

Coconino National Forest Plan Revision
Recreation Special Uses

Forest-wide Direction

Background and Description

- Special use permits authorize services that support the Forest Service mission and meet the needs of the public. These permits are a partnership between the Forest Service and private businesses and individuals to provide services and facilities, such as outfitter-guide services.

Desired Conditions

- Special use activities blend into the landscape and do not draw attention to the activity or equipment. Commercial tours are focused on main roadways and vistas as well as selected recreation locations. They support the Forest Service mission by providing high-quality outdoor recreational, educational and interpretive opportunities. If the need can be demonstrated, commercial tours are allowed to provide opportunities for scenic viewing, natural history education, wildlife viewing and other activities that are compatible with resource protection and Forest direction.
- Commercial and recreational activities occur during times and in locations that are consistent with the needs of National Forest users and area residents. These activities are consistent with other direction for the location including Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) objectives, resource protection and community goals. Commercial use travel is limited to roads and trails on the Motor Vehicle Use Map (MUVUM), or to sites designated in an operating plan for such use. Exceptions include activities that require very limited access over a short period of time, such as hot air balloon retrieval and similar activities, where this access is specified in the permit. Livestock used in special use activities are not allowed to access areas of unsuitable range conditions.
- Outfitter/guide permits or permit use does not cause a significant change for the ROS social or managerial setting, such as allowing airboats or seaplanes on the lakes that are at a less-developed ROS setting. Generally, motor vehicle use for outfitter-guide activities occurs on roads and trails displayed on the MVUM. Commercial uses are encouraged to use private land for their activities when their proposed use is not consistent with National Forest goals and can be accommodated on private land.
- Large group gatherings and recreation events are discouraged outside of suitably developed sites or areas that have already been analyzed for resource issues. Applicants are encouraged to use private land for staging when possible. Pre-approved sites are generally areas that are compatible with use by the general public and are identified based on their ability to support large group activities with minimal resource impacts. They do not have long-term evidence of erosion or invasive species as a result of special use activities. Events occur infrequently in areas where they will interfere with the general public's use of the land.

Working Draft – text under development, subject to change
Public input is welcome and would be most useful if received by December 10, 2010.
No text is final until Plan approval in Fall 2012.

- Recreation residences and commercial facilities on the Forest meet State and county health and safety standards. Their footprints are stable, with some exceptions to accommodate improvements that address health, safety, and environmental issues. Organization camps managed under special use permits are focused on natural resource values, conservation education and emphasize non-motorized recreation opportunities.

Objectives

- Replace outhouses (outbuildings with one or more seats and a pit serving as a toilet) at recreation residences within 5 years of plan approval.

Guidelines

- Outfitter-guide motor vehicle use and camping activities should be excluded from areas adjacent to urban areas or areas with a high density of archeological sites.
- Special use permits should not be given for activities proposed to occur within 200 feet of perennial streams, springs or sensitive waters. Exceptions will be made for hardened or slickrock sites, for activities in support of approved research, to improve safety, or to provide for site rehabilitation.
- Commercial tours at high interest archeology sites such as Honanki, should be consistent with site protection and visitor experience objectives.

Standards

- Prohibit motorized aircraft landings and takeoffs on National Forest System lands and waters, except for emergencies and rare administrative support activities.
- Require rehabilitation of non-NFS trails and other sites created by activities authorized under special use permits.

Management Approach

- Priority is given to permit applications received in response to a prospectus issues by the Forest Service. Unsolicited proposals will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis as workload allows.

Management Area-Specific Direction

Lake Mary, Walnut Canyon, Shultz and Urban-Rural Influence Management Areas

Desired Condition

- Generally, outfitter/guide activities or group activities do not occur in Deadman Wash, the Dry Lake Hills, Walnut Canyon from Fisher Point east, or Pumphouse Wash. Special use events occur on the Snowbowl Road infrequently and do not interfere with use of the area by the general public.

Management Approach

- Before permitting outfitter/guides adjacent to National Monuments, coordinate with the National Park Service. Outfitter guiding might also help meet the mission of the National Park Service in the National Monuments or on adjacent National Forest lands. Work cooperatively with NPS for special uses requests that occur on both Forest Service and NPS lands.

Sedona/Oak Creek Area

Desired Conditions

- New outfitter-guide permits are issued for activities that have demonstrated public need, promote transportation services or public safety, or substantially increase protection of cultural or natural resources.
- Commercial tours emphasize opportunities to experience scenic beauty, natural quiet, and contemplative reflection. Activities that vary from this condition, such as motorized tours, do not impact the ability of other forest users to have these experiences.
- Recreation events emphasize nature-based activities and education. Proponents are encouraged to stage large events off-forest and hold only smaller group activities on the National Forest Lands.
- Commercial filming using aircraft is limited in all management areas except the Savannah Management Area (MA) and limited places in the Gateway MA.

Guideline

- Statewide special use permits for the Sedona/Oak Creek Area should be issued by the Red Rock Ranger District. This will ensure compatibility with Forest Plan direction and appropriateness of the activity for the sensitive Sedona/Oak Creek Area.

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Standard

- Do not permit commercial tours on the Casner Powerline Road.
- Do not permit new outfitter/guide permits in areas that are at, or approaching, capacity.

Management Approach

- Develop partnerships with outfitter-guides for Schnebly Hill Road and other roads and facilities that receive high use by commercial tour activities for the purpose of maintaining and protecting resources in these areas.
- The district will provide a commercial guide training program. Such training should focus on National Forest goals and regulations, Leave-No-Trace etiquette, and natural and cultural history. Training should occur annually or when new guides are hired. Collaborate with guides, where possible, to develop and implement the training program.
- Work with local and regional governments and road agencies to develop transportation solutions that reduce traffic and vehicle impacts at high impact recreation areas on the Forest.
- Collaborate with Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), Sedona Airport Administration and air tour operators to minimize aircraft effects on threatened, endangered or sensitive animal species. Special flight rules should be in place, particularly over suitable peregrine falcon nesting habitat and big game winter.

Sedona Neighborhoods Desired Conditions

- Special use activities that access National Forest Service land through neighborhoods address resident concerns for safety and minimize disturbance. Mitigations are identified in the authorized operating plans.

Management Approach

- Commercial operators, filming groups, and homeowners work together with the Forest Service to resolve safety and quality of life conflicts, such as concerns about noise, safety, and facilities maintenance needs.