



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest Service

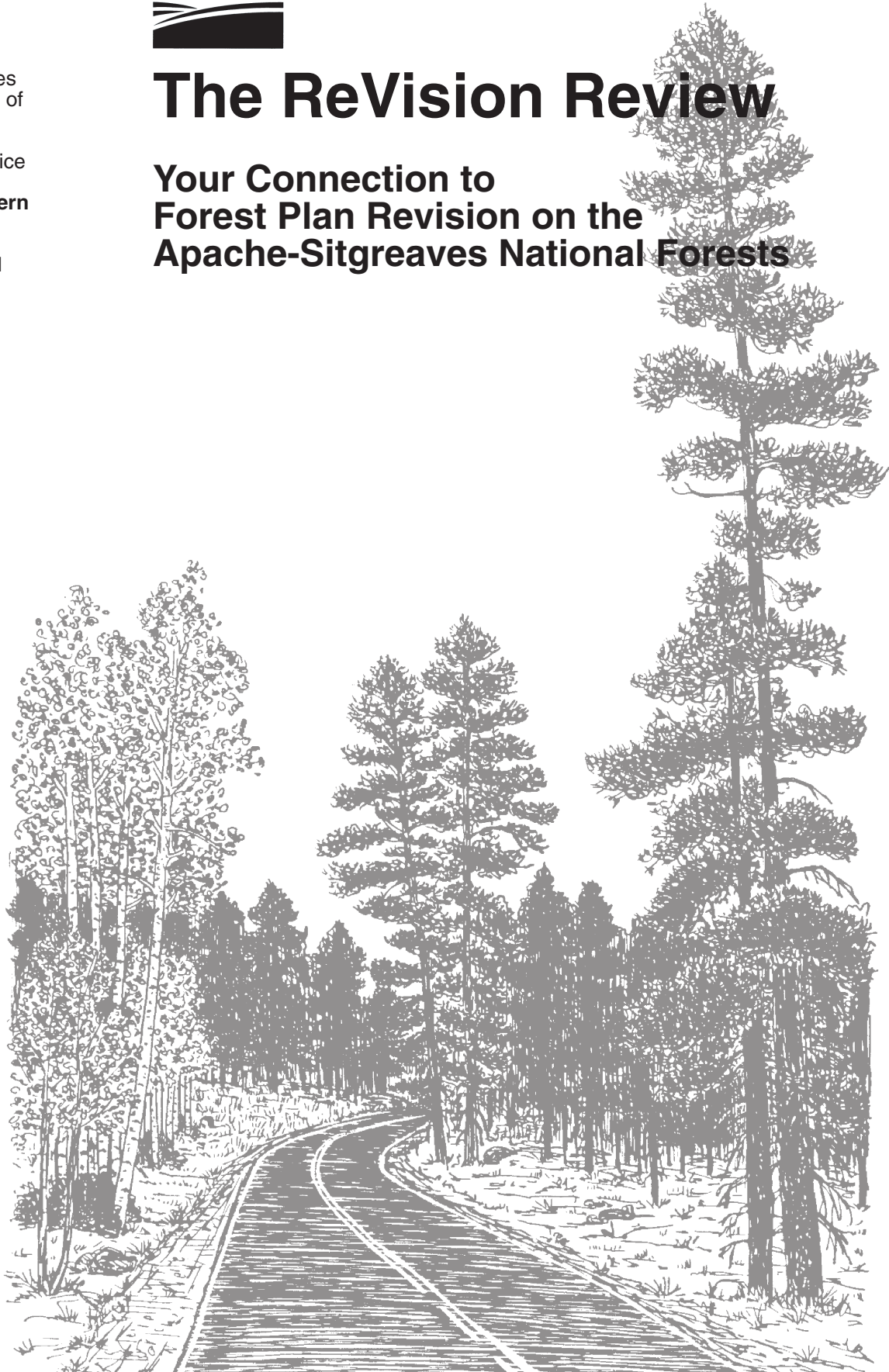
Southwestern
Region

MB-R3-01-1



The ReVision Review

**Your Connection to
Forest Plan Revision on the
Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests**



A Message from the Forest Supervisor

I want to thank all of you for your contributions to forest plan revision. I really appreciate the investments of time and energy that each of you have expended to be a part of this process.

