds to changes in global and regional climate due to increasing atmospheric concentrations of greenhouse gases was suggested. The EIS addresses climate change effects to local and regional resources for all of the alternatives. The four action alternatives also contain plan direction that facilitates building ecosystem resilience through desired conditions, objectives, and monitoring. Ecosystem resilience and adaptive capacity to a changing climate are expected to be achieved through the restoration efforts in the four action alternatives that focus on desired vegetation structure, vegetation composition, and fire regimes.

Alternative that Phases Out Livestock Grazing

An alternative emphasizing ecosystem restoration that would phase out livestock grazing across the forest over the life of the revised plan was suggested by the public. In the Multiple Use–Sustained Yield Act of 1960 (P.L. 86-517), Congress declared that the national forests are established and shall be administered for outdoor recreation, range, timber, watershed, and wildlife and fish purposes. The National Forest Management Act of 1974 (P.L. 94-588) reiterates this commitment to multiple use in Section 6 – National Forest System Resource Planning. Given these legal requirements, it was determined that this alternative was not consistent with the mission of the Forest Service and, therefore, outside the scope of this decision.

Alternative that Adopts a “Hands-Off” Management Approach

An alternative was suggested that would maximize long-term vegetative health and the retention of water and forage for wildlife through the implementation of a minimal management strategy. However, this type of “hands-off” approach is contrary to the best available science that recommends active restoration efforts for many of the departed ecosystems on the Prescott NF. The action alternatives address long-term vegetative health in the desired condition statements of how the various vegetation types on the Prescott NF should look and function. Management action is necessary to trend these ecosystems towards the desired conditions and strengthen ecosystem resilience in the face of expected changes in the climate of the Southwest.

Alternative that Adjusts Relative Mileage of Motorized and Non-Motorized Trails

A recreation oriented alternative was suggested that would increase the miles of nonmotorized trails relative to the miles of motorized trails. Current trail mileage for nonmotorized use is approximately equal to the mileage of motorized or multi-use trails (394 miles of nonmotorized

trails versus 408 miles of motorized trails). An alternative was suggested that would provide direction to adjust the nonmotorized trail mileage to exceed motorized trail mileage by about 40 percent to better reflect the proportions of visitor use.

The five alternatives considered in detail vary from adding no new system trails to adding 10 to 20 miles of trail; however, none of them would adjust the relative trail mileages to the extent suggested. Due in part to the average speed of travel, it is reasonable to expect that more miles of trail are required to provide the opportunity for a desired experience to an OHV rider than to a hiker. Motorized or non-motorized designation for trails will be determined at the site-specific level after specific proposals are identified and analyzed and there is the opportunity for public involvement.

Alternative that Limits the Road Density

An alternative was suggested that would prohibit new road construction and require a reduction in road density to less than 2 miles per square mile. This was not considered as a separate alternative because the current road density (including motorized trails) of the Prescott NF is less than 0.97 miles per square mile and all of the action alternatives include direction to minimize, but not prohibit, new road construction. Road density on the forest is even less if wilderness areas are included in the calculations.

All of the action alternatives address the impacts of roads and motorized trails by providing guidance for maintaining and restoring the health of watersheds and aquatic and riparian habitats impacted by existing roads. This includes objectives to repair or relocate roads or trails that impact watershed integrity, rehabilitate unauthorized routes that impact watershed integrity, and improve stream and drainage crossings.

My Decision

I select alternative E for the new land and resource management plan for the Prescott National Forest. The new plan will:

- Restore vegetation structure, composition and desired fire characteristics of selected ecosystems. This will reduce the risk of uncharacteristic fires and invasive plants; support sustainable levels of forest products, and forage for browsing and grazing animals; and increase ecosystem resilience to natural disturbances under warmer and drier climatic conditions.
- Retain or improve watershed integrity and hydrological function of impaired and at-risk watersheds, riparian areas and groundwater dependent ecosystems; and contribute to the municipal water supplies of communities in central Arizona. This direction will retain watershed and soil functions and features that support native fish and other aquatic and riparian species, and increase ecosystem resilience to natural disturbances under warmer and drier climatic conditions.
- Provide for varied but sustainable recreation opportunities considering the contributions and partner-supported strategies available across all lands and ownerships. This will ensure that recreation management activities achieve a balance between increased availability of opportunities at more highly developed sites with those that are more primitive and dispersed such that visitors enjoy the cultural and biophysical resources and settings of the forest while minimizing damage to those resources.

- Ensure that values shared by residents and the general public including open space and scenery are taken into consideration when responding to public access, land use, development and exchange proposals, tourism-based special uses, and quality of life concerns for area residents and visitors.
- Establish a monitoring framework that enables adaptive management.
- Provide guidance for 7 management areas across the forest that considers the geographically-oriented social and economic concerns and community landscape vision statements for the site-specific project decisions and management of social and ecological resources.
- Recommend approximately 23,137 acres for wilderness designation. These areas are adjacent to existing wilderness and will be managed to improve and/or maintain their wilderness values.

Components of the Decision

Components of plan decisions are outlined in the National Forest Management Act (1976) and Forest Service implementing regulations at 36 C.F.R. Part 219. A plan establishes a framework for future decision making by outlining a broad, interdisciplinary program for achieving the desired conditions of the national forest. A plan does not make a commitment to the selection of any specific project and does not dictate day-to-day administrative activities needed to carry on the Forest Service's internal operations. However, the plan is implemented through the design, execution, and monitoring of site specific activities that are consistent with the plan.

The decisions I am making in this record of decision for the new "Prescott National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan" are:

Establishment of forestwide multiple-use goals (characterized by desired conditions) and objectives (1982 Rule, Section 219.11 (b))

Forestwide goals, termed in this plan as desired conditions, are found in chapter 2 of the revised plan. While the plan addresses all uses and values of the forest, the desired conditions emphasize: (1) restoration of forests, shrublands and grasslands to provide terrestrial species habitat and to improve their ecological resilience under a changing climate; (2) providing for watershed integrity, hydrological function and aquatic species habitat; and (3) offering sustainable recreation, open space and scenery, and forest uses that honor the social, economic, and cultural values important to local residents and American citizens alike. Desired conditions are also established in the plan's chapter 5 for the management areas described above.

Objectives provide ways of achieving the desired conditions through specific actions and are established in the plan's chapter 3 for a full array of resources, uses, goods and services.

