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Prescott National Forest Forest Plan Revision EIS

Scenery and Open Space Specialist Report

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Introduction

The purpose of this report is to evaluate the potential environmental consequences on scenery and open space that may result from the adoption of a revised land management plan. It examines the consequences of taking no action to revise the current plan and of three different alternatives: the proposed revision of the current plan, an alternative that emphasizes vegetation and wildlife habitat restoration, and an alternative that emphasizes dispersed recreation opportunities.

This report will describe:

- The laws and policies that are relevant to scenic resources and land acquisition on the Prescott National Forest
- The current status of the scenery and open space on the forest
- The Needs for Change addressed in the forest plan revision
- The sections of each alternative considered in detail that are relevant to scenery and open space
- The process and assumptions used in the analysis of these alternatives
- The environmental consequences of these alternatives
- The relationship between the short-term and long-term consequences of the alternatives
- The cumulative consequences to the environment of the alternatives

Legal and Administrative Framework

Relevant laws that apply to scenic resources on the Prescott National Forest (Prescott NF) include:

- **Wilderness Act (1964)** – The act dictates that Wilderness is an area of Federal land that will be managed to retain its primeval character and influence. It is protected and managed so as to preserve its natural condition and the imprint of man's work must be substantially unnoticeable.
- **Wild and Scenic Rivers Act (1968)** – The outstandingly remarkable scenic values of rivers eligible or suitable to be included in the system must be carefully managed. Any management activities that could negatively impact the scenic resources should not be conducted.
- **National Trails System Act (1968)** – This act states that trails should be established within scenic areas and along historic travel routes of the Nation, which are often more remotely located.
- **Environmental Quality Act (1970)** – This act sets forth a national policy for the environment which provides for the enhancement of environmental quality.
- **Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resources Planning Act (1974)** – This act provides direction to conduct aesthetic analysis and assess the impacts on aesthetics for timber harvesting. It also provides the framework for natural resource conservation.
- **National Forest Management Act (1976)** – This act provides direction that the preservation of aesthetic values is analyzed at all planning levels. Part 219.21 requires that the visual resource shall be inventoried and evaluated as an integrated part of

evaluating alternatives in the forest planning process, addressing both the landscape's visual attractiveness and the public's visual expectation.

- **Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act (1977)** – The act states that "a surface area may be designated unsuitable for certain types of surface coal mining operations if such operations will result in significant damage to important aesthetic values and natural systems."
- **Public Rangelands Improvement Act (1978)** – This act declares that "unsatisfactory conditions on public rangelands reduce the value of such lands for recreational and aesthetic purposes."

In addition the Forest Service has routinely included both scenery and recreation as part of the 1960 Multiple Use-Sustained Yield Act.

The following USDA handbooks establish a framework for management of scenic resources. These handbooks were written when the Visual Management System was in place. The Visual Management System (VMS) has now been replaced by the Scenery Management System. The handbooks still apply to management of scenic resources.

- National Forest Landscape Management Volume 1. Agriculture Handbook 434: 1973
- Utilities, Chapter 2, Agriculture Handbook 478: 1975
- Range, Chapter 3, Agriculture Handbook 484: 1977
- Roads, Chapter 4, Agriculture Handbook 483: 1977
- Timber, Chapter 5, Agriculture Handbook 559: 1980
- Fire, Chapter 6, Agriculture Handbook 608: 1985
- Ski Areas, Chapter 7, Agriculture Handbook 617: 1984
- Recreation, Chapter 8, Agriculture Handbook 666: 1987
- Landscape Aesthetics, A Handbook for Scenery Management, Agriculture Handbook 701: 1995
- **FSH 1909.13.13a, Chapter 10:** "When pertinent to the issues...the Scenery Management System should be used to describe...desired conditions and objectives."
- **FSH 1909.13.2.3:** "...Also, see FSM 2380.61 for landscape aesthetics guidance."
- **FSM 2380.43.5** "Ensure application of the principles of landscape aesthetics, scenery management, and environmental design in project level planning"
- **FSM 2380.61** "Refer to the following publications in the Department of Agriculture's National Forest Landscape Management Series for technical guidance in managing landscape aesthetics and scenery." The pertinent publication is USDA Agriculture Handbook 701, "Landscape Aesthetics: A Handbook for Scenery Management".

Relevant laws that apply to the way that the Forest Service can acquire private lands and convey federal lands:

- **General Exchange Act (1922)** – This act regulates the exchanging of federal and non-federal lands
- **Townsite Act (1958)** – This act regulates the conveyance of National Forest land to a private party or municipality for fair market value.

