



United States Department of Agriculture

# Record of Decision for the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests Land Management Plan

Apache, Coconino, Greenlee, and Navajo Counties, Arizona



Forest Service

Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests

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**Record of Decision  
for the  
Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests  
Land Management Plan  
Apache, Coconino, Greenlee, and Navajo Counties, Arizona**

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## Introduction

This public Record of Decision (ROD) documents my decision and rationale for approving the new Land Management Plan (Plan) for the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests (Apache-Sitgreaves NFs or Forests). This revised Plan provides specific guidance and information for project and activity decision making, and will guide all resource management activities on the Forests for the next 10 to 15 years. It replaces the previous Plan, which was approved in 1987 and has been amended 15 times.

## Forest Setting

The Apache-Sitgreaves NFs' 2.1 million acres are managed as a single administrative unit by the Forest Service, an agency of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The Forests are located in the White Mountains of east-central Arizona. The Gila National Forest administers the portion of the Apache National Forest located in New Mexico.

The Forests are divided into five contiguous ranger districts: Black Mesa, Lakeside, Springerville, Alpine, and Clifton. Ranger district offices are located in Overgaard, Pinetop-Lakeside, Springerville, Alpine, and Clifton. The Supervisor's Office is located in Springerville. The Forests share boundaries with the Gila, Coconino, and Tonto National Forests; Fort Apache and San Carlos Apache Indian Reservations; Bureau of Land Management; State land; several cities, towns, and communities; and private lands.

The Forests are located along and below the Mogollon Rim, an abrupt escarpment which is the southern boundary of the Colorado Plateau and which splits Arizona into low elevation deserts and high elevation mountains and plateaus. The Forests encompass mountains, hills, cinder cones, plains, plateaus, deep canyons, and escarpments. Elevations range from about 3,500 feet in the Clifton area to 11,400 feet on Mount Baldy near Springerville.

The diverse vegetation ranges from semi-desert grasslands to high elevation spruce-fir forests. The Apache-Sitgreaves NFs contain a portion of the largest ponderosa pine forest in the world and the most extensive montane and subalpine grasslands in Arizona. Many of the unique riparian vegetation types of Arizona are found within the Apache-Sitgreaves NFs.

The Apache-Sitgreaves NFs are a distinctive and important component of the arid Southwest, containing over 30 lakes and reservoirs and more than 1,000 miles of rivers and perennial streams, more than any other Arizona national forest. The Forests contain the headwaters of several major Arizona river systems, including the Little Colorado, Black, Blue, and San Francisco.

Diverse ecosystems provide habitat for a wide array of wildlife, fish, and plants; some of which can only be found in this area. Unique species include Apache trout, Springerville pocket mouse, White Mountains ground squirrel, Three Forks springsnail, and Mogollon paintbrush. The Apache-Sitgreaves NFs are one of two national forests in the Nation to provide a home for the recovery of the Mexican gray wolf.

The Apache-Sitgreaves NFs are an important part of the social and economic environment for the four counties on the Forest and in the surrounding area. Jobs and income are generated by wood products, livestock grazing, recreation, and the contribution of local government offices. The forests enhanced their economic contributions to the community through the White Mountain

Stewardship Project over the past decade, and will continue to build on that success with projects to be implemented under the Four Forest Restoration Initiative (4FRI).

Most visitors to the Apache-Sitgreaves NFs come from Arizona's metropolitan areas, seeking a respite from the desert heat or the noise and/or confinement of urban living. Many are drawn to the water-based activities; while others enjoy the diverse scenery of vast rolling grasslands, rugged desert terrain, and lush alpine forests.

Visitors enjoy the recreation opportunities of the Apache-Sitgreaves NFs, including three scenic byways and several popular developed recreation areas. The Forests also provide an abundance of dispersed recreation opportunities. Three wilderness areas and the Nation's last remaining primitive area provide opportunities for solitude and back-country experiences. Over a thousand miles of trails provide ample hiking, bicycling, horseback, and off-highway vehicle access to natural highlights of the Forests' landscape. Big game hunting and fishing in some of the best lakes and streams of the Southwest are popular activities. The Forests are also a destination for winter activities: snow play, snowmobiling, ice fishing, cross-country skiing, and sledding.

Many people, some of whom have long-time connections to the Forests, have an interest in and use the Apache-Sitgreaves NFs. American Indian tribes and many local residents have traditional ties, such as forest product collection, hunting, and large group gatherings. Loggers and ranchers continue to be an important part of the Forests' history, and their traditional uses remain an important part of the cultural landscape.

## **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 directs 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 decision making by outlining a broad, interdisciplinary program for achieving the desired goals, objectives, and future conditions of the Forests. 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, or 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 Apache-Sitgreaves NFs 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 NFMA (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 Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests Land 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 Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests 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 299, published at 36 CFR parts 200 to 299, revised as of July 1, 2010). For this revision of the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests Land Management Plan, I have elected to follow these provisions, referred to collectively in this document as the 1982 Planning Rule.

This decision applies only to National Forest System lands of the Apache-Sitgreaves NFs located in the aforementioned counties. It does not apply to any other Federal (including those Apache National Forest lands administered by the Gila National Forest), State, or private lands, although the effects of activities occurring on these lands and the effects of my decision on lands that surround the Apache-Sitgreaves NFs 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 Apache-Sitgreaves NFs hosted multiple public meetings in nearby communities and attended meetings with local, State, Federal, and tribal governments.

In addition to traditional public involvement activities, the Forests sponsored a collaborative workshop where counties and local governments provided feedback on the socio-economic assessment. Two citizen-led discussion groups formed to further explore and help in the development of livestock grazing and wildlife-related plan components and provide baseline information for the species viability analysis. Active participants in the revision process included

several conservation groups (The Wilderness Society, Sierra Club, WildEarth Guardians, Center for Biological Diversity, Defenders of Wildlife, etc.), utility companies, Arizona Game and Fish Department, Arizona Department of Environmental Quality, Arizona State Land Department, range permittees, a regional wood products association, state wildlife and caving groups, a mining company, local motorized and wilderness interest groups, and local county governments (Apache, Navajo, Gila, Graham, and Greenlee Counties in Arizona and Catron County, New Mexico).

Key partnerships with The Nature Conservancy, Center for Biological Diversity, White Mountain Conservation League, Natural Resources Working Group, the Ranching Heritage Alliance, and Arizona Game and Fish have provided valuable analysis and support throughout the plan revision process.

The notice of intent to revise the 1987 Plan and prepare an environmental impact statement was published in the Federal Register (74 FR 68776-68779) on December 12, 2009. In March and April 2010, four public meetings and an informal comment period were held to gather feedback on the initial set of draft alternatives. Comments received early in the public involvement process were used along with science-based evaluations (e.g., Analysis of the Management Situation) to draft the initial proposed Plan.

The notice of availability announcing the release of the proposed Plan and draft environmental impact statement (DEIS) was published in the Federal Register (78 FR 11171) on February 15, 2013. Following the publication of the notice of availability, the Forest Supervisor, local line officers, and planning team members hosted three public meetings in the communities of Show Low, Springerville, and Clifton, Arizona, to answer questions and solicit comments. In addition, the Forests published a newspaper insert announcing the release of the documents with a set of frequently asked questions and a link to a Reader's Guide containing tips for reviewing and commenting. The Forest Supervisor and planning team attended meetings with local town councils, the Ranching Heritage Alliance, Natural Resource Working Group, and the Arizona Game and Fish Department.

## **Tribal Consultation**

The Apache-Sitgreaves NFs have consulted with nine tribes and one chapter that use the Forests for traditional, cultural, or spiritual activities, including the White Mountain Apache Tribe, San Carlos Apache Tribe, Hopi Nation, Navajo Nation, Pueblo of Zuni, Yavapai-Apache Tribe, Tonto Apache Tribe, Fort McDowell Yavapai Nation, Yavapai-Prescott Indian Tribe, and the Ramah Chapter of the Navajo Nation. Concerns identified by the tribes include access to the Forests and protection of sacred sites and archaeological sites as traditional cultural properties, natural water sources, and plants (e.g., spruce pollen, aspen, yucca, piñon nuts, acorns, reeds) for subsistence, medicine, and religious purposes.

## **Needs for Change**

The 1987 Plan was approved over 25 years ago and no longer addresses changes that have occurred to economic, social, and ecological conditions; new policies and priorities; and new information based on monitoring and scientific research. Using extensive public and employee collaboration and the Analysis of the Management Situation<sup>1</sup> the Apache-Sitgreaves NFs

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<sup>1</sup> The Analysis of the Management Situation (AMS) incorporates the findings of several evaluations including the following: Comprehensive Evaluation Report (CER), Ecological Sustainability Report, Economic and Social Sustainability Assessment, Resource Evaluations, CER Supplement to Meet AMS Requirements, and the Wallow Fire Changed Condition Assessment.

identified several needs for change in the 1987 Plan. The needs for change are summarized into three revision topics, which became major themes of the plan revision process: (1) Maintenance and Improvement of Ecosystem Health, (2) Managed Recreation, and (3) Community-Forest Interaction. The needs for change include the following:

### **Revision Topic 1 - Maintenance and Improvement of Ecosystem Health**

- Better describe desired conditions for the composition, structure, and cover for the vegetative communities that will result in resilient, functioning ecosystems. The vegetative communities include ponderosa pine, wet mixed conifer, dry mixed conifer, spruce-fir, and aspen forests, piñon-juniper and Madrean pine-oak woodlands, Great Basin, semi-desert, and montane/subalpine grasslands, interior chaparral, mixed broadleaf deciduous, montane willow, and cottonwood-willow riparian forests, and wetland/cienega riparian areas.
- Identify the desired fire regime that will help to restore fire to a more natural role as one of the Forests' primary disturbance agents.
- Provide direction to guide future vegetation management activities, including burning and mechanical treatments, to move toward or maintain desired conditions.
- Incorporate management direction to guide future projects to provide habitat to maintain viable populations of existing native and desired non-native vertebrate species in the planning area.
- Include appropriate standards and guidelines to provide direction to maintain species diversity and viability across the planning area.
- Reevaluate and update the management indicator species (MIS) to allow evaluation of the differences between alternatives in the EIS. MIS are species whose population changes are believed to indicate the effects of management activities.
- Add plan components to provide future project direction to control, treat, and eradicate non-native plant and animal invasive species.
- Address the emerging issue of climate change by incorporating adaptive management strategies and describing ecological conditions that are resilient to change.