Establishment of forestwide management requirements (standards & guidelines) (1982 Rule, Section 219.27)

Forestwide standards and guidelines are found in chapter 2 of the revised plan. Standards are limitations on actions or thresholds that are not to be exceeded. Guidelines are requirements that must be followed unless a different management action demonstrably achieves the same intent as the guideline. After careful review, I believe that the standards and guidelines provide sufficient requirements for management, provide for resource protection, and reflect the intent of the new plan. To simplify the planning document and to keep it up-to-date, laws, policies, Forest Service

Manual and Forest Service Handbook direction, or other regional directives are incorporated by reference from the original source and are not duplicated in the plan.

Establishment of management prescriptions and associated standards and guidelines (1982 Rule, Section 219.11 (c))

The revised plan provides direction for management areas that have specific management direction that differs from the general forest. Management areas are described and mapped in chapter 5 of the plan. The plan provides desired conditions, objectives, standards and guidelines for 7 management areas: Agua Fria, Crown King, Prescott Basin, Upper Verde, Verde Valley, Williamson Valley North, and Williamson Valley South. These management areas consider geographically-oriented social and economic concerns and community landscape vision statements in the site-specific management of social and ecological resources.

Determination of land that is suitable for timber production (1982 Rule, Section 219.14) and establishment of the allowable sale quantity (ASQ) of timber (1982 Rule, Section 219.16)

The identification and description of lands suitable for timber production are found in chapter 7 of the revised plan. The FEIS for the revised plan discusses the timber suitability analysis in the “Forest Products” section of chapter 3. The land area designated suitable for timber production on the Prescott NF totals 38,875 acres. The amount of wood that is estimated to be available for sale annually from the suitable land within the plan area for the first decade of plan implementation is called the allowable sale quantity (ASQ). The ASQ is better described as the “average allowable sale quantity” because it may be exceeded in a given year as long as the 10-year average is not exceeded. For this plan, the ASQ is 40,447 CCF (hundred cubic feet) which includes both sawlog and pulpwood products. This is an increase from 23,385 CCF under the previous plan, which is due to the revised plan placing more emphasis on restoration of ponderosa pine forests (sawlogs) and piñon-juniper woodlands (pulpwood). More information on timber suitability and ASQ is available in FEIS appendix C.

Recommendations for non-wilderness allocations and recommendations for wilderness status (1982 Rule, Section 219.17)

During the analysis process leading to this decision, a total of about 277,700 acres was evaluated for potential wilderness across the forest. I recommend 8 potential wilderness areas (PWAs) totaling 23,137 acres for Congressional designation as wilderness. These areas are identified on map 5 in appendix A of the revised plan. The areas recommended all have high wilderness character and are adjacent to existing wilderness, which would provide for better manageability of the existing wilderness. Until Congress considers this recommendation, the plan has management direction for these areas to improve and/or maintain wilderness character.

This recommendation is a preliminary administrative recommendation that will receive further review and possible modification by the Chief of the Forest Service, the Secretary of Agriculture, and the President of the United States. Congress has reserved the authority to make final decisions on wilderness designation.

Of the PWAs considered, but not being recommended for wilderness designation, almost half of the acres are within inventoried roadless areas (IRAs) and would generally be managed to maintain their roadless character. The other half of the PWA acreage is in semi-primitive areas with limited access. The plan components for these areas would retain their recreation and scenery settings.

Recommendations for wild and scenic rivers or other special use designations as appropriate (1982 Rule, Section 219.17)

The eligibility review process for wild and scenic rivers completed under this forest plan revision effort consisted of a review of the existing eligibility for a 38-mile section of the upper Verde River for inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System. The 38-mile section of the upper Verde River has been listed as eligible for classification as “recreation” in the Nationwide Rivers Inventory since 1993. Previously, the full extent of the upper Verde River was classified as recreational; however, the updated classifications completed in 2010, identified the following segments: 5.6 miles classified as wild, 25.4 miles classified as scenic, and 6.7 miles classified as recreational. Plan components provide that these recommended classifications remain intact and for the protection of the outstandingly remarkable values (i.e., archaeological, scenic, fishery, wildlife, recreational, and botanical) for these eligible river segments until further study is conducted or designation by Congress.

More information is available in FEIS appendix B.

Designation of lands suitable for grazing and browsing (1982 Rule, Section 219.20)

Approximately 73 percent of the Prescott NF is suitable for livestock grazing. The areas designated unsuitable for grazing were either closed to grazing in the 1987 plan or have been closed to grazing based on site specific NEPA decisions for grazing allotments. Since the 1987 plan was approved, more than 50 of the active allotments on the Prescott NF (74 percent) have received site specific environmental review for the authorization of grazing. Chapter 7 of the revised plan and appendix B of the FEIS contain more information about the grazing suitability and capability determinations on the forest.

Establishment of monitoring and evaluation requirements (1982 Rule, Section 219.11 (d))

Monitoring and evaluation requirements are found in chapter 6 of the revised plan. Specific monitoring questions are identified regarding achievement of desired conditions and objectives or meeting regulatory requirements. The monitoring plan strives to be realistic in terms of budget and capacity, provides for robust study designs and statistically valid conclusions, and will facilitate adapting management in response to results and new information. Application of this monitoring plan will inform achievement of the desired conditions and objectives, and serve as the basis for adjusting management actions.

Determination of lands administratively available for oil and gas leasing (36 CFR 228.102 (d))

This determination is not addressed in the revised plan.

Rationale for Decision

My decision to select alternative E as the new “Prescott National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan” is based on a careful and reasoned comparison of the environmental consequences of and responses to issues and concerns for each alternative. I selected alternative E because it represents the best mix and balance of management strategies that: (1) meet the purpose of and need for action by addressing the priority needs for change and major themes that drove plan revision; (2) provide the direction necessary for moving the forest’s resources toward desired conditions while including measures to protect sensitive ecological and cultural elements of the forest; (3) are responsive to the issues, concerns, and opportunities expressed by the public

and other agencies; (4) establish ambitious but achievable objectives for ecosystem restoration and maintenance and recreation opportunities and management; and (5) manage land uses in ways that are socially and economically sustainable.

Alternative E will most effectively restore vegetation structure, composition, and desired fire characteristics of selected ecosystems. This will reduce the risk of uncharacteristic disturbance from high-severity fires, insect epidemics, and invasive plants. These disturbance events and their associated adverse impacts to soils, watershed, wildlife, visual quality, and other human uses and values present the most significant risks to ecosystem sustainability on the Prescott NF.