As you may have heard, the U.S. District Court in northern California has ordered the Forest Service not to use the 2005 Planning Rule in ongoing forest planning processes. This means that the Forest Service has stopped using the 2005 Rule and is not conducting any activities specific to the rule. We expect guidance later this summer on how to go forward with revision efforts while complying with the court order. This will likely modify the timeframe of our revision schedule. As we learn more on how we will proceed, we will share this information with you. Meanwhile, we can continue to analyze your comments and identify the need for change in our current plan.

Travel management planning is not affected by this court order. Those efforts are underway and proceeding as scheduled. Please visit our Web site — www.fs.fed.us/r3/asnf — for more information.

Since we last met with you in January 2007, we have been evaluating our existing forest plan to determine which



*Elaine J. Zieroth, Supervisor,
Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests*



*Ursus americana, commonly called black bear, on the
Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests.*

parts of it are still valid. We have been reviewing your comments and looking at current conditions and trends to determine if current management is moving the forests in the right direction. So far, our evaluations indicate a need to make shifts in certain parts of the forest plan. We have grouped these items that need to change into three broad topics: Ecosystem Restoration, Managed Recreation, and Community-Forest Interaction.

The focus of this “ReVision Review” is to share a summary of this initial evaluation. I encourage you to review this draft and let us know your thoughts on current conditions and trends and items identified as needing to be changed. Let us know if you agree or disagree, and why. Your feedback will be used to help refine the scope of revision. Send us your comments electronically or mail them to us. You will find our contact information on the last page of this publication.

Let’s continue working together to build a vision for the future of the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests.

Elaine J. Zieroth
Forest Supervisor

“Caring for the Land and Serving People”

The Need for Change . . .

Introduction

The Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests' (ASNFs) current forest plan was published in August 1987. Some of the 1987 direction needs to be updated to reflect new laws, policies, regulations, and scientific information. Additional plan direction needs to be changed to better respond to the issues, concerns, and desires of the ever-increasing numbers of forest visitors. Other areas of the current plan are still adequate and timely; that direction will be carried forward into the revised plan.

What follows is a draft summary of forest plan direction that, through analysis, is not sufficient to address the challenges the forests face today, some 20 years after the plan was originally published. As you read this draft summary, you will see that numerous topics in the current forest plan have been identified as needing to be changed. However, they may not all be addressed during this revision effort. The responsible official, our forest supervisor, will consider the findings of this analysis, plus your comments and input, to define which need for change items to address during revision.

This summary is organized into three broad topics: Ecosystem Restoration, Managed Recreation, and Community-Forest Interaction. These topics were identified from the forests' resource conditions and trends evaluations, existing plan direction, and public input.

The Challenges of Managing National Forest Lands

The main challenges of administering more than 2 million acres of National Forest System lands for the citizens of the United States include identifying, managing, and monitoring the health and status of the physical resources (e.g. soil, water, air) that create the environment in which the vegetation and animals live and interact, while balancing the many human uses of the forest (e.g. camping, firewood gathering, logging, quest for solitude). People are part of the equation, but if human uses dominate and adversely affect the environment, the forests will no longer provide for human and ecological needs.

This need for change examines the social, economic, and ecological conditions and trends in and around the ASNFs and identifies where the current forest plan

does not provide adequate guidance for the present and future. The goal of forest plan revision is to provide management direction and guidance so that the social, economic, and ecological demands on the resources can be sustained in perpetuity without causing irreversible or irretrievable damages or losses to the forests. The social,

economic, and ecological systems are interrelated and need to be considered together, just as humans need to be included in the ecosystem context.

Three Potential Revision Topics Identified:

Ecosystem Restoration
Managed Recreation
Community-Forest Interaction

Revision Topic 1: Ecosystem Restoration

Congress established the Forest Service in 1905 to provide quality water and timber for the Nation's benefit. Over the years, public desires and needs from national forests and grasslands have changed and grown. Congress responded by directing the Forest Service to manage the national forests for additional multiple uses and benefits and for the sustained yield of renewable resources, such as water, forage, wildlife, wood, and recreation. Multiple use means managing resources under the best combination of uses to benefit the American people, while ensuring the productivity of the land and protecting the quality of the environment.

When the forest plan was written in 1987, management emphasized the production of goods and services, such as timber sales and grazing permits. In the mid-1990s the Forest Service began to emphasize ecosystem management, focusing on the long-term sustainability of forest ecosystems.

Prior to the 1850s, the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests ecosystems were resilient systems that provided a variety of vegetation—in terms of age and composition—across the landscape, and were home to a diversity of plant and animal species. Events such as disease, climatic change, and fires were natural components of this functioning ecosystem.

