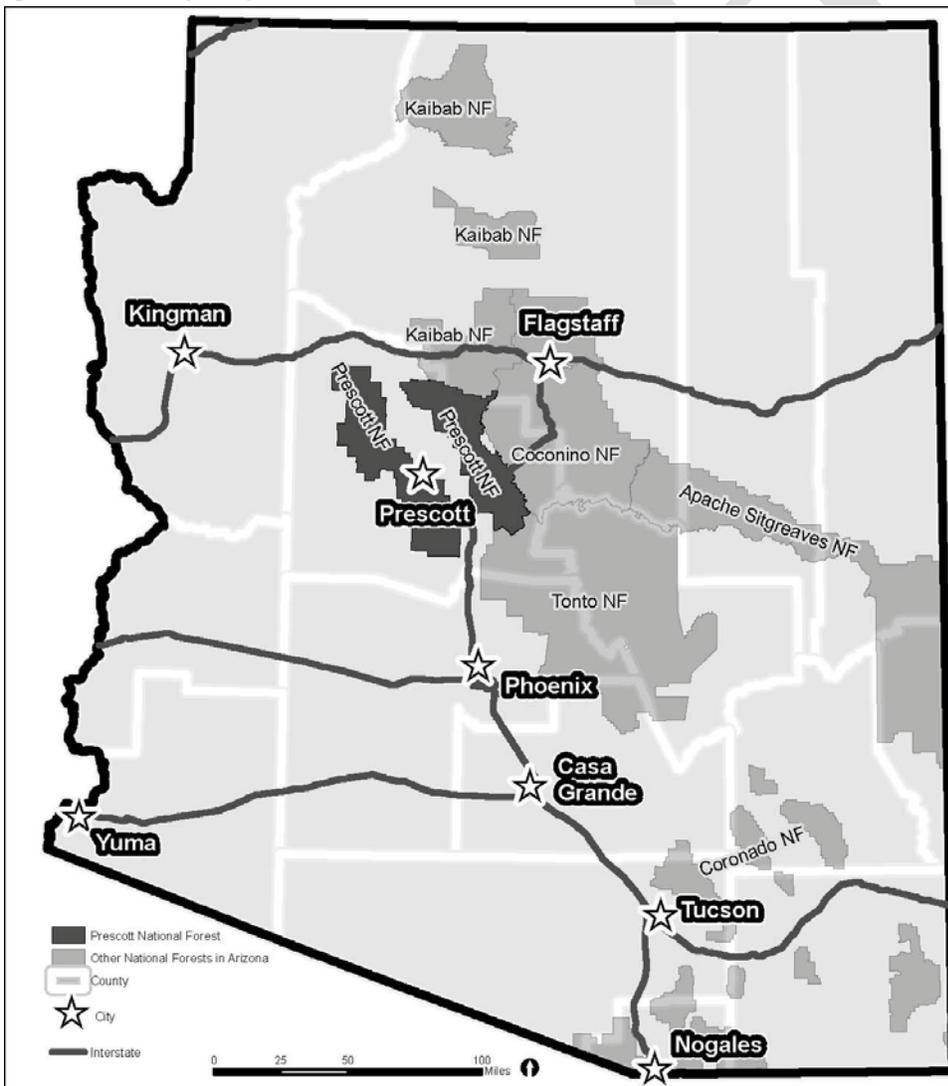


Chapter 1. Introduction

Location

The Prescott National Forest (PNF) is one of 6 National Forests in Arizona. It covers approximately 1.2 million acres in north-central Arizona and is located in Yavapai and Coconino Counties. The PNF is broken into two geographically separate land areas (eastern and western) and divided into three ranger districts: the Chino Valley Ranger District which covers the areas east and west of Chino Valley; the Bradshaw Ranger District which covers the area near Prescott and south into the Bradshaw Mountains; and the Verde Ranger District which covers the area just north of Jerome and Clarkdale and along the southern side of the Verde Valley. The PNF shares boundaries with the Aqua Fria National Monument; the Coconino, Kaibab, and Tonto National Forests; Bureau of Land Management—Hassayampa Field Office; Arizona State Trust lands; and several communities including Prescott, Camp Verde, and Cottonwood.