Alternative E best provides conditions supporting sustainable levels of forest products, forage for browsing and grazing animals, and terrestrial ecosystem resilience to disturbance under warmer and drier conditions.

Alternative E retains or improves watershed integrity and hydrological function of impaired and at-risk watersheds, riparian areas and groundwater dependent ecosystems, and contributes to the municipal water supplies of communities in central Arizona. Alternative E best retains watershed and soil functions and features that support native fish and other aquatic and riparian species, and aquatic ecosystem resilience to disturbances under warmer and drier conditions.

Alternative E will most effectively provide for varied but sustainable recreation opportunities considering the contributions and partner-supported strategies available across all lands and ownerships. Alternative E will ensure that recreation management activities achieve a balance between increased availability of opportunities at more highly developed sites with those that are more primitive and dispersed such that visitors enjoy the cultural and biophysical resources and settings of the forest while minimizing damage to those resources.

The analysis shows that alternative E best achieves the several social, economic, and cultural values important to local residents including sustainable levels of tourism, open space and scenery, and a strong sense of place and community. Alternative E ensures that these shared values are taken into consideration when responding to public access, land use, development and exchange proposals, tourism-based special uses, and quality of life concerns for area residents and visitors.

Alternative E includes recommended wilderness in several areas totaling about 23,130 acres that meet the wilderness inventory criteria, have high wilderness capability and would either improve the manageability of existing wilderness areas or include an outstanding, distinct landform feature. I believe these areas will make fine additions to the wilderness system.

I selected alternative E rather than alternative A because alternative A does not address the needs for change identified in the "Analysis of the Management Situation." The 1987 plan has no articulated desired conditions for watershed integrity and hydrological function, aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems structure and function, open space, scenery, or special areas. There are very few desired conditions for other resources. After reviewing the FEIS and summary in table 2 of the FEIS, it is clear to me that alternative A is generally the poorest of all the alternatives in terms of its ability to achieve desired conditions.

I selected alternative E rather than alternatives B, C and D for several reasons. Alternatives B and C have more focus on providing and maintaining developed recreation opportunities on forest and less focus on opportunities for dispersed recreation. Alternatives B, C, and D do not fully consider the contributions from other area recreation providers and partnership opportunities across all lands. Alternatives B, C, and D do not adequately address public concerns about safe

target shooting practices across the forest, nor do they address the need to pursue legal access to areas of the forest where historic access has been lost. Alternatives B, C, and D lack direction to obtain instream base flows to enable the Prescott NF to provide for watershed functionality, channel and floodplain maintenance and recharge of riparian aquifers.

Alternative E recommends approximately 23,130 acres for wilderness designation; while alternative B recommends 43,440 acres. Alternative D recommends 116,260 acres and alternatives A and C both recommend 0 acres. The potential wilderness areas in alternative E possess the highest degree of wilderness character, and are adjacent to existing wilderness. The areas in alternatives B and D have management needs for range, wildlife, and watershed improvement that would be more difficult to address without mechanical or motorized means. Additionally, there is relatively abundant wilderness that currently exists in and around the Prescott NF. As a result, I am choosing to include the fewest but highest quality potential wilderness areas.

The revised plan is responsive to the Forest Service's National Strategic Plan (2007-2012) and meets our legal obligations to the people and environment that surrounds them. The optimal implementation rate for the new plan could require higher funding levels in some areas than those currently allocated; however, I believe the management direction changes envisioned in the new plan are attainable under current budget levels. The achievement of desired conditions and outputs in some areas, however, may be prolonged or reduced if future budgets decrease.

In summary, I believe alternative E sets the framework for future decisions better than the other alternatives because it best addresses the needs for change to the current plan. It is overall best in achieving desired conditions and therefore best provides for social, economic, and ecological sustainability on the Prescott NF.

My conclusion is based on a review of the record that shows thorough incorporation of relevant scientific information, a consideration of opposing views, and the acknowledgment of incomplete or unavailable information, scientific uncertainty, and risk.

Response to Public Concerns

Many stakeholders shared their concerns and preferences during the collaboration and public involvement for the Prescott NF plan revision. I have made my decision to select alternative E with due consideration of the input from those diverse stakeholders. I will now share my views regarding the key concerns expressed for the Prescott NF plan and how my decision responds to those concerns.

Many stakeholders and commenters expressed preferences for or against one of the alternatives based on the amount of wilderness area that was recommended. The EIS studied alternatives that included a wide range of areas (0 to 16 areas and 0 to 116,260 acres) and levels of wilderness capability. My decision recommends areas that are adjacent to existing wilderness areas and offer high quality wilderness character for congressional designation as wilderness. My decision considered the needs for the active management for range, watershed, and wildlife resources as well as more opportunities for mountain biking. My decision also includes a desired condition that existing roadless areas, including those having low or moderate wilderness capability are free from activities that alter their roadless character.

Stakeholders voiced concerns about loss of forest access and travel corridors where locked gates have been installed along some National Forest System roads at locations that cross private

property and that the proposed plan does not adequately address this issue. My decision provides direction to actively pursue administrative and public access along these roads that cross private property using available legal means (e.g., reroutes, purchase or reciprocal rights-of-way) during the life of the plan.

Many residents commented that they want unsafe shooting behavior on the Prescott NF to be better addressed in the revised plan. In response to this concern, a recreation objective was modified to refocus efforts towards implementing strategies that address safe shooting practices across the forest rather than developing a new target shooting area.

Concerns were raised by many stakeholders and partners about the ability of the Prescott NF alone to provide sustainable outdoor recreation opportunities and environments over the long-term, considering declining budgets and increasing demand for outdoor recreation and tourism. In response to this concern, the number of new developed sites to be constructed was reduced. My decision shifts the management emphasis towards sustainable levels of dispersed recreation opportunities on the forest and away from more-highly developed recreation, due to contributions and partner-supported strategies across all lands and ownerships.

Several stakeholders expressed concerns that more emphasis should be given to watershed and soil conditions and protections for associated riparian/aquatic habitats. In response, language was added to desired conditions to clarify that upland vegetation and soils, water quality, and ground water recharge are important features of healthy watersheds. A plan objective was added to pursue in-stream flows to provide for channel and floodplain maintenance, recharge of riparian aquifers, and protection of riparian and aquatic habitat. Three new guidelines were added to limit uses and activities on steep wet or erosion prone soils. My decision highlights the importance of the Forest Service's responsibility for providing for healthy watersheds and water.