Human activities, coupled with natural disturbances, have changed the ecological character of the ASNFs. In 2003, the Chief of the USDA Forest Service identified fire and fuels, invasive species, and loss of open space as three of the four threats to the health of the Nation's forests.

Current Conditions and Trends

Some of the key findings identified during the evaluation of the ASNFs' current conditions follow.

Physical Resources

- Overall, water quality is considered to be good to excellent. However, there are several streams and water bodies that currently exceed state and national water quality standards and are classified as impaired.
- The forests yield approximately 385,000 acre feet of water per year. For comparison purposes, this is less than 20 percent of the water Phoenix uses in one year.
- Approximately one-third of the forests' soils, primarily those associated with lower elevation grasslands and woodlands, are considered to be in unsatisfactory condition.
- There are two geologic formations on the forests that are prone to landslides. Management considerations for these areas were not identified in the current forest plan.
- Forestwide air quality is considered to be good. Forest management actions, such as prescribed burning, contribute to air pollution, but are of limited duration and intensity.

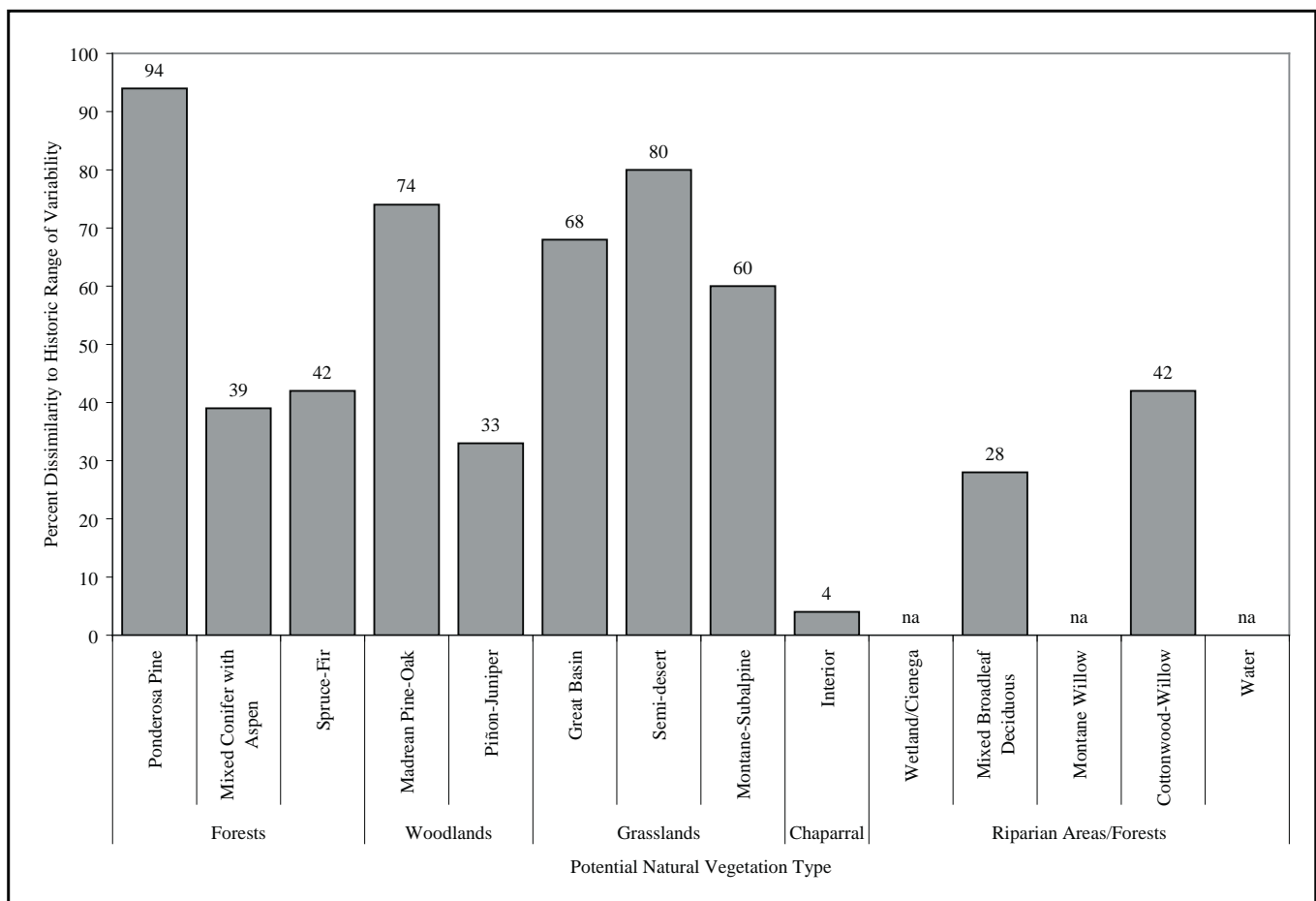


Erosion along Rudd Creek near Springerville, 1957

Ecosystem Restoration . . . continued

Biological Resources

- Fourteen vegetation types occur on the ASNFs in forests, woodlands, grasslands, chaparral, water, and riparian areas. All but one of these vegetation types (interior chaparral) vary, sometimes substantially in composition and structure, from what they were historically (see graph below).
- Ponderosa pine forest, the most widespread forest vegetation type on the ASNFs, is the most unlike its historic conditions. Historically, ponderosa pine stands were open and park-like with large diameter trees and were maintained by frequent surface fires. Today, this forest type is mostly dense groups of smaller diameter trees that are prone to stand-replacing crown fires.
- The three grassland vegetation types differ considerably from historic conditions. Woody species have and continue to invade these areas. Some grassland areas are now considered non-restorable because the site characteristics, such as soil conditions and vegetation types, have changed.
- Riparian vegetation types are unique habitats in east-central Arizona. Although they comprise less than 2 percent of the forests, over 50 percent of this habitat within the larger analysis area occurs on the ASNFs.
- The forests provide over 2,500 miles of riparian habitat; 26 percent is considered to be in good condition.



Graph illustrating the amount of divergence from historical conditions of each vegetation type found within the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests

Ecosystem Restoration . . . continued

- The quaking aspen component of several vegetation types is declining because of insects, disease, drought, browsing by wildlife and livestock, absence of natural fire and unnaturally dense stands of conifers that shade out and inhibit aspen growth. Healthy aspen stands have scenic values and provide forage for wildlife and livestock, wildlife habitat, and natural fire breaks.