- **Land and Water Conservation Fund Act of 1965 (1965)** – This act establishes fee authority at certain recreational areas and establishes a fund to subsidize state and federal acquisition of lands and waters for recreational and conservation purposes.
- **Sisk Act (1967)** – This act regulates the conveyance of National Forest land to a private party or municipality for fair market value.
- **Federal Land Policy and Management Act (1976)** – This is the "organic act" that establishes the Bureau of Land Management's multiple-use mandate to serve present and future generations. It is referenced in the 1987 Prescott NF Land and Resource Management Plan with regard to criteria for land exchange.
- **Small Tracts Act (1983)** – This act regulates the conveyance of National Forest land to a private party or municipality for fair market value.
- **Federal Land Exchange Facilitation Act (1988)** – This act regulates the conveyance of National Forest land to a private party or municipality for fair market value.
- **Northern Arizona Land Exchange Act (2005)** – This act sanctions an exchange of federal land for non-federal land in Northern Arizona and includes land on the Prescott NF.

Affected Environment

Scenery

The scenery of the Prescott NF is diverse, and includes mountains, pine forests, grasslands, lakes, streams, rugged canyons, and high desert plains. Visitors are drawn to the area for its open spaces, remoteness, tranquility, beautiful scenery and the cool climate of the high elevation which provides an escape from the desert heat. The variety of historic elements is rich in character and culture.

As stated in the abstract of the *Landscape Aesthetics Handbook for Scenery Management*, "High quality scenery, especially with natural-appearing landscapes enhances people's lives and benefits society." Natural features such as vegetation, water features, land form and geology as well as human made elements are factors which when combined define scenery.

The report of the President's Commission on America's Outdoors (1987) states that America's most important attribute for a recreation area is natural beauty. Sightseeing, driving for pleasure and outdoor photography are among the nation's highest ranking recreational activities. In addition to providing the main focus of an activity on the forest, scenery is an integral part of most recreational forest activities and contributes to the quality of the user's experience.

The fact that Prescott NF visitors value scenery is supported by the 2008 National Visitor Use Monitoring results. 81.9 percent of visitors said they participated in the activity "Viewing natural features (scenery)" and 18.4 percent of the respondents said that this was their primary activity on the forest. 68.2 percent said they participated in the activity of hiking and 44.5 percent said it was the primary reason for their forest visit. When asked about facilities or areas used, 16.2 percent indicated that they used the Scenic Byway.

The Scenery Management System (SMS) is a tool which was developed to determine the relative value and importance of scenery on National Forest Lands. It provides a framework to effectively inventory, assess, and manage scenic resources in sustainable and multiple use contexts.

The condition of the scenic resources of the 1.2 million acres of the Prescott NF is quite good. Since the Forest Service mission is to manage multiple resources, some of the other resources can have an effect on scenery. Older vegetation management practices such as juniper “pushes” have a negative impact since numerous dead trees often including roots laying on their sides is not an attractive or natural look. Similarly some mining activities can leave scars on the landscape. Other activities like fire and recent vegetation management activities can improve visual quality. Fire and tree thinning may initially be quite a change from the existing landscape but in a fairly short time can be more attractive.

One measure of the condition of the scenic resource used in the SMS is Existing Scenic Integrity. This is a snapshot in time which was most recently taken in 2007. The definition from the handbook glossary is “Current state of the landscape, considering previous human alterations.” It indicates the degree of intactness or naturalness of the landscape. Conversely it is a measure of features which are incompatible with the surrounding area. For example a quarry area where vegetation and rock have been removed will look much altered when compared to the area around it and would receive an Existing Scenic Integrity (ESI) of “Very Low”.

Table 1. Existing Scenic Integrity on the Prescott NF

Existing Scenic Integrity	Acres	Percentage
Very High	104,487	8.3%
High	1,045,737	83.3%
Moderate	93,929	7.5%
Low	2,795	0.2%
Very Low	8,535	0.7%

The 2007 mapping revealed that 8 percent of the forest, primarily the designated Wilderness Areas, received a rating of “Very High”, the highest level of ESI. The majority of the remaining Forest land, 83 percent is naturally appearing and has an ESI of “High”. This means that any deviations from the natural landscape character should repeat the form, line color and texture patterns of the surrounding area and therefore are not apparent.

Only 7 percent of the forest was considered “Moderate” or appears slightly altered due to management activities such as livestock improvements, utility corridors and some timber and mining activities or noticeable erosion in gullied drainages.