Some commenters claimed that the proposed plan lacked sufficient protections for Mexican spotted owl (MSO) and northern goshawk habitat, and other species, particularly related to tree canopy and old growth features. In response, desired conditions language was updated for openings and surrounding tree groups, guidelines were added for the retention of old growth tree features across the landscape, and language was added to better reference recovery plans developed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. My decision provides for the protection and conservation of large old trees in two ways. First, it includes a requirement that project design and treatment prescriptions should generally not remove large old trees, and large dead and "green" snags. Second, under certain stand structure conditions where large trees are more common, my decision allows for some older trees to be removed where needed to provide for breaks in the canopy and reduce the risk of stand replacing fire. By doing so, increased protection will be provided to the remaining large trees. I believe my decision best protects and provides for old growth.

Some stakeholders are concerned that the proposed plan overestimates the amount of suitable livestock grazing and such use causes watershed, stream, and grassland degradation. The grazing program on the Prescott NF has multiple mechanisms to evaluate, review, and adapt management as needed to effectively protect resources and respond to changing conditions. Based on the concern, standards and guidelines were reviewed and clarified to ensure that protections for soil, watershed, vegetation and wildlife resources were clear.

Stakeholders requested more protections and special status for the upper Verde River, including designation as a research natural area (RNA). Because the upper Verde River is eligible for inclusion as a wild and scenic river, and the revised plan already contains desired conditions and

standards and guidelines that protect the outstandingly remarkable values of the eligible river segments, it is my decision that designation as an RNA would not provide additional meaningful protection.

I appreciate all the stakeholder's constructive contributions to the development of this Prescott NF plan. That input has resulted in an improved plan that will serve the forest, its priceless resources, and the public well into the future.

Environmentally Preferred Alternative

The Council on Environmental Quality has defined the “environmentally preferred” alternative as: “...the alternative that will promote the national environmental policy as expressed in NEPA’s section 101. Ordinarily, this means the alternative that causes the least damage to the biological and physical environment; it also means the alternative which best protects, preserves, and enhances historic, cultural, and natural resources.”

Alternative E, the proposed action, is the environmentally preferred alternative, but only slightly more than Alternative C. Alternative E’s desired conditions, standards, guidelines, and objectives best provide the direction and management flexibility necessary to facilitate restoration of the structure, composition, and processes of frequent fire ecosystems and protect and restore rare and unique resources that support important habitats. It also ensures the protection of soil and watershed function; provides for threatened, endangered, sensitive, rare, and narrow endemic species; protects historic and cultural resources; and mitigates the effects of climate change.

Alternative E is the best at setting the ponderosa pine, piñon-juniper, and chaparral and grassland vegetation types on a trajectory toward achievement of desired conditions, thereby reducing the risk of uncharacteristic high severity fire. Alternative E is best helping wildlife species cope with climate change because it provides for resilient ecosystems, and was found to have the greatest ability to maintain viable wildlife populations over time. Alternative E would provide open conditions that are conducive to increased vegetative ground cover, which protects soil surfaces from erosion and prevents sediment delivery to water bodies. Under this alternative seeps and springs, riparian areas, stream channels and floodplains are likely to be more resilient—providing better habitat for native fish and aquatic species. Improved herbaceous vegetative cover and reduced wildfire risk would result in increased sequestration of atmospheric CO₂ and improve soil stability, hydrologic function, and nutrient cycling.

Net Public Benefits

The 1982 National Forest Management Act (NFMA) implementing regulations (36 CFR 219.1) state that plans “...shall provide for multiple use and sustained yield of goods and services...in a way that maximizes long term net public benefits...” Section 219.3 defines net public benefits as “...the long term value to the nation of all outputs and positive effects (benefits) less all associated inputs and negative effects (costs) whether they can be quantitatively valued or not. Net public benefits are measured by both quantitative and qualitative criteria rather than a single measure or index.”

There are two economic analyses required by the 1982 rule provisions—economic impact analysis and financial efficiency analysis. Economic impact analysis estimates the employment and labor income consequences and compares the relative effects of the alternatives. All of the action alternatives (B, C, D, and E) would provide more jobs and labor income than the current management direction (alternative A), but the difference between the alternatives is not

significant. Alternative E ranks in the middle of providing jobs and labor income. Financial efficiency analysis compares forest expenditures and revenues for the expected life (10 to 15 years) of the forest plan and the efficiency measure is present net value (PNV). PNV is the difference between program revenues and program expenditures over a 10-year period, using a four percent discount rate. Although PNV is negative for all alternatives and alternative E has the lowest PNV, it is important to note that PNV analysis is financial, not economic. This means that only quantifiable dollar expenditure and revenue information are included in the calculation. Not included are the substantial benefits associated with improvements in ecosystem function and integrity.

Alternative E was shown conclusively to be the combined most ecologically and economically beneficial alternative and as such, it is the alternative with the greatest net public benefits. This alternative most effectively maintains or improves ecosystem integrity and the socioeconomic contribution of the Forest.

Science Consistency

The revised plan contains a strong framework for adapting management of natural and cultural resources as new scientific information becomes available and plan monitoring reveals new or changing needs. Furthermore, I find that science was considered and applied throughout the revision process. Peer reviewed science was used whenever available, reliable, and applicable throughout the assessment process, the development of the plan, and preparation of the EIS. Extensive peer reviewed literature was available and used in the development of many plan components for many resource areas, including ecosystem vulnerability assessments of changing climate, restoring grassland and ponderosa pine ecosystems, listed species recovery plans, National Visitor Use Monitoring results, and the USFS Watershed Condition Framework. In addition to published scientific literature and reports, the Prescott NF solicited input from subject matter experts on human-geographic mapping, Recreation Opportunity Spectrum classifications, Scenery Management Systems, and used state-of-the-art ecological modeling such as the Forest Vegetation Simulator (FVS) and the Vegetation Dynamics Development Tool (VDDT).