- At one time or another, insects or disease have extensively damaged the forest and woodland vegetation types. The most severe insect damage has been in spruce (spruce aphid) and piñon (Ips bark beetle) areas. The most extensive and damaging parasite in ponderosa pine is Southwestern dwarf mistletoe.
- Fire suppression, sustained drought, and increasing disease, insect and invasive plant infestations have led to the presence of higher levels of woody vegetation (fuel loads) in the forests than existed historically.
- Approximately 85 percent of ASNFs lands are out of sync with historic natural fire cycles. Fire is a natural component of many Southwestern ecosystems, yet the current forest plan emphasizes suppressing fire rather than using it to improve ecosystem health.
- The great variety of habitat conditions found on the ASNFs provides for a wide diversity of plant and animal species.
- Since 1987, nine additional species have been listed as threatened or endangered. The American peregrine falcon was delisted in 1999.



Cattle grazing on the Greer Ranger District, 1939

- Seventy-five percent of inventoried streams show reduced fish habitat quality. Fish populations, especially Apache trout, have shown decreases of 50 to 75 percent over the last 10 years. These declines can be attributed to undesirable habitat characteristics, such as streambank soil and vegetation instability.

Humans in the Ecosystem

- In general, the communities dependent on the ASNFs have shifted from an extraction-based economy dependent on logging and grazing, to a service-based economy dependent on tourism, recreation and second home ownership. However, there continues to be social and economic dependencies on extractive activities.
- ASNFs management activities during 2005 contributed approximately 6 percent of the jobs and 5 percent of the labor income to the surrounding areas. The majority of these jobs were in government and in accommodations and food services sectors. The White Mountain Stewardship Project contract accounts for 5 percent of this labor income percentage.
- Increased demand for water has elevated concerns regarding water availability and contamination.
- Human activities, including fire exclusion, noxious and invasive plant and animal species introductions, grazing, road density, and erosion from existing roads continue to pose threats to the sustainability of the forests' ecosystem.
- Greater numbers of noxious and invasive weeds are found on the ASNFs each year. Noxious weed infestations grow and spread at rapid rates and aggressively replace native plants.
- Invasive animal species are also a serious and growing problem. Nonnative animals, such as zebra mussels, crayfish, and bullfrogs, have the potential to cause economic and environmental harm.
- The forests have one research natural area, which was set aside to provide researchers an opportunity to gather information about the montane/subalpine grassland ecosystem. There are four proposed research natural areas.