### **Revision Topic 2 - Managed Recreation**

- Update the spectrum of recreation opportunities to reflect current and projected recreation needs, natural resource impacts, and public input. This includes identification of areas that are developed for high use and areas that resemble more natural landscapes.
- Identify the suitability of areas for motorized vehicle use and other recreational activities.
- Incorporate direction for special areas that were not included in the 1987 Plan, including recommended research natural areas, the Heber Wild Horse Territory, scenic byways, and national recreation trails.
- Recommend additional special areas (i.e., research natural areas) where needed.
- Recognize the management requirements for rivers that are eligible for the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System.

- Evaluate lands for wilderness potential and, if determined to be appropriate by the responsible official, recommend designation by Congress and provide interim management guidance.

### **Revision Topic 3 - Community-Forest Interaction**

- Provide direction to address communities at risk from uncharacteristic wildfire. This includes describing the appropriate vegetation desired conditions and fire regime, and treatment of the wildland-urban interface.
- Provide guidelines and suitability determinations for addressing urban interface demands (access, trailheads, special use permits).
- Update guidelines regarding land ownership adjustments that better reflect community expansion needs and preservation of open space.
- Continue to provide a sustainable supply of forest and rangeland resources, the use of which promotes the achievement of desired conditions while supporting local communities. Determine the suitability of lands for timber production and the allowable sale quantity of timber.
- Identify major existing energy (utility) corridors and provide management direction for these areas. Update the criteria for establishing new energy corridors.

In addition to these needs for change, there is a need to update the monitoring plan in chapter 5 of the 1987 Plan because it focuses on outputs rather than progress toward attainment of desired conditions.

## **Alternatives**

This section describes the alternatives considered in this ROD to provide important context for the decision being made. The Apache-Sitgreaves NFs analyzed four alternatives in detail: no action, the proposed action, and two alternatives developed in response to issues raised by the public.

### **Alternative A (1987 Plan)**

Alternative A (No Action) represents the 1987 forest plan, as amended, and continues current management direction. Alternative A emphasizes timber management as a primary tool for providing forest products for local and regional industrial and individual needs while meeting wildlife habitat needs.

- Uses both mechanical and wildland fire restoration treatments, with the primary focus in the ponderosa pine potential natural vegetation type (PNVT) and around communities to reduce threats from wildfire and supply forest products through vegetation treatments.
- Manages at least 20 percent of each forested and woodland PNVT for, or toward, old growth.
- There are eight areas (totaling 45,506 acres) implemented under special closure orders that are managed as wildlife habitat or quiet areas. While not a 1987 Plan management area, these areas implement plan direction to benefit wildlife habitat, soil, vegetation, water resources, and recreation (improved hunting opportunities).
- Provides a variety of recreation opportunities, including motorized, nonmotorized, developed, and dispersed. Construction of new recreation facilities to meet growing demand is an emphasis.

- Provides direction for three designated wildernesses, Mount Baldy, Escudilla, and Bear Wallow. Additionally, The Blue Range Primitive Area and Additions Management Area is managed to protect wilderness values. In 1971, the Forest Service submitted a recommendation to the President of the United States for the Blue Range Wilderness in New Mexico and Arizona. Congress has not acted on the Arizona portion of this recommendation. Until Congress acts, the 1971 recommendation remains in place.
- Does not recommend any additional lands for wilderness.
- Manages 764,872 acres of land for timber production on a regulated basis with planned, scheduled entries. It is estimated that an average of 205,000 CCF (hundred cubic feet) of wood products, including sawlogs, biomass, and firewood, would be available annually for local and regional industry and individual use.
- Provides direction for one designated research natural area, Phelps Cabin Research Natural Area. Continues to recommend four research natural areas totaling 2,569 acres that were proposed by the original 1987 Plan, but were never acted upon.

### **Alternative B – Proposed Action**

Alternative B (Proposed Action) was designed to address the needs for change by addressing the demands for wildlife habitat, community protection, commodity outputs, and recreation opportunities with an emphasis on ecological restoration. The Proposed Action:

- Provides a framework for ecosystem restoration based on decades of ecological research (synthesized in GTR-310, Reynolds et al. 2013) which will move frequent-fire adapted systems toward increased resiliency by restoring spatial arrangement, structure, and species composition of vegetation. Treatments are focused in those PNVTs that are most divergent from desired conditions and priority watersheds and locations identified in community wildfire protection plans, including the Community-Forest Intermix Management Area.
- Provides overarching guidance for restoration projects such as 4FRI through a broad restoration framework.
- Restores woody canopy cover in forested PNVTs to historic levels, resulting in increased water supply in the Little Colorado, Salt, and Upper Gila River Basins for the greater Phoenix metropolitan area and for agricultural and industrial users.
- Restores and promotes ecosystem health, which increases resiliency in the face of climate change. Management actions which reduce the threat of uncharacteristic wildfire, promote habitat quality, increase or maintain species and structural diversity, increase water yield, and reduce fragmentation all contribute to the forests' ability to change and adapt to new climatic conditions.
- Promotes recovery of listed species, and where appropriate, provides for management actions to protect or enhance habitat of listed species.
- Retains old growth characteristics where they exist and encourages development of old growth conditions where current forests are lacking proportional representation of late seral stands and species composition on a landscape scale.
- Adds two new wildlife quiet areas to the eight existing areas for a total of 50,173 acres. Unlike alternative A, all wildlife quiet areas in this alternative are assigned to the Wildlife Quiet Area Management Area.

- Provides a variety of recreation opportunities, including motorized, nonmotorized, developed, and dispersed. New recreation developments are limited; the emphasis is on maintaining existing developments.
- Provides direction for the three designated wildernesses and primitive area similar to alternative A.
- Recommends an additional 7,074 acres for wilderness. This includes additions to both Escudilla (6,813 acres) and Bear Wallow (261 acres) Wilderness Areas.
- Provides for ecosystem restoration on 596,744 acres of suitable timberlands which, through management on a regulated basis with planned, scheduled entries, will yield an annual average of 263,000 CCF of wood products, benefiting local and regional industry and individual users.
- Carries forward the designated research natural area, Phelps Cabin Research Natural Area (approximately 290 acres) and recommends adding the Phelps Cabin Botanical Area (approximately 100 acres) to it as a recommended research natural area. In addition, it recommends designating five new research natural areas totaling 7,814 acres.

### **Alternative C**

Alternative C responds to public comments that forest management should provide increased benefits to local communities through management emphasis on commodity outputs and motorized and developed recreation. There is an emphasis on contributing to local and regional economic sustainability through ecological restoration.

- Emphasizes primarily mechanical treatments, with limited use of fire, to move toward more resilient, healthy ecosystems. Treatments are focused in the Community-Forest Intermix Management Area, forests suitable for timber production, woodlands, and those grasslands encroached by woody species.
- Does not emphasize the retention or encouragement of old growth characteristics to allow additional opportunities to meet forest products desired conditions.
- Carries forward all eight existing wildlife quiet areas for a total of 44,373 acres (two areas would be slightly smaller due to the configuration of other management areas). Unlike alternative A, all wildlife quiet areas in this alternative are assigned to the Wildlife Quiet Area Management Area.
- Provides a variety of recreation opportunities with an emphasis on motorized and developed opportunities. New recreation facilities would be considered where there is a need to meet increasing demand.
- Provides direction for the three designated wildernesses and primitive area similar to alternative A.
- Recommends an additional 6,982 acres for wilderness (additions to Escudilla Wilderness totaling 6,982 acres).
- Provides for ecosystem restoration on 604,746 acres of suitable timberlands which, through management on a regulated basis with planned, scheduled entries, will yield an annual average of 416,000 CCF of wood products, benefiting local and regional industry and individual users.

- Carries forward the designated research natural area, Phelps Cabin Research Natural Area (approximately 290 acres), and recommends adding the Phelps Cabin Botanical Area (approximately 100 acres) to it as a recommended research natural area. In addition, recommends designating five new research natural areas totaling 7,814 acres.

## Alternative D

Alternative D responds to public comments that forest management should emphasize more natural processes and nonmotorized and dispersed recreation opportunities. There is an emphasis on ecological restoration across all vegetation types.