I find this decision to be consistent with the application of the best available scientific information utilized throughout the plan development process during assessment of the original 1987 plan for needs for change to better reflect management of the forest, during plan development and evaluation, and during development of the plan monitoring program. Scientific conclusions are drawn from well-supported data sources, and data availability is disclosed. No unproven or controversial data or methods are used in analyses. Sources of information are referenced, and syntheses do not go beyond what the data indicate.

Compatibility with Goals of Other Public Agencies and Indian Tribes

Forest Service planning regulations require the agency to consider other federal, state, and local government and tribal plans and policies. As part of the collaboration effort in developing the revised plan, the Prescott NF engaged in a number of discussions with federal, state, local, and tribal representatives throughout the duration of the plan revision effort. The new plan was developed collaboratively and was coordinated with federal, state, and local agencies including the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Arizona Game and Fish Department, and local government and community leaders. Consultation with area tribes ensured the plan components reflect tribal concerns and needs with respect to the forest. Appendix C of the FEIS details the collaboration

and coordination with other public agencies and tribes the Prescott NF engaged in throughout the plan revision process and that no conflicts were identified.

Environmental Justice

Executive Order 12898 (59 Federal Register 7629, 1994) directs federal agencies to identify and address, as appropriate, any disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects on minority and low-income populations in the local communities. I have determined, from the analysis disclosed in the FEIS, that the revised plan is in compliance with Executive Order 12898.

The population of Yavapai County is predominantly white, non-Hispanic (82.3 percent), followed by Hispanic or Latino origin (13.2 percent), and American Indian (1.7 percent). Compared to Arizona and the U.S. as a whole, Yavapai County is less racially and ethnically diverse. However, this finding does not eliminate the need to consider potential disproportionate impacts of Forest Service management actions. Both the Hispanic and American Indian populations have a presence in the analysis area. These populations have strong ties to the land and its natural resources and associate important values with use of the resources found on the Prescott NF. While the analysis area may have a low overall concentration of minority residents, it may still have areas with a high concentration of minority residents who could be adversely affected by management actions.

Key environmental justice concerns relate to smoke and air quality in low-lying communities, hardship potential from wildfire evacuations and municipal water supply for the communities in the Verde Valley and the city of Prescott.

Overall, the themes that form the foundation of the revised plan (i.e., providing for social and ecological sustainability and resilience; emphasizing recreational, educational, and cultural opportunities; and providing for forest-based uses that contribute to local economies) should make the Prescott NF a healthy and enjoyable place to work, reside near, or visit. Therefore, I find no disproportional effects to minority or low-income populations will occur from implementing the selected alternative.

Consultation with the Fish and Wildlife Service

The Prescott NF prepared a biological assessment (BA) to evaluate the potential effects of the revised plan on federally proposed and listed species, critical habitats, and candidate species within the action area. It analyzed the potential effects on 16 species listed below in table 1.

Table 1. Species and critical habitats analyzed.

Name	Status	Critical Habitat	Effect
Gila chub (<i>Gila intermedia</i>)	Endangered	Yes	Likely to adversely affect
Gila topminnow (<i>Poeciliopsis occidentalis occidentalis</i>)	Endangered	No	Likely to adversely affect
Loach minnow (<i>Tiaroga cobitis</i>)	Endangered	Yes	Likely to adversely affect
Razorback sucker (<i>Xyrauchen texanus</i>)	Endangered	Yes	Likely to adversely affect
Spikedace (<i>Medafitlgida</i>)	Endangered	Yes	Likely to adversely affect
Gila trout (<i>Oncorhynchus gilae</i>)	Threatened	No	Likely to adversely affect

Name	Status	Critical Habitat	Effect
Colorado pikeminnow (<i>Ptychocheilus lucius</i>)	Non-essential	No	Not likely to jeopardize
Roundtail chub (<i>Gila robusta</i>)	Candidate	No	Not likely to jeopardize
Narrow-headed gartersnake (<i>Thamnophis rufipunctatus</i>)	Threatened	Proposed	Likely to adversely affect
Northern Mexican gartersnake (<i>Thamnophis eques megalops</i>)	Threatened	Proposed	Likely to adversely affect
Sonoran desert tortoise (<i>Gopherus morjakai</i>)	Candidate	No	Not likely to jeopardize
California condor (<i>Gymnogyps californianus</i>)	Endangered	No	No effect
Southwestern willow flycatcher (<i>Empidonax traillii extimus</i>)	Endangered	Yes	Likely to adversely affect
Mexican spotted owl (<i>Strix occidentalis lucida</i>)	Threatened	Yes	Likely to adversely affect
Western yellow-billed cuckoo (<i>Coccyzus americanus occidentalis</i>)	Proposed Threatened	Potential	Likely to adversely affect
Mexican gray wolf (<i>Canis lupus baileyi</i>)	Non-essential	No	No effect

The analysis concluded that the revised plan would have “no effect” on the California condor and the Mexican gray wolf. The analysis further concluded that the proposed action is “not likely to jeopardize” roundtail chub, Sonoran desert tortoise, and experimental non-essential populations of Colorado pikeminnow; but is “likely to adversely affect” these species: Gila chub and its critical habitat, Gila topminnow, Gila trout, spikedace and its critical habitat, loach minnow and its critical habitat, razorback sucker and its critical habitat, Mexican spotted owl and its critical habitat, southwestern willow flycatcher and its critical habitat, northern Mexican gartersnake and its proposed critical habitat, narrow-headed gartersnake and its proposed critical habitat, and the yellow-billed cuckoo.

The BA was transmitted to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on January 24, 2014, with a request for concurrence on the determination that the proposed action is “not likely to jeopardize” three species, and requested formal consultation on the “likely to adversely affect” determinations for the other 11 species.

In the July 9, 2014 BO, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) provided conference reports and concurrence with the determinations for Colorado pikeminnow, Sonoran desert tortoise, and roundtail chub. The FWS concluded that implementation of the revised plan may affect but would not jeopardize species or adversely modify critical habitat for these 11 species: Gila chub and its critical habitat, Gila topminnow, Gila trout, spikedace and its critical habitat, loach minnow and its critical habitat, razorback sucker and its critical habitat, Mexican spotted owl and its critical habitat, southwestern willow flycatcher and its critical habitat, northern Mexican gartersnake and its proposed critical habitat, narrow-headed gartersnake and its proposed critical habitat and the yellow-billed cuckoo.

The FWS anticipated incidental take of species could occur as a result of implementing the revised plan, but identified reasonable and prudent measures necessary and appropriate to minimize the effects of take for of Gila chub and Mexican spotted owls.