Figure 1. Vicinity map of the Prescott National Forest



Role and Contributions of the Planning Area

The PNF is located in a comparatively mountainous section of central Arizona between the forested plateaus to the north and the arid desert region to the south. Elevations range between 3,000 feet above sea level along the lower Verde Valley to 7,979 feet at the top of Mount Union, the highest natural feature on the Forest.

The rugged topography of the PNF provides important watersheds for both the Verde and Colorado River systems. Within these watersheds are many important continuously or seasonally flowing stream courses and drainages. Portions of the Verde River have been designated as part of the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System.

The vegetation on the PNF is complex and diverse. South of the Bradshaw Mountains there is Sonoran Desert dominated by saguaro cacti and paloverde trees. Less than 10 miles upslope from the desert, there are cool mountain forests where conifer trees grow. In between, there are a variety of plant and animal habitats including grasslands, chaparral, piñon-juniper woodlands, and ponderosa pine forests.

A variety of year-round recreation opportunities exist on the PNF. Visitors from the Phoenix metropolitan area enjoy having such opportunities nearby and come to the PNF to camp, hike, ride off highway vehicles (OHV) and generally to cool off. In the winter, visitors come from colder areas to recreate in moderate temperatures. Increases in population have led to increased demand for trails and other recreational opportunities. If climate changes include continuing increases in temperatures, it is likely that there will also be increases in recreational visitors from the Phoenix area.

Planning Framework

The Prescott National Forest Land Management Plan (hereinafter referred to as the Plan) is intended to produce responsible land management for the PNF based on useful and current information and guidance. The Plan guides the PNF in carrying out its responsibilities for stewardship under the sustainable multiple-use management concept—which is to meet the diverse needs of people while also protecting the resources of the PNF. Land management plans are required by the National Forest Management Act (NFMA) and the Multiple Use Sustained Yield Act (MUSYA).

Sustainable multiple use management, for the purposes of this document, means that various activities that have social or economic value may take place while ecosystem processes and biological characteristics continue to fulfill their natural rhythm of change over time. In order to do that, management needs to be adaptable. As activities take place, awareness of trends helps to determine needed modification of management actions.

The Plan provides broad guidance and information for project and activity decision-making on the PNF. The Plan has these characteristics:

- The Plan is strategic in nature. It does not include project level decisions. Those decisions are made later, only after specific proposals are made and analyzed, and there is the opportunity for public involvement.
- The Plan includes the following plan components: desired conditions (or goals), objectives, suitability of areas, special areas, standards, guidelines and a monitoring strategy.

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- The Plan is intended to be adaptive, in that new knowledge and information can be analyzed and the Plan changed, if appropriate, at any time. Changes to plan components are made by [an](#) amendment process.
 - The Plan honors the continuing validity of private, statutory, or pre-existing rights.

The Plan guidance covers National Forest System lands within the PNF boundary, with the exception of Sycamore Canyon Wilderness, which is guided by the Coconino National Forest Land Management Plan.

In the 2009 Analysis of the Management Situation (AMS), the PNF evaluated how management under the current Plan (as amended) was affecting conditions and trends related to sustainability of ecological, economic, and social factors. It integrated key findings from the Ecological Sustainability Report (2009) and the Economic and Social Sustainability Assessment (2008) which were developed previously by the PNF to identify what those conditions and trends were. These documents, and all documents associated with the Plan can be viewed and downloaded from the PNF website: <http://www.fs.fed.us/r3/prescott/plan-revision/index.shtml>.

The AMS identified five areas where there were priority needs for change.

- Restore vegetation arrangements, species, and fire as a natural process to selected ecosystems while using adaptive management to respond to citizen concerns related to smoke emissions.
- Maintain/improve watershed integrity to provide desired water quality, quantity, and timing of delivery.
- Provide sustainable, diverse recreation experiences that consider population demographic characteristics, reflect desires of local communities, avoid overcrowding and user conflicts, and minimize resource damage.
- Provide desired habitat for native fish.
- Enhance the scenic value of PNF-provided open space by defining the value of the visual character within areas near or viewed by those in local communities.