- Emphasizes natural processes, primarily fire, with some mechanical treatments to move toward more resilient, healthy ecosystems. Treatments are focused in priority watersheds and are distributed among all PNVTs in riparian areas, forests, grasslands, and woodlands. Mechanical treatments would be used around communities in the Community-Forest Intermix Management Area and, in some cases, as pretreatment for prescribed fire.
- Emphasizes retention of old growth and large trees with a standard to “retain all large and old trees regardless of size or condition.”
- Includes seven of the eight existing wildlife quiet areas (minus Hulsey Bench) plus five more, for a total of 58,379 acres. Unlike alternative A, all wildlife quiet areas in this alternative are assigned to the Wildlife Quiet Area Management Area.
- Provides a variety of recreation opportunities with an emphasis on dispersed and nonmotorized opportunities. There is no emphasis on building new highly developed recreation facilities; however, recreation development that provides for dispersed recreation (e.g., trailheads, wildlife viewing areas, trails) may occur.
- Provides direction for the three designated wildernesses and primitive area similar to alternative A.
- Recommends a total of 688,170 acres for wilderness on the Apache-Sitgreaves NFs, including 23 new stand-alone areas; 10 additions to Escudilla, Bear Wallow, and Mount Baldy Wilderness Areas; and 2 additions to the Blue Range Primitive Area. It also recommends almost all of the Blue Range Primitive Area and presidential additions (196,868 acres) for wilderness.
- Manages no land for timber production on a regulated basis. However, it is estimated that an average of 118,000 CCF of wood products including sawlogs, biomass, and firewood would be available annually for local and regional industrial and individual needs as a byproduct of restoration treatments.
- Carries forward the designated research natural area, Phelps Cabin Research Natural Area (approximately 290 acres), and recommends adding the Phelps Cabin Botanical Area (approximately 100 acres) to it as a recommended research natural area. In addition, recommends designating two new research natural areas totaling 5,957 acres.

## 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 the FEIS address these broad strategic objectives.

### **Alternatives Considered but Eliminated From Detailed Study**

In addition to the four 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.

#### **June 2009 Working Draft Land Management Plan**

The Forests released a working draft land management plan for review and comment in June 2009. This alternative, based on public and agency input, evolved into what is now the proposed plan.

#### **Initial Draft Alternatives**

In March 2010, the Forests released a set of three draft alternatives for public review and comment. These alternatives, based on public and agency input, evolved into the three action alternatives analyzed in the FEIS.

#### **Alternatives with No Timber Harvest or Large Increase in Timber Harvest**

These alternatives were considered to address public comments regarding whether timber harvesting should be allowed on the Apache-Sitgreaves NFs, and if so, at what level. It was determined that an alternative to eliminate timber harvesting is inconsistent with the mission of the Forest Service. Timber harvesting is a necessary management tool to maintain and restore vegetation communities to desired conditions, produce commercial wood products, create and maintain varied wildlife habitat conditions, and treat areas identified in community wildfire protection plans. An alternative that called for large increases in timber harvest was also considered but not analyzed in detail, because maximizing timber production would not meet the desired condition to manage and protect other resources.

The Plan provides for timber harvests on 596,744 acres of suitable timberland to restore vegetation communities to desired conditions. These harvests will be planned and regulated to provide a steady supply of forest products which will support forest products industries and local communities while protecting other uses and resources.

#### **Alternatives with No Livestock Grazing**

This alternative was considered in response to public comments preferring no grazing on the Apache-Sitgreaves NFs. A no grazing alternative would not meet the intent of the policies and goals of the National Forest Management Act or Multiple Use–Sustained Yield Act which direct forests to be managed using multiple use, sustained yield principles. Also, it would not allow the attainment of the desired condition for livestock grazing to contribute to the social, economic, and cultural diversity and stability of rural communities. Therefore, a no-grazing alternative is

inconsistent with the mission of the Forest Service and the land management plan's desired conditions, and is outside the scope of this decision.

The Plan provides management direction to guide project-level stocking decisions and ensure that land within active grazing allotments moves toward desired conditions for all resources.

### Minimum Management Alternative

This alternative was considered in response to public comments that there should be no or minimal human intervention in the management of the Apache-Sitgreaves NFs. This alternative would not meet the intent of the policies and goals of the National Forest Management Act or Multiple Use–Sustained Yield Act which direct forests to be managed using multiple use, sustained yield principles. Active management is also needed to maintain or move toward desired conditions, (e.g., restore forest ecosystems, maintain recreation opportunities, reduce the threat of uncharacteristic wildfires to communities, maintain the availability of forest products).

The Plan recommends, in addition to the 222,738 acres of existing primitive area and wilderness, an additional 7,074 acres of wilderness. In addition, the Plan provides for 322,000 acres of Inventoried Roadless Areas, which are managed to preserve their roadless character, and 8,075 acres of designated and recommended Research Natural Areas, which are managed to maintain natural conditions. Additional areas are managed as Natural Landscapes, in which management is directed toward maintaining natural appearance and restoring ecosystems, and Wildlife Quiet Areas, where management emphasizes wildlife habitat and motorized access is prohibited.

### Wilderness Alternatives

Requests for new wilderness areas were submitted by several groups. These areas were considered in light of the evaluation of potential wilderness that was completed by the Apache-Sitgreaves NFs for the plan revision process. Portions of these external proposals are further considered in alternatives B, C, and D. Other portions were dismissed from detailed consideration because they did not meet the criteria for potential wilderness.

The Plan recommends an additional 7,074 acres of wilderness, and provides for the maintenance of the majority of potential wilderness on the forests in a natural or roadless condition.

### Wildlife Conservation Area Alternative

Based on input from several groups, an alternative was considered to manage portions of the Black Mesa and Lakeside Ranger Districts as wildlife conservation areas. The wildlife conservation area proposal included various components such as existing and new wildlife habitat areas, wildlife corridors, core black bear and mountain lion habitat, Mexican spotted owl (MSO) protected activity centers, northern goshawk post-fledging family areas, and rivers eligible for designation under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. Although this alternative was considered, it was not further analyzed because many of its components are included in the three action alternatives.

The Plan provides for 50,173 acres of Wildlife Quiet Areas, managed under closure orders to maintain high-quality wildlife habitat. These areas are focused on enhancing core habitat for wide-ranging predators such as black bear and mountain lion and big game animals like elk, deer, and pronghorn, threatened and endangered species including MSO, and sensitive species including northern goshawk. Additional provisions of the Plan restrict timber management in MSO protected activity centers and northern goshawk post-fledging family areas, while

permitting management actions, including tree cutting and prescribed fire, that promote desired conditions and reduce the risk of uncharacteristic wildfire.

### Alternatives to Designate or Remove Wild and Scenic Rivers

These alternatives were considered in response to public comments that specific river segments should be designated or removed from the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System. Designation or removal of a wild and scenic river is a congressional action. The Apache-Sitgreaves NFs do not have any rivers designated in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System; therefore, there are no rivers that can be removed.

Before a river can be recommended to Congress for designation into the system, a suitability study must be conducted. A suitability study for any additional river segments is beyond the scope of this plan revision process.

There are 25 rivers eligible or suitable for designation that must be managed to maintain or enhance their outstandingly remarkable values. The Plan provides for the protection of the status of eligible and suitable wild and scenic rivers by restricting management activities within a one-half mile wide corridor along the river. Eligible and suitable wild and scenic rivers are considered special areas by the Forest Service.

### Changes to the Road and Motorized Trail System and Elimination of OHV Use

These alternatives were considered in response to public comments to change the road and motorized trail system and to eliminate the use of off-highway vehicles (OHVs). The land management plan provides a framework to guide future changes to the transportation system, including use. Potential changes to the Forests' transportation system would be evaluated in separate project-level analyses including the implementation of the Travel Management Rule (TMR) (36 CFR § 212). As a result, these alternatives were dropped from detailed consideration.

### Expanding Existing Energy Corridors

Arizona Public Service (APS), an Arizona electric utility company, recommended that the Forest Service establish designated corridors for all existing transmission facilities and expansion of high voltage transmission corridors. The action alternatives establish an Energy Corridor Management Area that provides guidance for existing facilities. The management area boundary follows the existing rights-of-way. In order to increase the width of the corridor, further analysis and a project-level decision would be needed. Although it was determined that this is beyond the scope of this revision process and would not be considered in further detail in this analysis, the issue can be revisited in future analyses. A future multimodal energy corridor was designated in 2009 under the Energy Policy Act of 2005. This corridor is 27.8 miles long and 3,500 feet wide and crosses the Sitgreaves NF, paralleling an existing APS utility corridor. The existence of this corridor does not authorize any projects, nor does it mandate that future rights-of-way locate in the corridor, or preclude the Forest Service from denying a project or requiring design revisions. However, under the Energy Policy Act, applications for construction of energy-related infrastructure within this corridor would be expedited.

### Alternatives with No Road or Motorized Trail Construction and Road Density Requirements

Comments received on the proposed plan and DEIS recommend an alternative with no road or motorized trail construction, and other comments requested the Forest Service set limits for road density. An alternative to forbid new road or motorized trail construction was considered not to be

feasible (e.g., new road construction may be required when access to a particular resource or private inholding is needed). The action alternatives address the impacts of roads and motorized trails on forest resources. Any new road or motorized trail construction would only be authorized following project-level NEPA analysis and would be accomplished using best management practices to minimize resource impacts while providing for forest access needs.

An alternative to include a road density standard was considered; the standard would limit the road system to a minimum number of miles of road per square mile of land. This alternative was considered but not analyzed in detail because future project-level planning efforts, including the implementation of the TMR, would determine the designated road system. The Plan provides for new road construction only in cases when access is needed to a resource or to a private inholding.

### Alternatives with No Mining and Drilling

Comments received on the proposed plan and DEIS supported recommending an alternative that would prohibit mining and drilling. This was considered; however, Congress declared in the Mining and Minerals Policy Act of 1970 that it is the continuing policy of the Federal Government, in the national interest, to foster and encourage the development of domestic mineral resources. In addition, the Forest Service does not have the discretionary authority to prevent mining of locatable minerals on public domain lands as prescribed by the 1872 Mining Law (as amended).

The plan contains desired conditions, guidelines, and suitability determinations for minerals and geology-related projects and activities, including surface occupancy stipulations. Any specific mining or drilling proposals will be evaluated to ensure consistency with plan decisions. Specific projects could be modified to include additional site-specific mitigation measures to protect forest resources.

