

Message from the Forest Supervisor...

Hi, I'm Betty Mathews and I am the Forest Supervisor for the Prescott National Forest.



It's been about six months since I started my new job, and I have thoroughly enjoyed getting to know the people and places that define this part of the Southwest.

My involvement with plan revision has spanned 11 years and 3 national forests. Before moving to Prescott, I served as the Deputy Forest Supervisor for the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest in Oregon, where I was involved in the revision of their forest plan. In addition, I held the position of district ranger on both the Colville National Forest in Washington and the Daniel Boone National Forest in Kentucky, which also provided me with extensive opportunities for participating in plan revision.

From these experiences, I observed many discussions on natural resource management, especially concerning increased extraction of timber products and recreation development. I hope to bring what I learned in those discussions to my interactions with all of you here.

On the Prescott National Forest, I've been particularly impressed with the collaborative nature of how our revised forest plan has been developed thus far. Our communities have played a key role in identifying the

challenges we face and in providing input for the management direction the forest plan should include. Not all forest plans are developed with this level of public involvement. So, needless to say, I am very pleased this is the case for the Prescott National Forest, and it is my intent to continue this tradition.

The Forest Service's big challenge is balancing our stewardship responsibility to the land with people's desires to use and enjoy it. This is no easy task. As a land manager, it's a part of my job to find solutions to complex resource and social issues that arise from trying to maintain this balancing act.

Some of the challenges we currently face on the Prescott National Forest include the protection of watersheds, the risk of wildfires in the wildland-urban interface, and increased demand for recreation trails. Neither I nor my employees can address these challenges alone—we need our neighboring citizens and jurisdictions to help us.

At the end of the day, there will always be more good work we can do for our public lands, but there may not always be the resources to carry out that work. Thus, I see my job as one of setting priorities. Your feedback on the forest plan is essential because it helps us land managers better understand what is most important and what we need to work on in the near future.

I thank you community members, both near and far, for your continued involvement in plan revision. Your contributions will help us produce a much better forest plan in the end. Thank you again, and I look forward to future opportunities I will have to work with you in these efforts.

~Betty Mathews



Update on Forest Plan Revision...

In the past year we have met with several groups and individuals to discuss their questions, concerns, and suggestions about the development of the proposed revised plan. We have also received extensive feedback from individual citizens, community groups, agencies, tribes, and stakeholders during the round of public meetings we held in August 2010 and written comments folks have submitted to us in the subsequent months.



Mtg. with Upper Agua Fria Watershed Partnership

The feedback we received covered a wide variety of topics, including: fuels reduction, smoke and air quality, recreation opportunities, open space values, land exchanges, wildlife habitat, energy uses, livestock grazing, and wilderness recommendations. The following is a sampling of what we heard:

- Consider the connectivity of trails to other trails and communities.
- Consider using livestock grazing to reduce vegetation where it's needed.
- Protect wildlife habitat from forest activities which may be harmful.
- Use fire as a tool to improve forest health, but consider the effects of smoke.
- Address illegal dumping on the forest.
- Protect scarce water resources.
- Provide more opportunities for conservation education.

We have worked hard to address your comments in the proposed revised plan, where possible. To do so, we held several internal review sessions with forest specialists and members of the forest leadership team in which we evaluated whether changes needed to be made to the proposed revised plan. Some of the changes we made are highlighted below.

- Added management approaches to emphasize public collaboration in addressing illegal dumping and the monitoring of watersheds.
- Added a desired condition to address invasive or feral species in terrestrial (land-based) habitats.
- Eliminated a guideline which specified only the use of certified weed-free feed in wilderness, but added a desired condition to describe the goal of having only native plants in wilderness.
- Increased the numbers in several objectives including: percentage of signs maintained; improvements to water developments for wildlife; and opportunities for land exchanges we would act on.
- Added an objective to address concerns about the use and condition of trails, and added language in an objective to provide the option of constructing new trailheads rather than just maintaining current ones.
- Added language in two guidelines to address transmission lines located in riparian corridors and energy proposals located outside of existing energy corridors.
- Added language to a guideline to retain the scenic integrity objectives of the Grief Hill Inventoried Roadless Area.
- Added language in the Monitoring chapter to examine opportunities for partners and citizens to assist in monitoring and evaluation.