Other needs for change have been and will continue to be identified. New information and changing conditions will call for changes in management. As these needs become ripe for action, iterative and adaptive planning will facilitate the incorporation of new information into potential plan amendments. This adaptive planning approach is in accordance with the National Forest Management Act (NFMA) of 1976 which requires the PNF to amend the Plan, if necessary, to reflect changing forest management needs. This proposed Plan and Plan alternatives will focus on the identified needs for change thus far.

Plan Direction that Remains in Place

The following amendments to the 1987 Prescott National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (the current Plan) were incorporated into the proposed Plan components essentially unchanged. The associated documents where these amendments can be found are located in the Plan Record for the revised Plan.

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- Amendment #10 (1997) provided management direction for Grapevine Botanical Area.
 - Amendment #11 (1999) provides specific direction for access in the Prescott Basin.
 - Amendment #13 (2004) incorporated the Verde Wild and Scenic River Comprehensive River Management Plan.
 - Amendment #14 (2005) provided management direction on the treatment of noxious and invasive weeds.

Other Changes Included in the Revised Plan

Some components of the current Plan are still adequate and timely; these have been carried forward into the revised Plan. Other components of the current Plan will be modified or removed, for reasons including: they describe a purely administrative or procedural function; they duplicate direction that can be found in existing law, regulation, or Forest Service policy; they are based on outdated policies, science, or information; or they include out-of-date terminology. In addition, some standards and guidelines in the current Plan will not be included in the Revised Plan because: they were unnecessarily prescriptive about how to accomplish a project; they did not support attaining desired conditions or accomplishing objectives; or they were duplicative. Finally, much of the monitoring and evaluation guidance in the current Plan focuses solely on outputs rather than overall progress towards the desired conditions (or goals).

Decisions Made in the Plan

Plan decisions include: goals/desired conditions, objectives, guidelines, standards, suitability of uses, special areas, and monitoring.

Desired Conditions (or Goals) describe the aspirational picture for the future of the PNF. They are the social, economic, and ecological attributes toward which management of the land and resources of the plan area are directed. They are aspirations and are not commitments or final decisions approving projects and activities and may only be achievable over a long time period. “Goals”, as required by the 1982 Planning Rule provisions, are articulated as “desired conditions” in this Plan.

Objectives describe how the PNF intends to move toward the desired conditions. Objectives are concise projections of measurable, time-specific intended outcomes. Objectives are the work that we think needs to be done and the means of measuring progress toward achieving or maintaining desired conditions.

Guidelines are guidance or constraints that should apply when an action is being taken that helps to make progress towards desired conditions. A guideline allows for variation if the result would be equally effective. Deviation from a guideline must be addressed in the decision document with the supporting rationale.

Standards are guidance or constraints that apply when an action is being taken to make progress towards desired conditions, but they differ from guidelines in that standards do not allow for deviation without a plan amendment.

Special Areas are lands within the National Forest System (NFS) that have designations by Congress or other delegated authority. “Special Areas” are designated because of their unique or special

characteristics. Examples include wilderness, research natural areas, botanical areas, and national recreation trails.

Suitability of Areas NFS lands are identified as “suitable” for various uses. An area may be identified as suitable or not suitable for certain uses depending on its compatibility with desired conditions and objectives for the area. This plan addresses suitability for timber and grazing in Appendix F and G.

Monitoring is the part of the adaptive management strategy used to determine the degree to which on-the-ground management is maintaining or making progress toward desired conditions. The monitoring plan includes questions and performance measures designed to inform implementation and effectiveness.

Plan Organization

This Plan is organized into the following major divisions:

Chapter 1: Introduction briefly describes the planning area, the analysis of the management situation, the purpose of this plan, the plan components, and how they are distributed throughout the plan. This chapter does not contain Plan decisions.

Chapter 2: Goals/Desired Conditions that apply to all of the PNF include descriptions of desired outcomes as a result of Forest Service management.

Chapter 3: Objectives are a list of measurable, time-specific actions intended to help the PNF progress toward Desired Conditions described in Chapter 2.

Chapter 4. Standards and Guidelines that apply to all of the PNF include guidance or constraints that are expected to be applied as site specific projects are carried out.