“Low” and “Very Low” accounted for less than 1 percent of the acreage on the forest. A “Low” ESI means the valued landscape character is moderately altered. Examples of this are electric transmission lines through shrub vegetated landscapes and some vegetation treatments. A “Very Low” ESI was assigned to areas such as most utility corridors, communications sites and gravel pits that strongly dominate the existing landscape. There were no areas rated as “Unacceptably Low”.

There are a number of threats to maintaining the relatively high level of ESI on the Prescott NF.

Increased impacts from recreation use

At statehood in 1912, Arizona's population was approximately 200,000 people. By 2005, the population had increased to more than 6 million, and Arizona currently has the fastest rate of population growth in the country. Population growth in Yavapai County exceeded even the rate of increase in overall state population from 1980 to 2000 (146 percent versus 89 percent, respectively). This increase in population has led to an increase in Forest users, which in turn has led to an increased demand for recreation facilities. The development of these facilities has not kept up with the demand, and the result has been an increase in unauthorized (social) trails, erosion and compaction at popular sites, loss of vegetation due to trampling, and trash left behind by visitors. These impacts contribute to the degradation of the visual quality in the areas that are frequented by forest visitors.

Communications towers and utility corridors

In recent years there has been an increase in the number of requests for large scale utility infrastructure to respond to population increases. In addition, other neighboring agencies, such as the Bureau of Land Management, have received an increase in the number of requests for permits to use public lands for alternative energy production, implying that the Prescott NF may also be affected. As discussed earlier, this type of activity and scale of these projects can have a huge impact on the landscape, but they are often unavoidable.

Mining

Surface and underground mining and quarrying are activities that are allowed by law and regulation on National Forest Lands. Depending on the type and size of operation these activities can have a large impact on the visual quality of the forest. When materials are being permanently removed it is difficult to mitigate the scenic consequences. Construction of new or the upgrading of existing access roads can also have a negative consequence on the scenery. (1872 Mining law and a 1963 USDA "Conditions, Rules and Regulations to govern exercise of mineral Rights reserved in conveyances to the United States, CFR Title 36-Chapter II –Section 251.15)

Climate Change

Scenery is indirectly affected by climate change. Higher mean annual temperatures and longer, hotter, drier, summers can lead to drought conditions and visual impacts from increased vegetation mortality. Shorter or insufficiently cold winters can increase insect and disease activity, further contributing to vegetation mortality. When combined, warmer temperatures and more dead vegetation increase the chance for catastrophic wildfire. In addition to the visual impact of such an event, the loss of vegetation and ground cover increases the probability and severity of erosion across the burned landscape. The visual quality would recover as the vegetation returned, but the negative impacts could last for ten to twenty years or more.

Land Ownership

Created under a presidential proclamation in 1898, the Prescott Forest Reserve was an area of 16 square miles centered at the head of Aspen Creek in Copper Basin, west of the town of Prescott.

The current size and shape of the Prescott NF is the result of a number of presidential proclamations, executive orders and Public Land Orders between 1898 and 1962. Portions of the former Verde and Tusayan National Forests, along with a portion of the Coconino National Forest, were transferred to the Prescott NF and several times during the 1900s portions of the Prescott NF were transferred to the Tonto National Forest.

At the present, the Prescott NF is approximately 1.25 million acres in size. Its shape on the map can best be described as two large and somewhat equal, stair-stepping polygons running parallel from northwest to southeast. These are separated by blocks of Bureau of Land Management (BLM) land, and alternating square-mile sections of state and private land. Larger blocks of private land, located in and around the various municipalities, and more BLM acres, lie along the Forest's proclamation boundaries.

Within the proclamation boundaries of the forest, there are an estimated 168,000 acres of private and other non-Federal lands which exist in a fragmented pattern. This is due principally to the area's rich history of mining and ranching. These activities resulted in the patenting of federal land for mining claims and homestead entries. A typical patented mining claim or Mineral Survey (MS) is rectangular in shape, approximately 20 acres in size, and oriented along the lode or vein and many times overlap one another. The communities of Walker, Ponderosa Pines and Crown King are good examples of this configuration. On the map, they appear as the white shapes that contain numerous rectangular polygons with small wedge shaped intrusions or triangular islands of green interspersed throughout. Homestead Entry Surveys (HES) are patented (private) lands surrounded by National Forest lands that generally occupy small, flat, fertile areas with natural water. They range in size to upwards of 160 acres and appear on the forest map as square, rectangular, trapezoidal, or a combination of these polygons.