Ecosystem Restoration . . . continued



Grassy opening in ponderosa pine, 1945

- The 25 Percent Fund payments to counties are the only Federal payments that may be affected by forest plan direction. These payments are based on monies generated from forest activities, such as timber harvesting, livestock grazing, and recreation.

See also the managed recreation and community-forest interaction revision topics.

Ecosystem Restoration: Need for Change

In order to address key findings related to the ecosystem, ASNFs forest managers need to:

Soils and Watersheds

- Maintain or improve soil and watershed conditions, where needed, emphasizing sustainability and overall ecosystem function.

Fire-adapted Ecosystems

- Move vegetation types toward more sustainable, resilient states. In particular, address the loss of native grasslands, the amount and distribution of structural classes in all vegetation types, and the decline in aspen.
- Restore and maintain appropriate fire regimes.
- Reintroduce fire as a necessary ecological process to improve and maintain ecosystem health.

Species Diversity

- Provide for individual species habitat needs that are not covered by forest level ecosystem diversity.
- Improve and maintain habitat conditions for all threatened, endangered, and sensitive species.
- Address nonnative species threats.

Humans in the Ecosystem

- Provide for a spectrum of human needs and desires from the forests, while maintaining ecosystem sustainability.
- Identify areas of the forests that are suitable for uses such as timber production, livestock grazing, and recreation.



Map of Arizona showing the location of the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests

Revision Topic 2: Managed Recreation

Although the counties within and surrounding the ASNFs are experiencing some population growth, the Phoenix metropolitan area, where the majority of forest visitors live, is one of the Nation's fastest growing areas.

Planned highway improvements will provide easier access to the ASNFs from the state's major population centers, increasing visitor numbers as well as recreation demands. The population is also aging; the 65 and over population in surrounding counties grew at a higher rate than state averages.

Extractive uses of national forests are declining, while recreation, including off-highway vehicle (OHV) use, continues to increase.

The Chief of the USDA Forest Service identified unmanaged recreation as one of the "four threats" facing the National Forest System. In particular, he was concerned about the large increase in demand for motorized recreation opportunities. The damage and conflicts that can occur from "off-road vehicle" use were identified as a major issue in the current forest plan.



LDS Church Girls Camp near Lakeside, Arizona, under special use permit, 1957

Current Conditions and Trends

During the current conditions and trends evaluation for the ASNFs, developed recreation and undeveloped or dispersed recreation opportunities, including motorized recreation, were examined. Some of the key findings are listed below.

Developed Recreation

- The ASNFs offer a wide array of developed recreation opportunities, including single family and group campgrounds, picnic areas, boating and fishing sites, trailheads, two visitor centers, and scenic overlooks. Over 35 percent of forest visitors use the developed campgrounds.
- The ASNFs receive approximately 2 million visitors per year. Approximately 70 percent of the forests' visitors are from the Phoenix and Tucson metropolitan areas.
- The ASNFs currently have a \$2.6 million backlog of deferred recreation facility maintenance, meaning that there have not been adequate funds to properly maintain the forests' recreation facilities. If this trend continues, facilities may be closed because of risks to human health and safety.

Dispersed Recreation

- The primary dispersed recreation activities are "relaxing and escaping the heat," fishing, hiking, OHV use, viewing natural features and wildlife, camping, driving for pleasure, picnicking and large group gatherings, and hunting. Over 19 percent of forest visitors camped outside of developed campgrounds.
- Three scenic byways, including the Coronado Trail National Scenic Byway, traverse the forests. The current forest plan does not address these byways.
- Fall visitation is increasing because of a growing interest in viewing fall colors. Declines in aspen could affect this activity.

Managed Recreation . . . continued

- Wilderness resources on the ASNFs include Mount Baldy Wilderness, Bear Wallow Wilderness, Escudilla Wilderness, and Blue Range Primitive Area. Since forestwide visitor use is expected to grow, wilderness visitor numbers may also increase.
- There are currently 17 inventoried roadless areas, totaling over 300,000 acres, on the forests.
- Of the 981 perennial stream miles on the ASNFs, over 25 percent are eligible for inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System as wild, scenic, or recreational rivers.

Motorized Recreation

- The number of OHVs in Arizona has risen dramatically. Almost 500,000 Arizona households have one or more OHVs and 29 percent of Arizonans operate OHVs for recreation. OHV sales show a steady increase in vehicles sold each year.
- Approximately 11 percent of 2001 forest visitors used OHVs, but only 4 percent identified OHV use as their primary recreational activity.