### Alternative with Maximum Treatments (Mechanical and Wildland Fire)

Comments received on the proposed plan and DEIS suggested an alternative that would maximize mechanical treatments (timber sales) and acres treated with wildland fire (planned and unplanned ignitions) with over 100,000 acres burned on an annual basis. Alternative C represents the maximum mechanical treatments, while alternative D represents the maximum wildland fire treatments the Forests anticipate being able to accomplish within the planning period. An alternative that would maximize both treatment types was not considered to be feasible based on anticipated future budgets.

The Plan presents a balanced approach to restoring ecosystems through mechanical treatments and wildland fire treatments. Allocation of treatments is based on management area suitability for the treatment, compatibility of the treatment with other land uses, and realistic expectations of future budgetary resources. Areas are prioritized for restoration based on watershed condition and risk of uncharacteristic wildfire to adjacent communities.

### Alternative with Different Livestock Grazing Management

Comments received on the proposed plan and DEIS recommended an alternative that provides a different strategy for managing livestock grazing than that analyzed in the DEIS. It would provide management direction that would maximize long-term vegetative health through a conservative strategy toward grazing including restrictive standards to reduce unsatisfactory lands and improve forage and grassland habitat.

A change in the management of livestock grazing was not identified as need for change from the 1987 Plan (see the “Purpose and Need for Change” section in chapter 1) and therefore, the topic of livestock grazing management did not drive alternative development. Nevertheless, guidelines, standards, desired conditions, and objectives for livestock grazing, riparian habitats, aquatic habitats, and PNVTs which support grazing in the new Plan provide much greater specificity and direction for promoting progress towards desired conditions and preventing resource damage.

All alternatives contain a primary desired condition for livestock grazing to “balance livestock grazing with available forage” on suitable grazing lands. Stocking decisions (amount of livestock grazing authorized) are authorized through term grazing permits (a long-term authorization subject to forestwide standards and guidelines), allotment management plans, and annual operating instructions. Changes to these authorizations would be made through project-level analyses.

The Plan provides direction for healthy and resilient vegetation, riparian areas, and water resources conditions in the short and long term. Two riparian PNVTs were selected as ecological indicators to provide a way to measure the effects of forest management, including grazing, on fragile ecosystems. Therefore, the Plan provides the framework for livestock stocking decisions that would provide for the health of vegetation and retention of water and forage for wildlife, because those decisions must be consistent with applicable plan direction.

### Alternative Based on the Old Growth Protection and Large Tree Retention Strategy

Comments received on the proposed plan and DEIS recommended an alternative based on the Old Growth Protection and Large Tree Retention Strategy (OGPLTRS) developed by stakeholders for implementation in 4FRI.

The action alternatives provide guidance to retain appropriate amounts of large and old trees and/or old growth. In addition, alternative D analyzes a strategy similar to OGPLTRS because it contains a standard to retain all old and large trees.

Although OGPLTRS does not dictate a universal upper cutting size limit (diameter cap); it does universally dictate keeping all pre-European-settlement (old) trees in all cases. The OGPLTRS proposes very specific tree retention requirements that are not appropriate for a programmatic land management plan. It reduces the flexibility that project-level decision makers may need to design treatments that promote site-specific desired conditions. Concepts from the OGPLTRS, including those which are more restrictive than those in the Plan, could be analyzed and incorporated at the project level, if applicable.

The Plan and FEIS were developed on nearly the same timeline as the Four-Forests Restoration Initiative (4FRI) and related Objection Resolution process. The Plan and FEIS closely evaluated the discussions of the 4FRI effort, and the Plan components will provide essentially the same direction. Specifically:

- The Plan is fully consistent with the MSO Recovery Plan, providing for protection and active management of MSO PACs and restoration of habitat, as well as monitoring of MSO, northern goshawk, and pronghorn antelope and their habitats.
- The Objection Resolution (and final decision) for the 4FRI on the issues of grazing are addressed in the Plan and FEIS. The FEIS specifically acknowledges the connection

between grazing and alteration of fire regimes and vegetation cover through removal of fine fuels.

- Objectives, standards and guidelines are in place to promote progress toward desired conditions for riparian areas, aquatic habitats, aspen, and other PNVTs which support livestock grazing.
- The Plan also integrates landscape-scale diversity, retention of old growth, and restoration of historic ranges of ecosystem structure, function, and processes, including the historic ranges of canopy cover.

### Alternative to Manage Forests as a Refuge for Fish and Wildlife

Comments received on the proposed plan and DEIS recommended an alternative that emphasizes biodiversity and errs on the side of ecological caution (a “no regrets strategy”) by managing the national forests as a safe harbor and refuge for fish and wildlife, even at the expense of competing multiple use activities, such as livestock grazing, timber production, and motorized recreation. The alternative would increase protection of forest resources, including species viability, in response to climate change.

The alternative was not considered in detail because, by focusing solely on fish and wildlife habitat over other uses, it would not meet the intent of the policies and goals of the National Forest Management Act or Multiple Use-Sustained Yield Act which direct forests to be managed using multiple use, sustained yield principles. Also, in light of changes predicted by current climate models (e.g., increased wildfires, greater vulnerability to invasive species, changes in timing of precipitation), there is a need to reduce vulnerability by maintaining and restoring resilient native ecosystems which would be an outcome in alternatives B, D, C, and A (in order from greatest resilience to least). Management practices that sustain healthy plant and animal communities (e.g., thinning for age class diversity and structure, reclaiming and restoring native grasslands) promote resilience and reduce opportunities for disturbance and damage.

The primary focus area, or revision topic, for the action alternatives is “Maintenance and Improvement of Ecosystem Health.” The alternatives provide specific direction to provide for biodiversity and protect endangered species, other animals, and habitat. They provide for the viability of all terrestrial and aquatic species. The Plan further provides specific direction for management to ensure the viability of listed species, species of concern, wide-ranging predators, big game species, sensitive species, and others. Management indicator species and ecological indicators are designated so that the effects of management actions on species viability can be assessed.

### Alternative to Compare Viability for the Mexican Spotted Owl

Comments received on the proposed plan and DEIS recommended an alternative that would include the following: (1) implement standards and guidelines from the 1987 Plan; (2) forbid new road construction in Mexican spotted owl protected activity centers (PACs); (3) incorporate fuel treatment concepts to minimize risk of stand-replacing fire in PACs, including large tree retention, management of surface fuels and sub-canopy forest structure, and spatial orientation of treatments; and (4) apply fuel treatment modeling in Mexican spotted owl habitat conducted by Northern Arizona University Forest Ecosystem Restoration Analysis. The intent of the alternative is to help the decision maker and the public compare impacts to Mexican spotted owl and its critical habitat.

This alternative was eliminated from detailed study because the implementation of 1987 Plan standards and guidelines is considered in the alternative A analysis in the EIS. The Plan provides direction that projects and activities would be managed consistent with the Mexican spotted owl recovery plan, including constraints on road construction and fuel treatments. Methodologies for fuel treatment modeling would be determined by the responsible official on a site-specific basis. The Northern Arizona University Forest Ecosystem Restoration Analysis may be used if determined applicable. Mexican spotted owl is identified as a management indicator species in the Plan, ensuring that it will be the focus of continued monitoring and that its viability will be considered in project-level planning. The Plan provides guidance that new roads and trails should avoid MSO PACs. MSO PACs are not suitable for timber production, but are suitable for tree cutting for habitat improvement, fuel management, restoration, or other purposes.

### Alternative Proposed by Counties

Several Arizona counties (Gila, Graham, Greenlee, and Navajo) and the Eastern Arizona Counties Organization recommended a new alternative during the comment period for the proposed plan and DEIS. That alternative would have included provisions from existing alternatives to treat grasslands, increase logging, prioritize mechanical thinning over prescribed fire, consider more new motorized areas and trails in the future, prevent catastrophic wildfire, restore watersheds, and alter the designation of management areas. The alternative would also have proposed changes to rangeland management; support for local wood-based industries; guidance for TMR; guidelines to integrate the OGPLTRS; a comparison of the 10 priority watersheds; more clearly differentiating between degrading factors and their effects and between natural processes and management effects; providing more information on the proposed natural landscape areas; a rationale for proposed elimination of IRAs; more specific information on and plans for monitoring; and guidelines to integrate social and economic sustainability, science, and considerations into decision making.

This alternative was not considered for detailed study because several components were analyzed in alternatives in the EIS, addressed in plan direction, or beyond the scope of the plan and plan revision process. The suggested provisions from existing alternatives were analyzed as alternatives B and C in chapters 2 and 3 of the EIS. The Plan provides a monitoring strategy in chapter 5. The Plan's interdisciplinary team considered the OGPLTRS in its entirety, but recommended that it not be analyzed in detail. The plan provides guidance to retain appropriate amounts of large and old trees and/or old growth to move ecosystems toward desired conditions. The "Watershed" section in chapter 3 of the EIS was updated based on the recommendation to clarify degrading factors.

The Plan contains guidance for treating grasslands to control invading woody vegetation, provides a balanced approach to treating forested PNVTs with mechanical treatments and fire, emphasizes the restoration and maintenance of watersheds, and gives a framework for implementation of the TMR. TMR will address the travel issues of motorized big game retrieval, dispersed camping, and firewood collection and harvesting. Through restoration of forested PNVTs, the Plan provides direction for producing a steady, sustainable flow of forest products which will support local economies.