Another prominent ownership pattern on the Prescott NF can be found in the northwestern section of the forest. This land ownership pattern involves approximately 50,000 acres of federal and non-federal land where the ownership alternates between every section. This alternating pattern of federal sections and non-federal sections looks like a checkerboard when displayed as alternating green and white squares on the forest map. These checkerboard lands are the result of the federal government in the late 1800s patenting the odd sections of land along proposed railway routes to railroad companies. The strips ranged from six to forty miles wide along the proposed route and the purpose was to provide an incentive to the railroad companies to build a rail line from the interior of the country to the Pacific Ocean. The railroad could develop or sell the sections, or harvest the natural resources (timber and ore) in order to finance the venture. With the passage of the Forest Reserve Act of 1898, the even sections of federal land became National Forest System land. In these checkerboards, private sections surround each federal section on all four sides, and these islands of National Forest System land have been a challenge to manage since the passage of the Forest Reserve Act.

Since the early 1960s, discussions regarding land exchange between the Prescott NF and the private land owners of the checkerboard properties have waxed and waned. It was not until the late 1990s that discussion about a land exchange started to gain momentum. In November of 2005, Congress passed Public Law 109-110, known as the Northern Arizona Land Exchange Act. The purpose of the act was to sanction an exchange of approximately 15,000 acres of federal land, including parcels in the checkerboard, and acreage in and adjacent to the communities of Flagstaff, Williams and Camp Verde, for approximately 35,000 acres of non-federal land in the checkerboard. This exchange would consolidate both the federal and private ownership within the

checkerboard and provide land for the expansion of the adjacent communities. Once completed, the Forest Service will have acquired approximately two-thirds of the private sections on the west and south end of the checkerboard and improved the public access and manageability on this tract.

Appropriations for land and interests in land purchases have always been extremely limited and highly competitive. Donation of non-Federal lands is very infrequent, and the authority to sell National Forest lands is very rare and limited. Land exchanges will continue to be the primary method used for land adjustments on the Prescott NF. Since 1986, the Prescott NF has acquired approximately 2,100 acres of non-Federal lands that were deemed valuable for public access, open space, scenic qualities and the protection of natural resources. During the same period, the Prescott NF conveyed approximately 760 acres that had essentially lost their National Forest character into non-Federal ownership.

Land Use

The land ownership patterns that developed under the homesteading laws persist today in and around the Prescott NF and are reflected in the diversity of land use. The current land use on, and surrounding, the forest varies from farming and ranching in rural areas to dense concentrations of residential, industrial, and commercial use in urban settings.

Between 1980 and 2000 Yavapai County's population growth has out-paced that of Arizona, which has had the fastest growth rate of any state in the nation. As a response, in the last ten years the conversion of private parcels from farming and ranching to more rural residential urban land has increased dramatically in the areas around the Prescott NF. This shift has been especially visible in the Verde Valley, Williamson Valley, Prescott Valley, Dewey, and Humboldt. These private parcels include a number of patented mining claims that have since been subdivided and developed as year-round and seasonal residences. Some of the homesteaded lands in and around the Prescott NF have also been subdivided and converted to housing developments. Those that do remain as ranches are generally associated with National Forest grazing allotments.

With an increase in the public awareness of the ecological benefits of ranch lands, there is a potential for the public to recognize that there is more value to ranch lands than just the economic value. That is, ranch lands also provide benefits in the form of open space and wildlife habitat. Nationally, landowners and conservation groups have increasingly recognized these values, as evidenced by the sale of conservation easements and the transfer of development rights. Access to National Forest grazing lands plays a part in sustaining ranching on private and State Trust lands in central Arizona, and given the relatively high percentage of these lands in proximity to the Prescott NF, future use will be highly relevant to forest management.

Open Space

Open space describes land that is valued for natural processes and wildlife, agricultural and forest production, aesthetic beauty, active and passive recreation, and other public benefit. Such lands include working and natural forests, rangelands, farms, ranches, parks stream and river corridors, and other natural lands within rural, suburban, and urban areas. Open space may be protected or unprotected, public or private.