Building road on the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests, 1937

- Motorized vehicle use is not allowed or is seasonally restricted on approximately 18 percent of the ASNFs. The remainder of the forests is open to motorized vehicle use, including cross-country travel.
- The ASNFs have an extensive road network, with over 6,000 miles of road. Forest managers face major challenges in maintaining this transportation system to ensure user safety and resource protection.

- The forests are in the process of implementing the 2005 Travel Management Rule, which when fully implemented, will restrict motorized vehicle use to designated routes and areas and will prohibit cross-country motorized travel. This will change the character of motorized vehicle recreation on the ASNFs.

Managed Recreation: Need for Change

In order to address unmanaged recreation and provide for the needs and desires of the recreating public, ASNFs forest managers need to:

Developed Recreation

- Manage for a developed recreation program, including facility needs, that considers increasing populations, changing demographics, and the associated demands for recreation opportunities.

Undeveloped or Dispersed Recreation

- Manage for a dispersed recreation program that considers increasing populations, changing demographics, and the associated demands for recreation opportunities, while protecting sensitive environmental features.
- Add direction for dispersed recreation opportunities that are not addressed in the current forest plan, such as scenic byways.
- Identify and recommend areas that may be suitable for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System.
- Identify and recommend rivers that may be suitable for inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System.

Motorized Recreation

- Manage for a sustainable transportation system designed to achieve forest management objectives, including public use and enjoyment, while minimizing impacts to the ecosystem.
- Identify areas that are suitable for motorized vehicle travel.

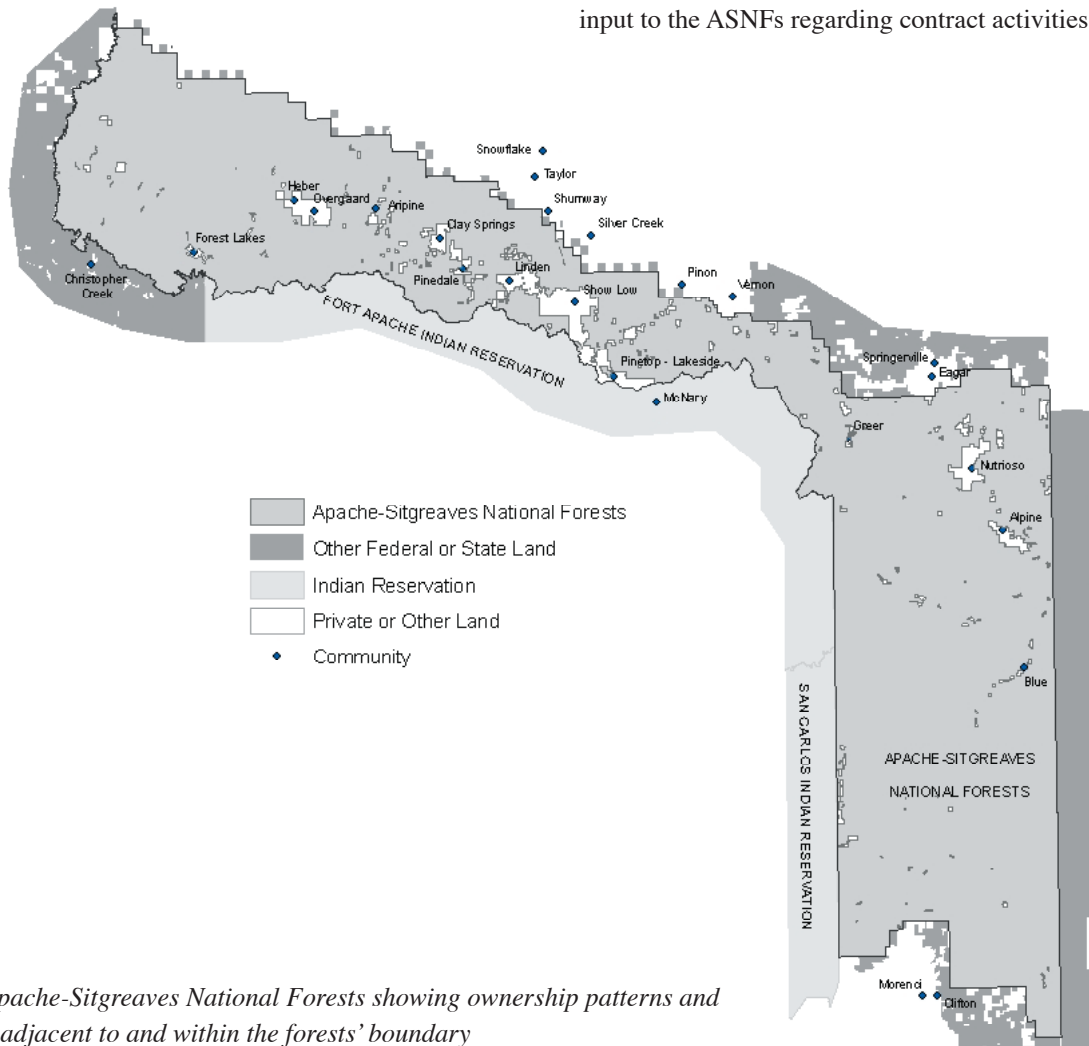
Revision Topic 3: Community-Forest Interaction