## My Decision

I select alternative B for the new Land Management Plan for the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests. The new Plan will:

- Maintain or improve the structure, composition, and processes of the Forests' fire-adapted vegetation types toward desired conditions. This will result in conditions that are more resilient to disturbances, including uncharacteristic fire, human activities, and climate variability. Management actions which reduce the threat of uncharacteristic wildfire, promote habitat quality, species diversity and structural heterogeneity, increase water yield, and reduce fragmentation all contribute to the forests' ability to change and adapt to new climatic conditions.
- Use a mix of both mechanical and wildland fire treatments to restore fire-adapted ecosystems with a focus on treating priority watersheds, areas identified in community wildfire protection plans, and lands in the Community-Forest Intermix Management Area. This will result in improved watershed conditions and reduced threats to communities from uncharacteristic wildfire. Wood products, forage, and clean water would be byproducts from the implementation of the Plan's restoration activities.
- Protect and improve soil and water resources that support terrestrial and aquatic habitat, including fens, bogs, and springs, and contribute to high levels of biodiversity consisting of more than 2,500 plant and animal species.
- Provide for the viability of all species, including the 109 wildlife and fish species identified as having viability concerns, through habitat desired conditions needed by those species and standards, guidelines, and objectives that address species-specific needs.
- Guide managers to control, treat, and eradicate non-native plant and animal invasive species. This will result in lowering risks to native species, ecosystem function, and the production of goods and services.
- Provide a balanced spectrum of recreation opportunities that visitors seek while managing to protect the Forests' other resources. New recreation development will be considered on a limited basis; the emphasis is to maintain existing recreation developments.
- Move vegetation toward desired conditions and reduce the risk of uncharacteristic wildfires and the threat to surrounding communities. The Community-Forest Intermix Management Area includes lands one-half mile around high-risk communities where fuels treatments would be the management emphasis.
- Address urban-interface demands (e.g., access to the Forests, utility corridors, roads, special use permits) and emphasize the need to understand adjacent community expansion needs.
- Restore forests, woodlands, and grasslands that will result in an abundant source of wood that can contribute to local and regional wood-processing and biomass industries and provide fuelwood for local families and trees to tribes for traditional and cultural purposes. This restoration would build on the trend initiated during the White Mountain Stewardship Project and continued by the 4FRI project. The Plan also provides for continued livestock grazing that will contribute to the cultural diversity and stability of local communities.
- Establish a monitoring strategy that enables and promotes adaptive management by focusing on outcomes.
- Provide guidance for 12 management areas on the Forests. Five management areas are similar to management areas in the 1987 Plan (Wilderness, Primitive Area, Research Natural Area, Recommended Research Natural Area, and High Use Developed Recreation Area). Three management areas provide direction for existing areas that lacked guidance in the 1987 Plan (Energy Corridor, Wild Horse Territory, and Wildlife Quiet Area). Four management areas are

newly established (General Forest, Community-Forest Intermix, Natural Landscape, and Recommended Wilderness).

- Provide guidance for managing other special areas including scenic byways, eligible and suitable wild and scenic rivers, and national recreation trails.
- Recommend approximately 7,100 acres for wilderness designation. These areas are adjacent to existing wilderness and will be managed to retain their wilderness characteristics until a congressional decision on wilderness designation is made.
- Recommend five research natural areas (7,500 acres). These areas contribute to the ecological diversity of the regional network of research natural areas and are managed to provide for research, observation, and study.

## **Components of the Decision**

Components of plan decisions are outlined in the National Forest Management Act (1976), and Forest Service implementing regulations at 36 CFR Part 29. 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 Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests Land Management Plan are:

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

Forestwide goals, termed in this Plan as desired conditions, are found in chapter 2 of the revised Plan. Desired conditions set forth the desired social, economic, and ecological attributes of the Apache-Sitgreaves NFs. They paint a picture of what we (the public and Forest Service) desire the forests look like or the goods and services we desire them to provide. While the Plan addresses multiple uses and values of the Forests, the desired conditions emphasize (1) restoring the Forests' fire-adapted vegetation types to reduce the risk of uncharacteristic fire and improve ecological resilience in the face of climate change with an emphasis on treating priority watersheds and areas identified in community wildfire protection plans, (2) managing for a balance of recreation opportunities the public desires in a sustainable manner, and (3) contributing to the social and economic sustainability of communities while maintaining the ecological sustainability of the Forests. Desired conditions are also established in the Plan's chapter 3 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 2 for a full array of resources, uses, goods and services. Objectives are concise, time-specific statements of measurable planned results that make progress toward or maintain desired conditions.

### **Establishment of forestwide management requirements (standards and guidelines) (1982 Planning 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. A project or activity must be consistent with all standards applicable to the type of project or activity and its location in the

plan area. Guidelines are requirements that must be followed unless a different management action demonstrably achieves the same intent as the guideline, with such deviations being documented within the project record. 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 revised 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 Planning 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 in chapter 3 of the plan and are mapped in appendix F. The plan provides desired conditions, standards, and guidelines for 12 specific areas on the Forests. Two types of areas are identified: designated areas and management areas.

Designated areas (also known as special areas) are lands given special designation through statute or a preexisting administrative process due to their unique or special characteristics. Designated areas in the revised Plan include Heber Wild Horse Territory (Wild Horse Territory Management Area), Phelps Cabin Research Natural Area (Research Natural Area Management Area), Blue Range Primitive Area (Primitive Area Management Area), Mount Baldy Wilderness, Bear Wallow Wilderness, and Escudilla Wilderness (Wilderness Management Area). There are other designated areas that are not mapped as management areas; these include national recreation trails (Blue Ridge, General George Crook, Eagle, and Escudilla) and scenic byways (Coronado Trail Scenic Byway, From the Desert to Tall Pines Scenic Road, and White Mountain Scenic Road). Direction for these areas is found in forestwide direction in chapter 2 of the Plan.

Management areas are delineated to aid in management and provide plan direction for specific sites. Management areas established in the revised Plan are General Forest, Community-Forest Intermix, High Use Developed Recreation Area, Energy Corridor, Wildlife Quiet Area, Natural Landscape, Recommended Research Natural Area, and Recommended Wilderness.

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

The identification and description of lands suitable for timber production is found in chapter 4 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 Apache-Sitgreaves NFs totals 596,700 acres. The amount of wood that is estimated to be available for sale 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 122,000 CCF (hundred cubic feet) per year. This is an increase from 73,000 CCF under the previous plan, which is due to the revised plan placing more emphasis on restoration treatments. More information on timber suitability and ASQ is available in the FEIS appendix B.

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

During the analysis process leading to this decision, a total of about 714,938 acres in 38 areas were found to have wilderness potential. I recommend the 7,074 acres identified in the Recommended Wilderness Management Area for Congressional designation as Wilderness. The areas recommended are adjacent to existing wilderness and would provide for better manageability of the existing wilderness because wilderness boundaries would be more identifiable by the public and Forest Service employees. Until Congress considers this recommendation, the Plan has management direction for these areas to improve and/or maintain wilderness character. The 199,000-acre Blue Range Primitive Area was recommended as wilderness in 1971, and will continue to be managed as primitive, maintaining its wilderness character, until such time as Congress acts upon the recommendation.

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.

Most of the areas identified as potential wilderness, but not recommended for wilderness, would be managed under Natural Landscape Management Area direction, which would help maintain wilderness characteristics. All inventoried roadless areas would be managed consistent with the 2001 Roadless Area Conservation Rule, which would help maintain roadless characteristics.

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

The eligibility review process for wild and scenic rivers is described in the Eligible and Suitable Wild and Scenic Rivers section of the FEIS. Approximately 339 miles of 23 rivers were determined eligible to be included in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System. There are 172 miles classified as wild, 66 miles as scenic, and 101 miles classified as recreational. Suitable rivers include portions of the Blue River and KP Creek; these rivers were found to be suitable for inclusion in the national system through a separate environmental analysis. The revised Plan provides guidance to protect the river characteristics and outstandingly remarkable values through application of interim management guidelines for river segments that are eligible (Forest Service Handbook 1909.12, Chapter 82.5).

As previously described, the revised Plan provides management direction in chapters 2 and 3 for designated areas that have been established through statute or a preexisting administrative process because of their unique or special characteristics. These include the wild horse territory, research natural area, primitive area, three wildernesses, four national recreation trails, and three scenic byways.

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

Approximately 94 percent of the Apache-Sitgreaves NFs is suitable for livestock grazing. The areas designated unsuitable for grazing include research natural areas, recommended research natural areas, and those lands not in a grazing allotment. The Plan sets the framework for site-specific determinations relating to allotment management, such as the grazing systems (e.g., season of use, permitted livestock numbers, forage use levels) to meet desired conditions and the range developments needed to implement those systems. Chapter 4 of the revised Plan and the

Livestock Grazing section and appendix B of the FEIS contain more information about the grazing suitability and capability determinations on the Forests.

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

Monitoring and evaluation requirements are found in chapter 5 of the revised Plan. Specific monitoring questions are identified regarding achievement of desired conditions and objectives or meeting regulatory requirements. The monitoring strategy strives to be realistic in terms of budget and capacity and will facilitate adapting management in response to results and new information. Application of this monitoring strategy will inform achievement of the desired conditions and objectives, and serve as the basis for adjusting the land management plan.

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

This determination is not a part of the revised Plan.

## **Rationale for Decision**

My decision to select alternative B as the new Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests Land 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 B 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 Forests' resources toward desired conditions while including measures to protect sensitive ecological and cultural elements of the Forests; (3) are responsive to the diverse needs, issues, concerns, and opportunities expressed by the public and other agencies; (4) establish ambitious but achievable objectives for maintenance and improvement of ecosystem health, managed recreation, and community-forest interaction; and (5) manage land uses in ways that are ecologically, socially, and economically sustainable.