Update *continued...*

During internal reviews we found that many suggested changes could not be incorporated into the proposed revised plan because:

- They were redundant with laws, regulations, or policies with which the Forest Service is already required to comply. For example, a suggestion to incorporate direction from recovery plans for threatened and endangered species into the plan’s standards and guidelines.
- They were outside the scope of a land management plan. For example, site-specific actions such as designating specific sites for trail construction, or actions, such as hunting regulations, which are covered by another jurisdiction.
- They were inconsistent with the revision topics, or needs for change. For example, a suggestion for no prescribed burning would be inconsistent with the revision topic of restoring fire to ecosystems.

Some suggestions that were not used in the proposed revised plan, however, were used to develop alternatives to the plan (see page 5).

In addition to working on refining the proposed revised plan, we have also conducted analysis and completed documentation for other processes which must happen concurrent with plan revision. These have included: evaluations of potential wilderness areas, research natural areas, and wild and scenic river segments; suitability determinations for recreation uses, grazing areas, and timber production; selection of management indicator species (MIS); and evaluation of species viability. Some of these documents are currently available on the

Prescott NF plan revision website; while others will be available in the upcoming months as they are finalized.



Upper Verde River - evaluated for eligibility as a wild and scenic river

We have also been working on the draft environmental impact statement (DEIS), a document required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), which contains an analysis of the environmental effects or consequences of implementing the proposed revised

plan and any alternatives. The DEIS summarizes the analysis conducted by several specialists with expertise in a variety of fields including: ecology, fire, silviculture, range management, soils, recreation, wildlife, fisheries, hydrology, archeology, and others.

In the coming months we will finalize the proposed revised plan and DEIS and then submit them for internal review to our regional and national headquarters. Following review, we will publish these documents for a formal 90-day public comment period. The comments we receive during this time will be used to develop the final revised plan and the final environmental impact statement. We encourage interested individuals and groups to stay tuned for this upcoming opportunity to review these documents and comment.



Overview of the Proposed Revised Plan...

The five revision topics are the primary focus of the proposed revised plan. They were identified at the beginning of the plan revision process as "needs for change" on the Prescott NF. The proposed revised plan addresses these revision topics through direction stated in desired conditions, objectives, standards, guidelines, suitability of areas, monitoring, and special areas.

Here's a brief overview of how the proposed revised plan addresses each revision topic:

Topic 1 - Restore Ecosystems

It uses a blend of mechanical treatments and natural processes (namely fire) to create ecologically sustainable ecosystems which are resilient to uncharacteristic wildfire and climate change. It also provides direction for controlling and eradicating non-native invasive species and for protecting sensitive plant species.



Topic 2 - Watershed Integrity

It outlines several maintenance and improvement efforts to address watershed integrity. These include: maintaining and/or improving roads and trails, removing unauthorized routes, improving stream crossings and drainages near roads or trails, and enhancing and restoring ecosystems which are dependent on ground water.



Topic 3 - Recreation



It includes the addition of some developed and undeveloped recreational opportunities (e.g., developed recreation areas, designated dispersed camping areas, and trails) but primarily focuses on maintaining and/or improving those already in existence. Activities include: reducing the backlog of deferred maintenance, improving trails, maintaining signage, and marking wilderness boundaries.

Topic 4 - Native Fish

It includes direction to improve native fish habitat and to work with the Arizona Game and Fish Department to restore native fish species to a handful of stream reaches within the Prescott NF.



Topic 5 - Open Space Values

It promotes the acquisition of lands, especially near the Verde River, to retain the open space values that local communities have expressed as being very important to their "sense of place."