The ASNFs are literally the backyard for many residents of Arizona's White Mountains. Many communities adjoin the ASNFs, while others are completely surrounded by the forests. Because of this close proximity, many communities and private landowners are directly affected by forest management decisions. These entities, in turn, affect forest management.

In the past, local communities have not played a large role in the national forest land management planning process. Because local governing bodies cannot mandate or direct

the actions of Federal government agencies, there has been little consideration of national forest management issues in their policies.

The events surrounding the 2002 Rodeo-Chediski Fire, the largest in Arizona history, served as a catalyst for increased public concern and interaction with the Forest Service. Following the fire, communities developed community wildfire protection plans, which identify ways to reduce the wildfire risk to communities. In 2004, the ASNFs awarded a contract for the White Mountain Stewardship Project, the first large-scale, 10-year stewardship contract in the Nation to focus on forest restoration. A citizen-based monitoring board provides input to the ASNFs regarding contract activities.



Map of the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests showing ownership patterns and communities adjacent to and within the forests' boundary

Community-Forest Interaction . . . continued

The ASNFs share borders with the Fort Apache (White Mountain Apache Tribe) and San Carlos Indian Reservations. The Forest Service and Native American tribes have a unique government-to-government relationship of one sovereign nation to another. This is based on the U.S. Constitution, treaties, statutes, agreements, and court decisions.

The ASNFs consult with 10 Native American tribes including Fort McDowell Yavapai Nation, Hopi Tribe, Navajo Nation, Ramah Navajo Chapter, San Carlos Apache Tribe, Tonto Apache Tribe, White Mountain Apache Tribe, Yavapai-Apache Nation of Camp Verde Indian Reservation, Yavapai-Prescott Tribe of the Yavapai Reservation, and Pueblo of Zuni.

Current Conditions and Trends

Highlighted below are some of the key findings regarding the interactions of communities and the ASNFs.

Community-Forest Interaction

- Land exchanges have been the principal means of ownership adjustment for the ASNFs. Approximately 17,540 acres have been acquired and 4,462 acres conveyed to private ownership since 1987. The ASNFs have acquired more land than they have conveyed because many land exchanges have involved the transfer of lands within other Arizona national forests to private ownership, while the ASNFs acquired private lands within their boundaries.
- The expansion of many communities is limited because they are surrounded by the forests. There

are strong public feelings, both for and against future land exchanges that would make National Forest System lands available for community growth.

- The area where human development and the forests meet is commonly referred to as wildland-urban interface (WUI). The forests have approximately 900,000 acres of WUI.
- Because tree densities on the ASNFs are at uncharacteristically high levels, forested areas are at increased risk from wildfires.
- The White Mountain Stewardship Project (WMSP) contract, awarded in 2004, is the first large-scale,

10-year stewardship contract in the Nation. The contract emphasizes large-scale forest restoration activities that result in healthier forests, enhanced rural economic development, and the utilization of previously unmarketable small diameter trees. Some WMSP benefits include hazard fuel reduction and local economy contributions in the form of new jobs.



Apache National Forest Supervisor's Office, Springerville, Arizona, 1926

- Comments received from the public indicate a desire to increase the amount of goods provided by the ASNFs. Goods include timber, firewood and forage for livestock grazing.
- Because subdivision and development of land adjoining or surrounded by the ASNFs is increasing, demands for utility corridors, roads, and special permits to service these developments are expected to increase.
- WUI residents may or may not agree with forest management practices, such as thinning and prescribed burning, on adjacent ASNFs lands.