Chapter 5. Management Area Direction provides desired conditions, and standards and guidelines that apply to a specific geographic area.

Chapter 6. Monitoring and Evaluation Strategy provides the adaptive management strategy for determining the degree to which on-the-ground management is maintaining or making progress toward desired conditions.

Management Approaches

Management Approaches are not part of the Plan components or decisions, but are expressions of intent for how the PNF intends to carry out aspects of future management. Management approaches are also based on public feedback the PNF received on the Draft Plan regarding suggested methods for carrying out activities. Therefore, this section has been added to reflect our intent and those suggestions.

Collaboration/ Volunteers: There are many who have suggested that they would like to assist with aspects of National Forest Management. The PNF intends to create increasing opportunities for volunteers and partners to be more active as part of National Forest Management. One area this could work well is in natural resource and heritage education and interpretation. Citizen involvement would also be of benefit to the PNF for: increased contact

with recreation visitors to encourage appropriate behavior. Assistance with Plan monitoring is also a possibility. Finally the PNF intends to continue working with the Prescott Area Wildland Urban Interface Commission to encourage the Firewise community programs and to proactively work to reduce risks of intensive fire in the Wildland urban interface. As part of collaboration efforts, the PNF hopes to continue interaction with groups interested in Forest activities so as to better understand recreation and other needs as well as identify partnership opportunities.

Cooperation with Tribal Groups and Agencies

Heritage: Most heritage resource management is guided by laws, existing regulations, and Forest Manual policy. For that reason, few plan components are found in the revised plan that relate to such management. However, heritage resources management will be coordinated with the State Cultural Resource Plan and planning activities of the State Historic Preservation Officer as well as other Tribal, State and Federal agencies. This could include periodic meetings, data sharing, coordination on National Register nominations, interpretation, site protection, and participation in the State heritage resources planning process. In addition, Native American tribes, communities, and Nations will be consulted when heritage resources having religious or traditional cultural values for living communities of American Indian tribes may be present. These communities or tribes will be consulted concerning location and importance of those resources and alternatives for protecting them.

BLM: Arizona is 1 of 19 states where one may locate mining claims or sites. The Forest Service manages minerals found on the surface of National Forest System (NFS) lands and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is responsible for subsurface minerals on NFS and BLM lands. Therefore, if the PNF desires to have an area withdrawn from mineral entry, it requests such a closure from the BLM. Examples of areas which are withdrawn from mineral entry include: a designated wilderness, a portion of a designated wild and scenic river, or a designated recreation area. For areas not withdrawn, the Forest Service may apply mitigations for mining, but it may not prohibit mining.

AZGFD, USFWS, and APHIS: The Arizona Game and Fish Department (AZGFD) directly manages wildlife populations, while the Forest Service manages wildlife habitat. The Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) is the federal agency that addresses non-native plants and animals if that management involves removal of species, such as feral hogs, or the introduction of species, such as insects that prey on invasive plants. The US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) is the agency that oversees direct management of animals and fish across the nation, including administration of the Threatened and Endangered Species Act. The PNF will cooperate with all three of these agencies in order to carry out management activities. For example, management of native fish could involve removal of predator species as well as adjustments in habitat which would require working with one or more of these listed agencies. The PNF also expects to coordinate with AZGFD in development of wildlife linkages (movement corridors) within the PNF so that species such as the pronghorn antelope remain a viable species.

Watershed management

In several Plan components, high priority watersheds or high risk riparian areas are referenced (See objectives O-16 and O-17 in Chapter 3). The intent of the Plan is to address the needs of these priority watersheds by 1) classifying watershed condition across the forest including the

determination of potentially high risk riparian areas and 2) implementing integrated restoration activities on priority watersheds.

Open Space

The PNF intends to participate in meetings hosted by the Verde Valley Land Preservation Institute regarding the East Mingus Land Exchange Task Force. The Verde Valley Land Preservation Institute was formed after the Verde Valley Forum on Open Space. The purpose of the group is to acquire, manage, and enhance the natural open space in the Verde Valley. East Mingus lands occur on steep slopes approximately between Jerome and Clarkdale and south of Jerome.