Photos: (clockwise) Mingus Lake; fish monitoring; aerial view of Verde River; Sycamore Creek; and ponderosa pine thicket after thinning.



Alternatives to the Proposed Revised Plan...

Alternatives have been developed to address issues which were within the scope of land management planning, but were incompatible with the direction contained in the proposed revised plan. The following represent the alternatives the plan revision team developed to address issues identified through public comments and internal reviews:

Alternative A - Also called the "No Action Alternative." It is the existing plan from 1987 and its amendments.

Alternative B - Also called the "Proposed Revised Plan." Plan components for this alternative have been developed iteratively with the public.

Alternative C - Contains much of the same management direction as Alternative B, but it has a greater emphasis on restoring vegetation and habitats that are highly departed from desired conditions.

Alternative D - Contains much of the same direction as Alternative B, but it has a greater emphasis on providing a wide range of dispersed recreation opportunities and settings.



Photos: (clockwise) Fishing at Lynx Lake, a Mexican spotted owl, and landscape of piñon-juniper shrub.

Highlighted below are some of the major points of the four alternatives.

A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mix of fire and mechanical veg. treatments, but acres treated are lower than other Alts. Lacks specific direction for water quality & quantity, invasives, sensitive plants, and habitats for native fish and pronghorn. Contains direction for current recreation developments, but lacks direction for additional ones. Recommends no new wilderness areas.
B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mix of fire and mechanical veg. treatments with higher acreages than Alt. A. Contains direction for additional developed rec. areas, designated dispersed sites, and trail improvements. Contains direction to improve watershed integrity and terrestrial & aquatic habitats. (Same in Alts. C&D.) Contains an objective to increase open space through land acquisitions/exchanges. (Same in Alts. C&D.) Recommends eight (8) new wilderness areas.
C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mix of fire and veg. treatments, but higher acreages for fire treatments in specific grassland and pine veg. types than Alts. A, B, & D. Contains direction to protect sensitive plants in the Verde Geological Formation. Less work to trail maintenance backlog and fewer improvements to trailheads than in Alts. B & D. Increased focus on improvements to streams, grasslands, migration corridors, and water developments for the benefit of wildlife than Alts. B & D. Recommends no new wilderness areas.
D	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mix of fire and mechanical veg. treatments with same acreages as Alt. B. Fewer additional developed rec. areas, but more new designated dispersed sites and trail improvements than Alts. B & C. Additional objective for constructing new trail miles and decommissioning trails causing resource damage. Recommends sixteen (16) new wilderness areas.

Additional Information...

The timeline below outlines some of the major plan revision activities that are taking place now and will take place over the next year.

Summer/Fall 2011

- Finalize the proposed revised plan
- Analyze the environmental consequences of the alternatives
- Summarize analysis in the DEIS
- Internal review of the proposed revised plan and DEIS at our regional and national headquarters

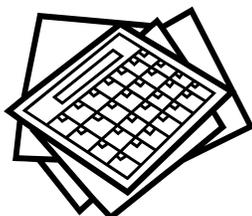
Fall/Winter 2011

- Publish the proposed revised plan and DEIS
- 90-day formal public comment period

Winter/Spring 2012

- Address comments
- Begin working on the final revised plan and final environmental impact statement

Note: Public meetings will be a part of the 90-day formal public comment period that follows the release of the proposed revised plan and the DEIS. The specific dates for those meetings are yet to be determined.



Final Steps...

The final steps in the plan revision process will be the approval and implementation of the revised plan. Given the timeline above, we anticipate reaching these steps sometime at the end of 2012.

We welcome your participation and comments throughout the plan revision process. Although there are specific times for formal public comment, you can submit comments to the plan revision team at any time via our electronic comment form on the website, by fax, or through regular mail.

If you have questions, feel free to contact us. You can also visit our website and find a wealth of information including background on the plan revision process, documents we have developed, and maps.



Website: www.fs.fed.us/r3/prescott/plan-revision

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~ Thank you ~