Under section 7 of the Endangered Species Act, the Forest Service must comply with the terms and conditions of the incidental take statement in the BO, which implement the reasonable and prudent measures. The final BO and associated terms and conditions can be found in the planning record.

Findings Related to Other Laws and Authorities

I have considered the statutes governing management of the Prescott NF, and I believe that this decision represents the best possible approach to fulfilling the current statutory duties of the USDA Forest Service. Following are summaries of how the revised plan addresses the National Forest Management Act, National Environmental Policy Act, Endangered Species Act, Multiple-Use Sustained-Yield Act, Clean Air Act, Clean Water Act, and National Historic Preservation Act.

National Forest Management Act

The National Forest Management Act (NFMA) requires the development, maintenance, amendment, and revision of land and resource management plans for each unit of the National Forest System. These plans help create a dynamic management system so an interdisciplinary approach to achieve integrated consideration of physical, biological, economic, and other sciences will be applied to all future actions on the unit (16 U.S.C. 1604(b), (f), (g), and (0)). Under NFMA, the Forest Service is to ensure coordination of the multiple uses and sustained yield of products and services of the National Forest System (16 U.S.C. 1604(e)(1)).

NFMA requires the Secretary of Agriculture to promulgate regulations for developing and maintaining forest plans. On April 9, 2012, the Department of Agriculture issued a final planning rule for National Forest System land management planning (2012 rule) 77 FR 68 [21162-21276]. According to transition language of the 2012 planning rule 36 CFR § 219.17(b)(3), the responsible official may elect to complete and approve the plan revision in conformance with the provisions of a prior planning regulation (36 CFR part 219, published at 36 CFR parts 200 to 299, revised as of July 1, 2010). For this revision of the “Prescott National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan,” I have elected to follow these provisions, referred to collectively in this document as the 1982 rule. References in this ROD to sections of 1982 planning rule version of 36 CFR part 219 are indicated in the citations.

My review of the planning process, the FEIS, and the information provided in the ROD indicates the revised plan and its preparation meet requirements for revising plans under the provisions of the 1982 planning rule, as allowed in the transition provisions of the 2012 planning rule at 36 CFR § 219.17. Therefore, the revised plan is fully compliant with the NFMA.

National Environmental Policy Act

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requires public involvement and consideration of potential environmental and social effects of implementing federal actions. The environmental analysis and public involvement process outlined in the FEIS complies with the major elements of the requirements set forth by the Council on Environmental Quality for implementing NEPA (40 CFR §§ 1500-1508). These include: (1) considering a range of reasonable alternatives, (2)

disclosing cumulative effects, (3) using best scientific information, (4) consideration of long-term and short-term effects, and (5) disclosure of unavoidable adverse effects.

The Prescott NF considered a range of alternatives in the FEIS and has compiled a comprehensive record of the effects relevant to the alternatives (long-term, short-term, and cumulative), considering best scientific information. The revised plan adopts all practical means to avoid or minimize environmental harm. These means include provisions for providing the ecological conditions needed to support biological diversity and standards and guidelines to mitigate adverse environmental effects that may result from implementing various management practices. The revised plan includes monitoring requirements and an adaptive management approach to assure needed adjustments are made over time.

The revised plan does not represent an irreversible or irretrievable commitment of resources. The revised plan is a programmatic level planning effort and does not directly authorize any ground-disturbing activities or projects. Future ground-disturbing activities and projects will be consistent with this revised plan and subject to additional site specific public involvement, environmental analysis, and pre-decisional review processes. Therefore, the revised plan is fully compliant with NEPA and CEQ implementation regulations.

Endangered Species Act

The purpose of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) is to provide a means whereby the ecosystems upon which endangered and threatened species depend may be conserved and to provide for the conservation of such endangered and threatened species. Section 7(a)(1) of the Act requires federal agencies to carry out programs for the conservation of listed species. In addition, Section 7 requires federal agencies to ensure that any agency action does not jeopardize the continued existence of the species (ESA Section 7(a)(2)). ESA also requires the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) and Forest Service, respectively, to base the biological opinion and subsequent agency action on the use of best scientific and commercially available data [16 U.S.C. 1536(a)(2)].

In accordance with Section 7(c) of the Act, the FWS identified the listed and proposed threatened or endangered species that may be present on the forest. The Forest Service prepared a biological assessment for the revised plan. The FWS issued a biological opinion regarding effects of implementing the plan on the threatened, endangered, and candidate species present on or near the forest. The biological opinion sets terms and conditions to implement reasonable and prudent measures.

Multiple-Use Sustained-Yield Act

The Multiple-Use Sustained-Yield Act requires National Forest lands to be administered to provide for multiple uses such as recreation, range, timber, watersheds, wildlife, and fisheries. The revised plan establishes a strong multiple use framework by providing desired conditions, standards, guidelines, and objectives related to ecosystem structure, process, and function; wildlife and fisheries; recreation; traditional and cultural uses; livestock grazing; forestry and production of forest products; special uses; mining and minerals extraction; and energy transmission and development.

Clean Air Act

According to the Clean Air Act of 1990 and the Organic Administration Act of 1897, the Forest Service has the responsibility to protect the air, land, and water resources from the impacts of air pollutants produced within the Forest Service boundaries and to work with states to protect air resources from degradation associated with the impacts of air pollution emitted outside of Forest Service lands. The revised plan contains desired conditions and guidelines to protect air quality. Furthermore, analysis of the effects plan implementation on air quality in the FEIS indicates that all alternatives are expected to achieve the desired conditions for air quality but that alternative E offers the highest ratio of mechanical thinning to prescribed fire treatments to meet landscape restoration objectives, and therefore a lower susceptibility to uncharacteristic, high emission-producing fires, which have a high potential to negatively impact air quality, over time.

Clean Water Act

The revised plan contains direction to provide for the maintenance or improvement of water quality in the natural and constructed waters of the Forest. Furthermore, reducing the risk of uncharacteristic high-severity fire will facilitate protection of crucial water sources for municipal water supply for the communities in the Verde Valley, Crown King, and the city of Prescott. Overall, implementation of the revised plan is expected to contribute to protecting or restoring the physical, chemical, and biological integrity of waters of the forest in accordance with the Clean Water Act.

