



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

Gila National Forest
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Internet: www.fs.fed.us/r3/gila/

File Code: 1920-2-1

Date: September 14, 2004

Dear Friend of the Gila National Forest:

The Gila National Forest proposes to amend the Forest Plan standards and guidelines for riparian inventory and management. In 2001, Forest Guardians sued the United States Forest Service (USFS) for failure to comply with riparian standards and guidelines, specifically for failing to inventory and failure to improve riparian conditions as scheduled in the Forest Plan. The court ruled in favor of the USFS and the Forest Guardians appealed the case. A settlement agreement was reached to resolve this litigation. The settlement agreement between the Forest and Forest Guardians (10th Circuit Court of Appeal, December 5, 2003) provides for the Gila National Forest to amend the Gila National Forest Plan. This settlement agreement did not specify how the Gila National Forest would amend the Forest Plan. The proposed amendment updates the riparian standards and guidelines to change scheduled activities (inventories and monitoring) and definitions such as riparian condition and classification to allow flexibility in responding to future changes in budget and priorities.

Enclosed is a Project Scope and Analysis document for your review and comment. This document details the reasons for the proposed amendment (purpose and need) and the specifics of the proposed changes to the plan. The amendment will make it easier to update our scheduled activities and riparian evaluation methods based on inventory needs, Forest priorities, changes in scientific knowledge, and annual budget processes.

The draft Forest Plan standards and guidelines and the schedule of activities detailed in the enclosed document are also available directly on the Gila National Forest web site at <http://www.fs.fed.us/r3/gila/projects> or by contacting Cecilia McNicoll at the Forest Supervisor's office in Silver City by e-mail at cmnicoll@fs.fed.us or by phone at 505/388-8261.

I welcome your comments, electronic or written, on the enclosed proposal to amend the Forest Plan. Please provide your comments by 4:30 p.m. on October 29, 2004. However, comments will be accepted past that date and throughout the process, although I would appreciate receiving them as early as possible. Electronic comments may be provided by email to cmnicoll@fs.fed.us. Written comments should be addressed to Marcia R. Andre, Forest Supervisor, Gila National Forest, 3005 East Camino del Bosque, Silver City, NM, 88061, ATTN: Cecilia McNicoll, Forest Planner.

Thank you for your interest and participation in this analysis effort.

Sincerely,

/s/ Stephen G. Libby for
MARCIA R. ANDRE
Forest Supervisor

Enclosure

cc: District Rangers, RO Appeals & Litigation, RO Planning, and U.S. Department of Justice