Concept Descriptions to Improve Reader Understanding in the Revised Plan

This section was placed in this introduction in an effort to respond to questions and feedback we have received related to technical terminology and concepts that were used in preparation of this revised Plan. By gaining some understanding of those concepts early on, further Forest Plan clarity may be improved. The concepts are organized according to the five areas identified in the Need for Change statement.

1. Restore vegetation, structure, composition, and desired characteristics of fire to selected ecosystems, while responding to citizen concerns related to smoke emissions.

In order to improve ecological health and sustainability within several plant communities, the arrangement of vegetation, types of vegetation species, and frequency of disturbances (such as fire) need to be modified.

Concepts for Understanding:

PNVTs: In the Forest Plan revision planning effort a framework was needed to classify and map areas on the Prescott National Forest based on associations of ecological factors. In order to determine needs for change, the PNF used Potential Natural Vegetation Types (PNVTs) as a means of classifying and mapping vegetation on a forest-wide scale. PNVT's were defined for various vegetation communities within the PNF and were assigned to Terrestrial Ecosystem Survey (1997) map units. Terrestrial Ecosystem Survey map units were originally identified for the whole PNF based on field inspection; they classify lands according to similarities in vegetation, local climate, geology, topography and soils. Assigned PNVTs were allowed to be non-contiguous between map units.

Each PNVT description includes a set of 3 or more described conditions or 'states' that reflect changes in size, density, and type of vegetation following disturbance. Estimates were made for how long each condition would be found on the land before vegetative growth moved it into the next stage. A reference condition that identified relative amount of each state at any one time, and the frequency of disturbance were estimated based on scientific literature (Schussman and Smith 2006) or Forest Service experiences within the western United States (Hann and others

2008). Comparisons of the current situation to reference conditions were made to identify needed changes and thus produced acreages found in Chapter 3, Objectives.

Concepts for Understanding:

NNIS: Native plants and wildlife species are those that have evolved or adapted to the ecosystem along with all the other functions and species within the system. Non-native invasive species (NNIS), in this document, are those that are not native to Arizona ecosystems; and because there is a lack of checks and balances within the ecosystem to control their spread, they out-compete native species and quickly expand or spread over large areas. For plants, NNIS can choke out native species which then changes habitat for insect life, animals that feed on that insect life, and ultimately changes the availability of habitat for wildlife. They also can change the fire regime which then affects native species. For fish, non-natives can create a predator-prey situation where native species have difficulty surviving.

There are non-native species that are not invasive and can be beneficial to the ecosystem. Examples include introduced insect species that inhibit or feed on certain invasive plant species or non-native plants such as filaree, an annual plant that provides forage to cattle and wildlife and food and cover for quail and other birds on rangeland. A third term that is sometimes used synonymously with NNIS is noxious weed species. Noxious weed species are those identified by local governments or agencies as a danger to agriculture or local ecosystems and by having them on private property one may incur legal consequences.

Resilience: This term is an ecosystem concept of much debate. For the purposes of the desired conditions described in this document, the term resilience is used to infer the capacity of a system to absorb disturbance and reorganize so that it retains essentially the same function, structure, and identity.

2. Retain or Improve watershed integrity to provide desired water quality, quantity, and timing of delivery.

Watershed integrity is the completeness of watershed function in providing water quality, quantity and timing of delivery. It is influenced by soil function, biological function and the physical shape of the land, including steepness, and geological factors. Vegetative structure and composition, disturbance regimes, and recreation activities all can affect watershed integrity.

Concepts for Understanding:

During any discussion of watersheds, scale needs to be identified. When we talk about the watershed characteristics of the Verde River, for example, are we talking about the 1.6 million acre Upper Verde River watershed including multiple streams that drain into the river, or the 28,700 acre Upper Granite Creek – Watson Lake watershed that covers only a one stream (and its tributaries) and drains into the Upper Verde River?

The means of determining scale in a watershed is the **Hydrologic Unit Code** as developed by the U.S. Geologic Survey. In this system, the larger the watershed, the smaller the Hydrologic Unit Code (HUC). For example, the system creates a hierarchy where many smaller watersheds are

nested within the next level watershed; then many of that level are included in a yet larger watershed.