Community-Forest Interaction . . . continued

- Along with the growth of local communities, recreational use of the adjacent forests' lands is increasing.
- Economic activity associated with the ASNFs generated over \$78 million in labor income directly and indirectly to the local economy. The combined recreation and wildlife economic contribution areas, including recreation, hunting, fishing, and wildlife viewing-based visits to the forests, are 66 percent of this total.

Users and Uses

- Communities whose economic bases were once largely dependent on extractive activities provided by the ASNFs, such as logging and grazing, are transitioning to a more service-based economy dependent on recreation, tourism, and second home ownership. This trend contributes to an increased diversity in lifestyles, values, and social institutions associated with natural resources and their uses.
- As the population becomes more diverse, demand increases for a greater range of experiences on the ASNFs. Potential conflicts in value systems and expectations between long-time residents and people who have recently moved into the area can create friction over natural resource management.
- Demographic changes, including increasing populations of retirement-age and part-time residents, have resulted in larger WUI areas and increased demands for access, water, recreation, and consideration of persons with disabilities.
- The ASNFs encompass the former aboriginal territory of many Native American tribes. Such lands are known or thought to contain many traditional cultural properties of concern and significance to tribal neighbors.



*Sitgreaves National Forest
Supervisor's Office, Holbrook,
Arizona, 1926*

- Native American tribal members' use of ASNFs lands includes the permitted gathering of various forest products, such as boughs, basket materials and teepee poles, for ceremonial purposes.

Partnerships, Conservation Education and Enforcement

- Collaborative efforts have resulted in the formation of many partnerships such as the Natural Resources Working Group, the Arizona Sustainable Forest Partnership, the White Mountain Stewardship Monitoring Board, Eastern Arizona Counties Resource Advisory Committee, and the Little Colorado River Weed Management Area. These partnerships have contributed to the decisionmaking process and desired outcomes on the forests.
 - The ASNFs work closely with the county governments in Greenlee, Apache, Coconino, and Navajo counties, with state and local governments, and with other Federal agencies.
 - The importance of having a viable conservation education program is affirmed often as there is a clear lack of public understanding of forest issues, laws, consequences of forest user behavior, and forest management actions. Conservation education efforts have been severely limited by available funding.
 - The law enforcement workload has grown substantially because of increased visitor use and substantial urban population growth within several hours travel of the ASNFs.
- Illegal activities include marijuana cultivation, drug and undocumented immigrant corridors, and illegal wood cutting, especially old growth alligator juniper and oak.
- There is concern that the forests' current law enforcement staffing is not adequate to provide for visitor safety and resource protection, handle ongoing illegal activities, as well as enforce mandates (i.e. implementation of the Travel Management Rule).

Community-Forest Interaction . . . continued

Community-Forest Interaction: Need for Change

With more and more people residing in areas of the White Mountains that are adjacent to or within forested areas, managers are challenged to provide the goods, services, and access that people demand. Managers also face a major challenge in reducing the fire threat to neighboring communities.

In order to address these, managers of the ASNFs need to:

- Reduce the potential for uncharacteristic fire in the WUI to protect life and property.
- Address wildland-urban interface recreation demands (trailheads, urban uses, and general access).
- Consider the increasing demands for goods, services, and forest access from growing populations and urban developments that border the forests.



Get Involved in Your National Forest . . .

Our next step together is to refine the draft need for change evaluation. We need your help. Please review this draft and let us know what you think. Tell us if you agree or disagree with current conditions and trends or the need for change items and why. Which of the potential revision topics do you think are most important to focus on during revision and why? Remember, this analysis and your comments and input will be used by our forest supervisor to define the scope of revision. The draft summary is located on the ASNFs Web site. Your participation and comments are welcome at any time, and there are several ways to get involved in the forest plan revision process:

Public Meetings—a chance to interact and work with Forest Service representatives and other members of the public.

Web site: <http://www.fs.fed.us/r3/asnf/plan-reivision/>—a place to find more information about the revision process and opportunity to provide comments.

E-mail: asnf.planning@fs.fed.us—contact us with your questions or comments.

Phone: (928) 333-4301—ask for a planning team member.

FAX: (928) 333-5966

TTY: (928) 333-5768

Regular Mail: USDA Forest Service
Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests
Attn: Plan Revision Team
P.O. Box 640
Springerville, AZ 85938

Let us know if you have other ideas that will better help us work together.

*Hope to receive your comments on
the need for change topics soon!*

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