Alternative B will effectively maintain or move vegetation toward desired conditions. Alternative B provides direction to restore forests, woodlands, grasslands, riparian areas, and chaparral; maintain or establish well-distributed occurrences of old growth; reestablish native species understory; and regenerate aspen. Analysis shows the ecological composition, structure, and processes of the Forests' vegetation types would be closer to reference conditions, allowing the reestablishment of natural patterns and processes within vegetation communities that allow for natural resiliency. Resiliency is especially important when faced with uncharacteristic wildfire, presence of invasive species, human activities, and climate change.

Alternative B uses a mix of both mechanical and wildland fire treatments to maintain or move vegetation toward desired conditions. Mechanical treatments will result in a sustainable flow of wood products to local and regional industry. The use of wildland fire treatments would assist in restoring fire to a more natural role and provide an economical alternative to mechanized thinning.

Alternative B consistently addresses the same issues as the Four Forest Restoration Initiative (U.S. Forest Service, 2015a), which provides for mechanical and prescribed fire treatments to restore frequent-fire ecosystems at landscape scale, reduces the incidence of uncharacteristic wildfires, and produces economic benefits for communities. Desired conditions, objectives,

standards, and guidelines for forested PNVTs in the plan provide for treatments to reduce tree density, restore natural fire regimes, promote high quality habitat and healthy ecosystems, reduce fire hazard, provide forest products, and promote resiliency to climate change.

Alternative B promotes healthy watersheds through desired conditions, standards, and guidelines that protect and improve soil, water resources, riparian, and upland vegetation conditions. Alternative B prioritizes treatments in priority watersheds and contains an objective to improve the condition class on at least 10 priority watersheds by removing or mitigating degrading factors. Analysis shows that soil conditions under alternative B would remain static or improve over the planning period and alternative B would provide the best opportunity for restoring or maintaining watersheds across the Forests. Analysis shows that under alternative B, water quality will trend toward desired conditions and water yield may increase because of implementation of ecological restoration treatments that result in more open forests, woodland, and grassland conditions. Restoration to, and maintenance of, desired conditions in forested vegetation types will result in increased water yields for important watersheds which supply agricultural and urban areas of Arizona and recharge groundwater. Major watersheds on the Apache-Sitgreaves NFs include the Salt River, which provides the greater Phoenix Metropolitan Area with water and hydropower through the Salt River Project, the upper Gila River basin, which provides water for agriculture and mining interests, and the Little Colorado River, which also provides irrigation water in its upper watershed. Alternative B is expected to result in a positive trend for riparian areas, based on the overall focus on ecosystem restoration and resiliency, in addition to specific objectives to treat riparian areas and remove motorized routes that impact riparian condition.

The plan components within Alternative B provide for improvement of vegetation cover and the health of riparian areas, increasing resiliency to climate change and extreme weather events. The plan provides for reduction of uncharacteristic wildfires, increased water yield, and increased economic benefits by restoring healthy structure in frequent-fire systems. Provisions in the plan to improve ecosystem health and reduce the risk of uncharacteristic wildfire will in turn result in fewer opportunities for epidemic-level outbreaks of insects and diseases and invasion of exotic species, as well as specific direction to control and eradicate exotic invasive species.

Alternative B provides a mix of recreation opportunities with a balanced approach in providing developed, dispersed, motorized, and nonmotorized recreation opportunities. Alternative B emphasizes maintenance of existing recreation developments with limited new development. Analysis shows that the Forests' deferred maintenance backlog will be reduced during the planning period. Alternative B provides the framework to guide future changes to the transportation system. Specifically, the plan identifies existing Forest Service roads and motorized trails, as well as designated motorized areas, as being suitable for motorized travel, while identifying the rest of the Forest as being unsuitable for motorized travel unless specific exemptions apply. Restrictions on motorized travel in areas deemed to be unsuitable cannot be enforced until the implementation of the Travel Management Rule (36 CFR § 212) and its associated NEPA environmental effects analysis, as required by Executive Order 11644. The result of TMR analysis will be a Motor Vehicle Use Map (MVUM) displaying where motorized travel is allowed. Any proposed future site-specific changes to the Forest's transportation system will be evaluated in annual NEPA-based adjustments to the MVUM, accomplished under the framework of the Plan's suitability and other plan guidance.

Analysis shows that alternative B would provide the greatest benefit of reducing the risk of uncharacteristic wildfire and the resulting threat to communities and ecosystems and potential losses from fire. Treatments within the wildland-urban interface (including the Community-Forest

Intermix Management Area) would help protect communities and protect the Forests from fire that starts on private lands. These treatments would also benefit firefighter and public safety.

Analysis in the FEIS shows that Alternative B will contribute to social and economic sustainability. It is expected to produce approximately 3,800 jobs and \$118 million in labor income for the local economy, a 1 percent increase over the 1987 Plan, mostly generated through the recreation, livestock grazing, minerals, and wood products programs. Wood products, made available to local markets from suitable timberlands and through tree cutting for purposes such as safety, firewood, and biomass on non-suitable lands, are anticipated to total between 124,000 and 400,000 CCF per year. This steady and sustainable flow of wood will provide incentives for the forest products industry to invest in local wood utilization infrastructure, building on the success of past efforts, particularly the White Mountain Stewardship Project.

The White Mountain Stewardship Project was a 10-year stewardship project which provided for mechanical restoration treatments on up to 15,000 acres per year. Key lessons from the project include the importance of an existing, viable wood products market to implement restoration treatments at a meaningful scale. It also became apparent that one forest cannot support a viable industry large enough to absorb expected supplies from future restoration actions, including those anticipated under the Four-Forest Restoration Initiative (U.S. Forest Service 2015b). Alternative B provides the vision for partnership between forests, tribes, and industry to build a critical mass of capacity, labor, and supply to support an effort like 4FRI.

Alternative B includes recommended wilderness adjacent to Escudilla Wilderness and Bear Wallow Wilderness totaling about 7,100 acres that meet the wilderness inventory criteria to improve the manageability of existing wilderness areas. I believe these areas will make excellent additions to the wilderness system.

The 199,000-acre Blue Range Primitive Area was recommended as wilderness in 1971. Alternative B provides direction to continue managing the Blue Range Primitive Area as primitive, maintaining its wilderness character, until such time as Congress acts upon the recommendation.

Alternative B recommends five research natural areas totaling approximately 7,500 acres. These areas provide representation in four ecological types (riparian forest, ponderosa pine forest, semi-desert grassland, and wetland/cienega riparian area) that will broaden ecological diversity of the regional network of research natural areas. These additions will provide additional opportunities for research, observation, and study.

I selected alternative B rather than alternative A because alternative A does not address the needs for change identified in the Analysis of the Management Situation. The current plan has no articulated desired conditions for the Apache-Sitgreaves NFs' 14 PNVTs. There are very few desired conditions for other resources. After reviewing the FEIS and summary in table 3 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 B rather than alternative C for several reasons. Although alternative C, because of its increased amount of mechanical treatments, would restore ponderosa pine forests the best, it would result in a trend away from desired conditions for riparian areas and would restore the least amount of grasslands. Alternative C does not emphasize the retention or encouragement of old growth characteristics as much as alternative B. In addition, alternative C emphasizes motorized and developed recreation and will result in decreases in nonmotorized and

dispersed recreation opportunities. Finally, alternative C considered forest management without inventoried roadless areas and so is inconsistent with the 2001 Roadless Area Conservation Rule.

I selected alternative B rather than alternative D for several reasons. Alternative D would not restore the ponderosa pine and dry mixed conifer forests toward desired conditions as well as alternative B. Alternative D would provide the least wood volume for meeting social and economic desired conditions for local and regional markets and related jobs. This is because of its emphasis on wildland fire as a primary treatment tool, as well as the standard to retain all large and old trees. This may result in an overabundance of large trees, conversion of stands to even-aged condition, and a movement away from desired conditions. Uniform stands of large trees lack the canopy gaps which allow them to regenerate to desirable species and have a higher risk of stand-replacing wildfire. Alternative D emphasizes nonmotorized and dispersed recreation and will result in decreases in motorized and developed recreation opportunities.

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 full 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 or if wood processing infrastructure is not available within a feasible distance.

In summary, I believe alternative B 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 Apache-Sitgreaves NFs.

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 Apache-Sitgreaves NFs' plan revision. I have made my decision to select alternative B with due consideration of the input from those diverse stakeholders. I will now share my views regarding the key concerns expressed for the plan and how my decision responds to those concerns.

Some stakeholders expressed support for more recommended wilderness, while other stakeholders expressed a preference for less wilderness. Related to this, some stakeholders disagreed with the wilderness evaluation process. The Apache-Sitgreaves NFs wilderness evaluation process is consistent with the 1982 planning rule, directives, and regional guidance. The EIS studied alternatives that included a wide range of recommended wilderness (0 to 485,000 acres). My decision considered the needs for active management to decrease the risk of uncharacteristic wildfire. My decision recommends areas that are adjacent to existing wilderness areas to improve manageability of the Escudilla and Bear Wallow Wildernesses. The 199,000-acre Blue Range Primitive Area was recommended as wilderness in 1971, and will continue to be managed as primitive, maintaining its wilderness character, until such time as Congress acts upon the recommendation.

Stakeholders requested that mechanized use (e.g., bicycles) be prohibited in recommended wilderness. In response to this request, the recreation suitability for recommended wilderness was changed by removing the allowance for mechanized use to provide consistent direction with adjacent wilderness.

Some stakeholders opposed consideration of alternative C in which inventoried roadless areas (IRAs) would be managed with no direction to retain their undeveloped character. Council on Environmental Quality regulations allow an alternative outside the legal jurisdiction of the agency to be analyzed if it is reasonable and responsive to public concerns. This alternative was developed in response to scoping comments but was not selected. My decision contains desired conditions to maintain the overall roadless character of all IRAs consistent with the 2001 Roadless Area Conservation Rule.