Watersheds were analyzed at the 6th and 5th HUC level in preparation for plan revision. At that scale, only a portion of most 5th HUC watersheds overlap with PNF land ownership. Therefore, while 5th code watersheds that overlap the PNF range from about 150 to 360 square miles in size, watershed integrity objectives primarily refer to the 1 to 230 square mile portions of those watersheds that actually are part of the PNF.

3. Provide sustainable and diverse recreation experiences that consider population demographic characteristics, reflect desires of local communities, avoid overcrowding and user conflicts, and minimize resource damage.

With increasing populations and numbers of visitors to the Prescott National Forest, conflicts between types of activities, over-crowding, and over-use leading to resource impacts needs to be addressed.

Concepts for Understanding:

The **Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS)** is a classification system that identifies a continuum of setting, activities, and recreation experiences. It is used to inventory large areas based on national criteria involving physical, social, and managerial attributes. The classifications range from the most remote and undeveloped (primitive) to the most developed settings (urban) based on access, remoteness, social encounters, amount of visitor management, and type of recreational development, and visitor impacts.

Primitive (P)—The experience includes isolation from man-made sights, sounds, and management controls in an unmodified environment. Motorized use is not present.

Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized (SPNM)—there is some isolation from man-made sights, sounds and management controls in a predominantly unmodified environment. Few visitors are present but some evidence of use is expected. Motorized use is not present.

Semi-Primitive Motorized (SPM)—is very similar to Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized except that both motorized and non-motorized use is present.

Roaded Natural (RN)—there are about equal opportunities for isolated experiences and opportunities to interact with other groups. The landscape is generally natural. On-site managerial controls are subtle. Both motorized and nonmotorized use is present. The expectation is that visitors will drive to facilities.

Rural (R)—the natural environment is substantially modified. Interactions with other visitors prevail. Sites and sounds of people are readily evident and user concentration is moderate to high.

Urban (U)—a substantially urbanized area is present although the background may have natural elements. There are high levels of human activity, concentrated development, and developed sites and roads are designed for high use.

4. Provide desired habitat for native fish species.

Native fish and other aquatic species are in decline within several watersheds. Native aquatic species are no longer found in five watersheds that overlap with the Prescott National Forest. The Prescott National Forest can provide habitat and watershed characteristics that will support native fish species. The Forest could also cooperate with the State of Arizona in addressing control of non-native species.

Wildlife species diversity and viability: The PNF is required to plan for retaining species diversity and to provide for habitat needed to maintain viable, well-distributed populations of existing native and desired non-native species (FSM1926.15). A list of species was identified including federally listed or candidate species, those species for which management actions could be needed to prevent federal listing, and those for which management actions could be necessary to achieve ecological or other multiple use objectives. The list included birds, mammals, fish, amphibians, reptiles, invertebrates, and plants. Species were screened as to whether or not they occurred in the plan area and were affected by Forest Service management. For species affected by Forest Service management, potential threats that could impact species distribution and abundance were identified and screened to determine which species warrant more detailed consideration in the Plan. For many species, trending toward aquatic and vegetative desired conditions listed in Chapter 2 will maintain species diversity and viability. For others, specific plan components, such as objectives, or standards and guidelines were developed to respond to diversity or viability concerns.

5. Enhance the value of open space provided by the Prescott National Forest by defining the value of visual character within areas near or viewed by those in local communities.

The Prescott National Forest has an opportunity via the Forest Plan to ensure that open space and scenic values are taken into consideration on PNF lands as population density is expected to increase on other ownerships.

Concepts for Understanding:

The **Scenery Management System** provides a systematic approach for determining the relative value and importance of scenery in National Forest lands. It is a method of analyzing National Forest lands using attractiveness, visibility, and level of public value of scenery to determine the scenic integrity of areas on the National Forest. A map (Map A, Appendix A) has been created that classifies the PNF into Scenic Integrity Objectives of High, Medium, or Low. An area of High scenic integrity objective is one that has highly valued scenic qualities and whose integrity should be maintained. Within areas of high or medium Scenic Integrity Objective, guidelines will be applied to help retain scenic qualities.