National Historic Preservation Act

The revised plan is a programmatic action and does not authorize any site specific projects. Projects undertaken in response to direction in the revised plan will fully comply with the laws and regulations that ensure protection of cultural resources. The revised plan contains direction for cultural resource management, including direction to integrate such management with other resource management activities. Since the revised plan does not authorize ground-disturbing activities, consultation with the Arizona State Historic Preservation Office under the National Historic Preservation Act is not required, per the 2003 programmatic agreement between the Forest Service's Southwestern Region and the State Historic Preservation Officers (SHPO) of Arizona, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas. It is my determination that the revised plan complies with the National Historic Preservation Act and other statutes that pertain to the protection of cultural resources.

Roadless Area Conservation Rule

Management activities in Inventoried Roadless Areas are conditional on the 2001 Roadless Area Conservation Rule (RACR) (36 CFR Part 294 (2001)). During the development of the issues and alternatives in this EIS, the 2001 RACR was subject to litigation. However, on March 1, 2012, the nationwide injunction on implementing the RACR was vacated and the RACR was placed back in effect. Consequently, the 2001 RACR's restrictions on timber harvesting and road building apply to all Inventoried Roadless Areas (IRAs). Management direction contained in each of the proposed alternatives (A, B, C, D and E) is consistent with the 2001 RACR.

Project Consistency

I am providing the following transition direction to ensure the orderly implementation of the revised plan that is made in this record of decision. The new direction will apply to all project

decisions made on or after the effective date of this decision. The new direction does not apply to any projects that have had decisions issued prior to the effective date of this decision. Projects currently under contract, permit, or other authorizing instrument are not affected by the decision; however, projects may be modified to adopt all or part of this direction where Forest Service managers deem appropriate. Reissuance of existing authorizations will be treated as new decisions, which must be consistent with the new direction described in the revised plan subject to valid existing rights.

As required by NFMA and the planning rule, subject to valid existing rights, all projects and activities authorized by the Forest Service after approval of this revised plan must be consistent with the applicable plan components (16 U.S.C. 1604(i)) as described at 36 CFR 219.15 of the 2012 planning rule. (Although the transition provisions at 36 CFR 219.17 of the 2012 planning rule allow revision of this plan under the 1982 regulations, subsequent projects or activities approved on units with plans revised under a prior planning rule must comply with the consistency requirement at 219.15 of the current rule.)

Consistency with the revised plan will be achieved by developing management activities that are designed specifically to achieve the desired conditions and objectives of the new plan and are guided by relevant standards and guidelines. To the extent practicable, documentation for such projects should identify the elements of the desired conditions, goals, or objectives to be achieved by the project. It should not be expected that all projects or activities would contribute to all desired conditions, goals, or objectives, but rather to a limited subset. It should also be recognized that some projects designed to contribute to some desired conditions, goals or objectives may have consequences considered adverse to the achievement of other desired conditions, goals, or objectives. In this situation, the responsible official for the project needs to identify and disclose these effects in the project documentation and make a decision that balances these considerations.

A project or activity approval document must describe how the project or activity is consistent with the plan by the criteria listed at 36 CFR 219.15(d) (2012 planning rule). Where a proposed project or activity would not be consistent with plan direction, the responsible official has the following options (36 CFR 219.15(c) 2012 Rule):

1. Modify the proposed project or activity to make it consistent with the applicable plan components;
2. Reject the proposal or terminate the project or activity;
3. Amend the plan so that the project or activity will be consistent with the plan as amended;
4. Amend the plan contemporaneously with the approval of the project or activity so that the project or activity will be consistent with the plan as amended. This amendment may be limited to apply only to the project or activity, and may be adopted at the same time as the approval of the project or activity (36 CFR 219.15(c)(4) 2012 Rule).

Any resource plans (e.g., travel management plans) developed by the Forest Service that apply to the resources or land areas within the planning area must be consistent with the plan components. Resource plans developed prior to plan decision must be evaluated for consistency with the plan and amended if necessary (36 CFR 219.15(e) 2012 Rule).

Authorizations for occupancy and use made before the final ROD may proceed unchanged until time of reauthorization. At time of reauthorization, all permits, contracts, and other authorizing

instruments must be made consistent with the revised plan, subject to existing valid rights, as provided at §219.15(d) (2012 Rule).

A forest plan is used as a direction source for future projects, plans, and assessments. It is not expected that this new direction be used to re-evaluate or change decisions that have been made under the 1987 plan. A smooth and gradual transition to the new plan is anticipated, rather than one that forces an immediate reexamination or modification of all contracts, projects, permits, and other activities that are already in progress. As new project decisions, contracts, permits, renewals, and other activities are considered, conformance to the revised plan direction is expected.

Implementation Schedules and Budgets

The revised plan will be implemented through a series of project-level decisions based on site-specific environmental analysis and public involvement. These analyses will be documented in the appropriate NEPA documents. The plan seeks to guide management activities and projects by establishing clear desired conditions for the Prescott NF rather than by establishing schedules for actions. This approach should leave more flexibility for managers to adapt program and project selection as changes take place in budgets, resource capabilities, and management priorities.

Outputs in the FEIS are projections of probable outcomes. They were used to approximate activities and practices, in order to estimate the likely environmental effects of following the direction provided by the revised plan.

Maintaining the Land Management Plan and Adapting to New Information

Adaptive Management

A land management plan is an integral part of an adaptive management cycle that guides future management decisions and actions. Adaptive management includes:

- Defining measurable management objectives;
- Monitoring management outcomes and changing circumstances; and
- Revising management strategies accordingly (with appropriate NEPA).

This adaptive management cycle enables the forest to identify and respond to changing conditions, changing public desires, and new information. The forest's monitoring program is an integral part of this adaptive management cycle, and consists of monitoring questions and metrics (see chapter 6 of the revised plan for additional information about the monitoring plan).

Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation are used to assess the degree to which on-the-ground management is maintaining or making progress toward the desired conditions and objectives in the plan. The monitoring program is described in chapter 6, "Monitoring and Evaluation," of the plan. This monitoring program was developed collaboratively and focuses on key plan components where management projects and activities are likely to cause a change over time.

Specific monitoring questions are identified and directly linked to plan desired conditions, objectives, standards, and specific regulatory requirements. Only selected goals, objectives, and

standards are monitored. Relevancy to issues, compliance with legal requirements and agency policy, scientific credibility, administrative feasibility, long- and short-term budget considerations, and impact on work force all influence monitoring priorities.