Stakeholders expressed a preference for more emphasis on managing for biological diversity and at-risk species especially to address scientific uncertainty and controversy regarding climate change impacts. In light of changes predicted by current climate models (e.g., increased wildfires, greater vulnerability to invasive species), there is a need to reduce vulnerability by restoring and maintaining resilient native ecosystems which would be an outcome of my decision. Management practices that sustain healthy plant and animal communities (e.g., thinning for age class diversity and structure, reclaiming and restoring native grasslands) promote resilience and reduce opportunities for disturbance and damage. My decision contains specific direction to provide for biodiversity and protect endangered species, other animals, and habitat.

Concerns were raised by stakeholders about the species viability process. The viability analysis is documented in the EIS. Wildlife species viability was conducted in accordance with the 1982 Planning Rule to assure the plan (and plan decisions) maintain viable populations of wildlife relative to well-distributed habitat, species occupancy, and maintenance or restoration of habitat. My decision contains protections for the viability of all species through desired conditions, objectives, standards, and guidelines, including a guideline to follow species recovery plans.

Some stakeholders questioned the number of management indicator species (MIS) and the basic concept of MIS. The Apache-Sitgreaves NFs followed the 1982 Planning Rule requirements for selecting and analyzing effects of MIS; this is also documented in the EIS. The role of MIS and the basis for their selection is to estimate the effects of each alternative on wildlife species. These species are also monitored throughout the life of the plan to assess the effects of management on their populations and the populations of other species with similar habitat needs. My decision identifies three MIS that represent vegetation types where extensive restoration objectives are planned.

Many stakeholders and partners voiced concerns about OHV use and motorized cross-country travel. Some requested that roads and trails be evaluated for addition or removal during the plan revision process. Others requested that the plan provide guidance for upcoming travel management planning (TMR) for dispersed camping, big game retrieval, firewood collection, and dispersed shooting. My decision provides the framework through desired conditions and standards for the TMR analysis process that will resume in 2015 on the Apache-Sitgreaves NFs.

Some stakeholders commented that they wanted the Apache-Sitgreaves NFs to eliminate or reduce livestock grazing, while others commented that livestock grazing should be increased. Alternatives to eliminate, reduce, or increase livestock grazing were considered in the EIS but eliminated from detailed study. Elimination of grazing is not consistent with the multiple-use mission of the Forest Service, and stocking decisions are made at the project level using a site-

specific analysis. Livestock grazing contributes to the social, economic, and cultural diversity and stability of rural communities. The grazing program on the Apache-Sitgreaves NFs has multiple mechanisms to evaluate, review, and adapt management as needed to effectively protect resources and respond to changing conditions. My decision contains desired conditions and guidelines to balance livestock grazing with available forage. My decision would also improve ecological conditions on uplands, increasing available forage for grazing animals. This would provide an opportunity to reduce grazing pressure on riparian areas, providing for T&E species such as the New Mexico meadow jumping mouse as described in the Biological Assessment and Biological Opinion.

Some stakeholders questioned the range capability and suitability determinations and the clarity and feasibility of achieving vegetation desired conditions, standards, and guidelines. Based on the concerns, desired conditions, standards, and guidelines were modified to clarify the intent and update grass height desired conditions.

Stakeholders expressed concerns about the establishment, implementation, and management of forage reserves. Alternatives B, C, and D of the DEIS analyzed the effect of forage reserves, while alternative A considered no forage reserves. Due to concerns regarding maintenance of rangeland improvements, associated economics, and impacts to wildlife, forage reserves were removed from the FEIS. My decision would not preclude the future establishment of forage reserves if needed.

Some stakeholders expressed a preference for emphasizing old growth and forbidding the harvest of old-growth trees. Some suggested that the plan include the 4FRI stakeholders' "Old Growth Protection and Large Tree Retention Strategy" (OGPLTRS). The EIS evaluated an alternative with direction to retain all large and old trees. My decision contains desired conditions and guidelines to sufficiently retain and encourage old growth. The OGPLTRS proposed very specific tree retention requirements that are not appropriate for a programmatic land management plan. It reduces the flexibility that project-level decision makers may need to design treatments that promote site-specific desired conditions. Concepts from the OGPLTRS could be incorporated at the project level where applicable.

Some stakeholders and partners requested more direction for fire and fuels management (e.g., fire suppression priorities). In response to these concerns, a "Wildland Fire Management" section was added to the plan. My decision contains desired conditions and guidelines that better describe the Apache-Sitgreaves NFs' fire and fuels management intent.

Some stakeholders requested more protections for water, riparian, and aquatic ecosystems using key watersheds, riparian reserves, and additional standards and guidelines. Some landowners were concerned that their water rights would be affected. My decision contains desired conditions, standards, and guidelines to protect water resources and riparian and aquatic habitat. My decision also contains a guideline to establish streamside management zones to maintain water quality and temperatures. Existing water rights will not be affected by this decision.

I appreciate all the stakeholders' constructive contributions to the development of the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests Land Management Plan. That input has resulted in an improved Plan that will serve the Forests, 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 B is the environmentally preferred alternative, but only slightly more than alternative D. All alternatives facilitate restoration of the structure, composition, and processes of ecosystems and protect and restore rare and unique resources that support important habitats. All alternatives ensure the protection of soil and watershed function; provide for threatened, endangered, sensitive, rare, and narrow endemic species; protect historic and cultural resources; and mitigate the effects of climate change. Overall, alternatives B and D would provide for the greatest movement toward resilient ecosystems; therefore, forest resources and fish and wildlife species would be most resilient to changes in climate.

All alternatives set the ponderosa pine and frequent fire mixed conifer vegetation types on a trajectory toward achievement of desired conditions, thereby reducing the risk of landscape-scale high-severity wildfire. Alternatives A and C focus treatments around communities, while alternatives B and D emphasize treatments in priority watersheds and around communities. Alternatives A and C also focus treatments in forests and woodlands with very little treatment planned for grasslands. Alternatives B and D balance restoration objectives across forests, woodlands, and grasslands. Over time, alternative B would move the Forests’ vegetation types closer to reference conditions and more quickly than alternative D. This would more effectively and more quickly reduce the risk of high-severity wildfire and improve conditions in priority watersheds and grasslands.

## 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 Planning 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. Alternative B would contribute over 3,594 jobs and over \$111,809,000 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 4 percent discount rate. The expected PNV for alternative B is approximately equivalent to the other alternatives except alternative C. Alternative C would have increased program revenues because of the greater amount of mechanical treatments. Not included in the economic impact and financial efficiency analysis are the substantial benefits associated with improvements in ecosystem function and integrity, resource protection, and aesthetic and cultural benefits.

Overall, alternative C was shown to be the most economically efficient alternative and provide the largest contribution in jobs and labor income. However, I have determined alternative B to be the combined most environmentally (see section above) 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 Forests.

## Science Consistency

The revised Plan contains a strong framework for adapting management of Apache-Sitgreaves NFs' 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, development of the plan, and preparation of the EIS. Extensive site-specific peer-reviewed literature was available and used in developing many plan components for many resource areas, particularly restoring ponderosa pine ecosystems. In addition to published scientific literature and reports, the Apache-Sitgreaves NFs solicited input from subject matter experts, and used state-of-the-art ecological modeling, including the Forest Vegetation Simulator (FVS) and the Vegetation Dynamics Development Tool (VDDT).

The revised Plan provides a framework for frequent-fire ecosystem restoration (ponderosa pine and dry mixed conifer) based on decades of ecological research. Its emphasis on restoring spatial arrangement, structure, and species composition of vegetation is consistent with the best available scientific information synthesized in GTR-310 by Reynolds et al. (2013).

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 Forests, 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 Apache-Sitgreaves NFs engaged in a number of discussions with these entities throughout 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 affiliated tribes ensured the Plan components reflect tribal concerns and needs with respect to the Forests. Appendix C of the FEIS documents the review of other Federal, State, and local governments and tribal planning efforts and their potential impact on the Apache-Sitgreaves NFs and vice-versa. Appendix F of the FEIS details the collaboration and coordination with other public agencies and tribes the Apache-Sitgreaves NFs engaged in throughout the plan revision process.

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## 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.

There are high concentrations of American Indian and Hispanic/Latino residents within the area addressed by the Plan. In addition, all of the counties within the planning area have higher percentages of persons living in poverty than the national average (13.8 percent) with Apache County having the highest poverty rate (34.4 percent). The FEIS analyzed the potential impacts to these groups and identified no environmental justice consequences. Since all alternatives, including the Plan, would continue to support similar levels of employment and income, they would not exacerbate the poverty rate or disproportionately worsen the economic well-being of low-income individuals. None of the alternatives were expected to disproportionately adversely impact racial and or ethnic minority individuals.

Because of the high proportion of minority populations and high poverty rates, decision makers on the Forests will pay careful attention to the potential health and environmental impacts of management actions upon these groups. Overall, the themes that form the foundation of the revised Plan (i.e., maintenance and improvement of ecosystem health, managed recreation, and community-forest interaction), make the Apache-Sitgreaves NFs 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 U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

The Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests prepared a Biological Assessment (BA) in accordance with the Endangered Species Act (ESA) to evaluate the potential effects of the revised Plan on federally listed or proposed species, and designated or proposed critical habitat. The BA analyzed the potential effects of plan implementation on the following 18 species (table 1).

**Table 1. Federally listed, proposed, and candidate species; and designated or proposed critical habitats analyzed in the biological assessment**

Species	ESA Listing Status	ESA Determination of Effects
<b>Mammals</b>		
New Mexico meadow jumping mouse <i>Zapus hudsonius luteus</i>	Species: Endangered Critical Habitat: Proposed	Species: May affect, likely to adversely affect Critical Habitat: Not likely to adversely modify <sup>1</sup>
Mexican gray wolf <i>Canis lupus baileyi</i>	Species: Non-essential, experimental Critical Habitat: None	Species: Not likely to jeopardize Critical Habitat: n/a
Lesser long-nosed bat <i>Leptonycteris curasoae yerbabuena</i>	Species: Endangered Critical Habitat: None	Species: No effect Critical Habitat: n/a
<b>Birds</b>		
Mexican spotted owl <i>Strix occidentalis lucida</i>	Species: Threatened Critical Habitat: Designated	Species: May affect, likely to adversely affect Critical Habitat: May affect, likely to adversely affect
Southwestern willow flycatcher <i>Empidonax traillii extimus</i>	Species: Endangered Critical Habitat: Designated	Species: May affect, likely to adversely affect Critical Habitat: May affect, likely to adversely affect
Western yellow-billed cuckoo <i>Coccyzus americanus occidentalis</i>	Species: Threatened Critical Habitat: Proposed	Species: May affect, likely to adversely affect Critical Habitat: Not likely to adversely modify <sup>1</sup>
<b>Amphibians/Reptiles</b>		
Chiricahua leopard frog <i>Lithobates chiricahuensis</i>	Species: Threatened Critical Habitat: Designated	Species: May affect, likely to adversely affect Critical Habitat: May affect, likely to adversely affect
Narrow-headed gartersnake <i>Thamnophis rufipunctatus</i>	Species: Threatened Critical Habitat: Proposed	Species: May affect, likely to adversely affect Critical Habitat: Not likely to adversely modify <sup>1</sup>
Northern Mexican gartersnake <i>Thamnophis eques megalops</i>	Species: Threatened Critical Habitat: Proposed	Species: May affect, likely to adversely affect Critical Habitat: Not likely to adversely modify <sup>1</sup>
<b>Invertebrates</b>		
Three Forks springsnail <i>Pyrgulopsis trivialis</i>	Species: Endangered Critical Habitat: Designated	Species: May affect, likely to adversely affect Critical Habitat: May affect, likely to adversely affect
<b>Fish</b>		
Apache trout <i>Oncorhynchus apache</i>	Species: Threatened Critical Habitat: None	May affect, likely to adversely affect Critical Habitat: n/a
Gila chub <i>Gila intermedia</i>	Species: Endangered Critical Habitat: Designated	Species: May affect, likely to adversely affect Critical Habitat: May affect, likely to adversely affect
Gila trout <i>Oncorhynchus gilae</i>	Species: Threatened Critical Habitat: None	Species: May affect, likely to adversely affect Critical Habitat: n/a

Species	ESA Listing Status	ESA Determination of Effects
Little Colorado spinedace <i>Lepidomeda vittata</i>	Species: Threatened  Critical Habitat: Designated	Species: May affect, likely to adversely affect  Critical Habitat: May affect, likely to adversely affect
Loach minnow <i>Tiaroga cobitis</i>	Species: Endangered  Critical Habitat: Designated	Species: May affect, likely to adversely affect  Critical Habitat: May affect, likely to adversely affect
Razorback sucker <i>Xyrauchen texanus</i>	Species: Endangered  Critical Habitat: Designated	Species: No effect  Critical Habitat: No effect
Roundtail chub <i>Gila robusta</i>	Species: Candidate  Critical Habitat: None	Species: Not likely to jeopardize <sup>2</sup>  Critical Habitat: n/a <sup>3</sup>
Spikedace <i>Meda fulgida</i>	Species: Endangered  Critical Habitat: Designated	Species: May affect, likely to adversely affect  Critical Habitat: May affect, likely to adversely affect

<sup>1</sup> if designated

<sup>2</sup> Consultation may be initiated if the roundtail chub were to be listed.

<sup>3</sup> Consultation may be initiated if critical habitat for the roundtail chub were to be proposed and designated.

On May 13, 2015, the Fish and Wildlife Service provided a Biological and Conference Opinion based on the information provided in the Biological Assessment and concluded that “implementation of the ASNFs’ LMP will not jeopardize the continued existence” of any of the species covered by the consultation, nor would it “destroy or adversely modify their designated critical habitats.” The Fish and Wildlife Service anticipated that incidental take could occur as a result of implementing the revised Plan, and identified Reasonable and Prudent Measures and Terms and Conditions to minimize the effects of take of Mexican spotted owl, narrow-headed gartersnake, Chiricahua leopard frog, Three Forks springsnail, Apache trout, Gila chub, Little Colorado spinedace, and loach minnow. Under section 7 of the Endangered Species Act, the Forest Service must comply with the Terms and Conditions of the incidental take statements, which implement the Reasonable and Prudent Measures. The final Biological Opinion can be found in the planning record.

## Findings Related to Other Laws and Authorities

I have considered the statutes governing management of the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests, 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 land management 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, National Historic Preservation Act, and the Roadless Area Conservation Rule.

### National Forest Management Act

The National Forest Management Act (NFMA) directs 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 directs 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 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 299, published at 36 CFR parts 200 to 299, revised as of July 1, 2010). For this revision of the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests Land Management Plan, I have elected to follow these provisions, referred to collectively in this document as the 1982 Planning Rule. References in this ROD to sections of 1982 Planning Rule version of 36 CFR 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) considering long-term and short-term effects, and (5) disclosing unavoidable adverse effects.

The Apache-Sitgreaves NFs 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 ir retrievable 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 Council on Environmental Quality 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 ESA requires Federal agencies to carry out programs for the conservation of listed species. In addition, the ESA 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 (USFWS) 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 ESA, USFWS identified the listed and proposed threatened or endangered species that may be present on the Forests. As described above, a biological assessment was prepared for the revised Plan and Biological and Conference Opinion rendered by USFWS regarding effects of implementing the plan on the threatened, endangered, and candidate species present on or near the Forests. The Biological and Conference Opinion concluded that none of the species would be jeopardized by implementation of the LMP.

### **Multiple-Use Sustained-Yield Act**

The Multiple-Use Sustained-Yield Act directs 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, objectives, standards, and guidelines related to ecosystem structure, process, and function; wildlife and fisheries; recreation; cultural resources; livestock grazing; 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 of plan implementation on air quality in the FEIS indicates that all alternatives are expected to achieve the desired conditions for air quality. However, over the next 15 years, alternatives D and B would have the greatest movement to overall vegetative desired conditions resulting in a reduction of uncharacteristic high emission-producing fires, which could negatively impact air quality.

### **Clean Water Act**

The revised Plan contains desired conditions, standards, and guidelines to provide for the maintenance or improvement of water quality in the streams and waterbodies of the Apache-Sitgreaves NFs. Overall, implementation of the revised Plan is expected to contribute to protecting or restoring the physical, chemical, and biological integrity of water resources of the Forests 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. Consultation with the Arizona State Historic Preservation Office under the National Historic Preservation Act is required and was completed, per the 2003 programmatic agreement between the Forest Service's Southwestern Region and the State Historic Preservation Officers 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 (IRAs) are conditional on the 2001 Roadless Area Conservation Rule (RACR). 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 IRAs. While the management direction that was developed in alternative C would allow timber harvest and road construction in some IRAs, the 2001 RACR would not allow such activities to be implemented. However, the management direction in the other alternatives, including the selected alternative (B), is consistent with the 2001 RACR.

## Project Consistency

I am providing the following transition direction to ensure the orderly implementation of the revised Land Management 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 made 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. Re-issuance 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 directed 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 land management 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 Apache-Sitgreaves NFs 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 Forests to identify and respond to changing conditions, changing public desires, and new information. The Forests' monitoring strategy is an integral part of this adaptive management cycle, and consists of monitoring questions and metrics (see chapter 5 of the revised Plan for additional information about the monitoring strategy).

## **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 strategy is described in chapter 5, "Monitoring Strategy," of the Plan. This monitoring strategy 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 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 decision maker'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.

In accordance with the monitoring requirements of the 2012 Planning Rule, the monitoring components of this Plan will be transitioned to those 2012 Rule monitoring requirements by May 9, 2016. This monitoring transition will start soon after the revised plan goes into effect.

## **Plan Amendments**

A land management 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, plan monitoring, or other documentation of new information and changed conditions or circumstances. The amendment and administrative change process is described at 36 CFR 219.17(b)(2) 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 began on the effective date of the 2012 Planning Rule, May 9, 2012. Since that 3-year transition period has expired, all future plan amendments must conform to the requirements of the 2012 Planning Rule.

## Effective Date

The revised Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests Land 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 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 newspaper of record for the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests (*The White Mountain Independent*). 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:

<http://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](mailto: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 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 Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests Land Management Plan or Final Environmental Impact Statement, or who would like more information, to contact:

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## Literature Cited

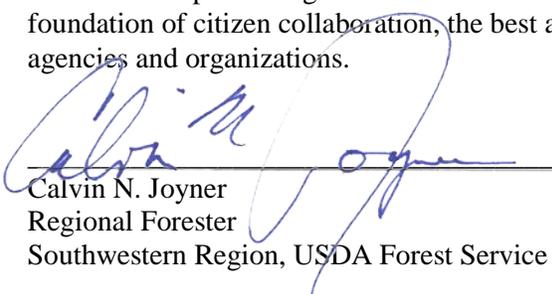
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## Approval

I am pleased to announce my decision to select alternative B for the revised Land Management Plan for the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests. This new Plan has been built on a strong foundation of citizen collaboration, the best available science, and engagement with other agencies and organizations.



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

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7/30/15  
Date