Monitoring information will be evaluated and used to update inventory data, improve current and future mitigation measures, and assess the need to change the strategies used in plan implementation. Evaluation of monitoring results is directly linked to the decisionmaker's ability to respond to changing conditions, emerging trends, public concerns, and new information and technology. No single monitoring item or parameter automatically triggers a change in plan direction. An interdisciplinary approach is used to evaluate information and decide what changes are needed.

Plan Amendments

A forest plan may be amended at any time based on a preliminary identification of the need to change the plan. The preliminary identification of the need to change the plan may be based on a new assessment, forest plan monitoring, or other documentation of new information and changed conditions or circumstances. The amendment and administrative change process is described at 36 CFR 219.13(b) & (c) of the 2012 planning rule.

The revised plan is a dynamic instrument that can be changed with appropriate public involvement and environmental analysis. Throughout the life of the plan, amendments may be needed to incorporate new information, new policy and direction, or changing values and resource conditions. Amendments will keep the plan current, relevant, and responsive to agency and public concerns. Amendments are needed whenever any of the plan decisions should be changed due to any of the above conditions. The plan also can be amended for specific projects if during project design it is determined that the best method of meeting goals and objectives conflicts with standards and guidelines in the plan. Deviation from a guideline must be specified in either the decision document or elsewhere in the project record with supporting rationale. When deviation from a guideline does not meet the original intent, a plan amendment is required. Any deviation from a standard requires a plan amendment.

A 3-year transition period for plan amendments begins on the effective date of the 2012 planning rule, on May 9, 2012. During the transition period, plan amendments may be initiated under the provisions of the 1982 planning rule, or may conform to the requirements of the 2012 planning rule. Plan amendments initiated after the transition period must conform to the requirements of the 2012 planning rule.

Under the 1982 planning provisions, amendments may be significant or non-significant. The Forest Supervisor may implement non-significant amendments to the revised plan after appropriate public involvement and environmental analysis. The Regional Forester approves significant amendments.

Effective Date

The revised "Prescott National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan" will become effective 30 days from the date that the Environmental Protection Agency's Notice of Availability of the FEIS appears in the Federal Register (per 36 CFR 219.17(a), 2012 Rule).

Appeal Information

This decision is subject to administrative review. According to 36 CFR 219.17(b)(3), if the responsible official chooses to complete an ongoing planning process under the provisions of the prior planning regulation, the responsible official can choose to allow for either an administrative appeal or can follow the objection process identified in 36 CFR 219 Subpart B. When the option is made to proceed under the 1982 regulations and to follow the administrative appeal process, the “Optional Appeal Procedures Available during the Planning Rule Transition Period” (the former 36 CFR Part 217 appeal procedures that were in effect prior to November 9, 2000) are to be used. For this decision, I have decided to use the “Optional Appeal Procedures”.

A written notice of appeal must be filed in duplicate and postmarked or received within 90 days after the date the legal notice of this decision is published in the newspapers of record for the Prescott National Forest (The *Daily Courier*). The appeal must clearly state that it is a Notice of Appeal being filed pursuant to the Optional Appeal Procedures. Appeals must meet the content requirements of Section 9 of the Optional Appeal Procedures, which are available for review at:

www.fs.fed.us/emc/applit/includes/PlanAppealProceduresDuringTransition.pdf

Appeals must be filed with the Chief of the Forest Service at:

Physical address (for UPS and FedEx deliveries):

USDA Forest Service
Attn: Appeal Reviewing Officer
210 14th Street, SW
EMC-LEAP, Mailstop 1104
Washington, DC 20250

(Note: If a phone number is needed for carrier delivery, use: 202-205-1449)

Regular mail:

USDA Forest Service
Attn: Appeal Reviewing Officer
1400 Independence Ave., SW
EMC-LEAP, Mailstop 1104
Washington, DC 20250

Appeals may also be faxed (Fax number is 202-649-1172) or appeals may be mailed electronically in a common digital format to:

appeals-chief@fs.fed.us

The notice of appeal must be fully consistent with the Optional Appeal Procedures and include at a minimum:

- A statement that the document is a Notice of Appeal filed pursuant to the Optional Appeal procedures;

- The name, address, and telephone number of the appellant;
- Identification of the decision to which the appeal is being made;
- Identification of the document in which the decision is contained, by title and subject, date of the decision, and name and title of the Deciding Officer;
- Identification of the specific portion of the decision to which the appeal is made;
- The reasons for appeal, including issues of fact, law, or regulation, or policy and, if applicable, specifically how the decision violates law, regulation, or policy;
- Identification of the specific change(s) in the decision that the appellant seeks.

Requests to stay the approval of this land and resource management plan shall not be granted (Optional Appeal Procedures, section 217.10 (b)).

Final decisions on proposed projects will be made on a site-specific basis using appropriate analysis and documentation in compliance with NEPA. Project decisions may be subject to the appropriate administrative review procedures, at the time the project decision is made.

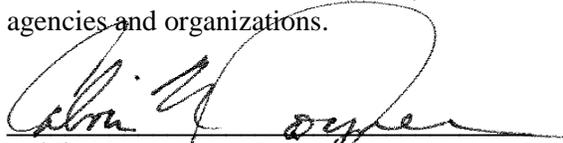
Recommendations for designations such as additions to the National Wilderness System are preliminary administrative recommendations that will receive further review and possible modification by the Chief of the Forest Service, the Secretary of Agriculture, and/or the President of the United States. The Congress has reserved the authority to make final decisions on wilderness on federal lands; therefore, wilderness recommendations in the revised plan are not appealable under the agency's administrative appeal procedures (Section 4 of the Optional Appeal Procedures).

I encourage anyone concerned about the revised Prescott National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan or Final Environmental Impact Statement, or who would like more information, to contact:

Teresa A. Chase
Forest Supervisor
Prescott Forest Supervisor's Office
2971 Willow Creek Rd, Bldg. 4
Prescott, AZ 86301
(928) 443-8000

Approval

I am pleased to announce my decision to select alternative E for the revised Land and Resource Management Plan for the Prescott National Forest. This new plan has been built on a strong foundation of citizen collaboration, the best available science, and engagement with other agencies and organizations.



Calvin N. Joyner
Regional Forester
Southwestern Region, USDA Forest Service

5/5/15
Date