-Forest Service Open Space Conservation Strategy

Preservation of open space is a predominant land use issue, given both the public's desire to maintain the "rural character" of county lands and the need to accommodate rapidly growing populations and municipalities. National Forests lands that abut private lands, by their very nature, fill that niche. It is understandable why private land adjacent to open space, such as the Prescott NF, would be highly desirable as rural residences. However, land ownership within and along the boundaries of the Prescott NF presents challenges to Forest managers. As the population of the area increases, private lands in and around the Prescott NF are increasingly subject to subdivision and development. It is common for the buyer to view the adjacent portion of public land as their "little slice of National Forest". This can be especially true when private lands surround small portions of public lands and may be inaccessible to the public in general.

With increased growth comes the increased probability of encroachment, trespass and unauthorized use on the Prescott NF. An encroachment can involve a color of title issue, such as the innocent use of public land due to an errant private survey, whereas a trespass implies the individual or individuals knowingly used or occupied public lands without authorization. An example of unauthorized use would be an individual building his home across a clearly marked and posted National Forest boundary line. Other examples of unauthorized use include; planting a garden on public land; placing picnic tables or horseshoe pits across the property line; cutting trees or brush on National Forest land to 'get a better view'; or digging into a hillside (across the boundary) to widen a parking area or driveway.

A common unauthorized use for landowners along public lands is to create a social trail from their property out onto National Forest land. This often happens through continued use of the trail by foot, horseback or off-highway vehicle. Another common and troubling misuse of public lands involves the dumping of household refuse and trash (refrigerators, stoves, old cars, tires, etc...) by individuals who would rather not take the time, or go to the trouble or expense, of hauling their trash to an authorized public landfill.

The impacts on National Forest System lands by activities such as those mentioned above can be enormous, and ultimately result in the loss of National Forest characteristics. The irony being that, the *loss of National Forest characteristics* is one of several criteria used by Forest managers when evaluating federal lands for conveyance. Simply put, National Forest land can be impacted to such a point where it loses its value as National Forest land and quite possibly loses its value as open space.

Partnerships

One of four priority actions as stated in the *Forest Service Open Space Conservation Strategy* is to "Convene partners to identify and protect **priority** open space." The Prescott NF works with

land conservation groups to help identify potential properties within Yavapai County. The objective "...is to facilitate, encourage, and galvanize voluntary land conservation to help ensure that forests and grasslands across the landscape can continue to provide valued services and benefits for society." The Prescott NF has focused on acquisition opportunities adjacent to the forest, whereas local communities and open space groups have strategies that look at critical lands within and around communities.

Need for Change

The Prescott NF Analysis of the Management Situation identified a list of eight possible Needs for Change covering topics that had not been adequately addressed in the current forest plan. Five of these became topics for the forest plan revision, and include the following Need for Change related to open space and visual character:

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

The high rate of population growth within Yavapai County, combined with limited lands for development, sensitizes residents to land development, land exchange, and land use issues. The Prescott NF has an opportunity, via the revised Plan, to ensure that scenic values are taken into consideration as population density is expected to increase on other ownerships. Defining the value of open space on the Prescott NF will help to display the benefits these lands provide to local communities, should a land exchange be proposed.

Issues to be addressed.

- Scenic integrity near communities, and especially within the Verde Valley, needs to be retained.
- Options for acquiring lands by the Prescott NF need to be investigated, especially in areas that provide riparian benefit and areas that help to retain open space values.

Because visual quality and open space were identified as areas of concern by the public, it was necessary to first re-map the existing condition of the forest's scenic resource. In 1995 the Forest Service introduced a new system for inventorying and analyzing scenery. The Scenery Management System (SMS) replaced the older Visual Management System (VMS). The intent was that each forest would change to the new system at the time of next forest plan revision. One of the big differences between the two systems is that, in addition to looking at the natural systems, the SMS addresses the human dimension.

The SMS changed the end product emphasis from Prescriptive (what to do in an area) to Strategic (what are the possibilities). By mapping the entire forest using the SMS, it helps us identify and analyze the suitability and sustainability of the scenic resource.

The last mapping of scenery was done in 1986. Since that time many things have changed. When the 1986 mapping was done, all of the forests in the Southwest Region were looked at as one. While the Prescott has many scenic areas, they did not always rate as high when compared to other Forests in the region.

The other major change since 1986 is the increase in population. Both the new and old scenery systems look at a combination of the intrinsic beauty of an area and the visibility of it from major roads, trails and sites. With the increase in people enjoying the forest there are more travel ways and use areas where there are a number of people who place a high importance on viewing landscapes.

The end results of the SMS process are Scenic Integrity Objectives (SIO) these are comparable to Visual Quality Objectives (VQO) produced under the VMS. Due to the reasons listed above the percentage of the SIO in the high range (High) increased dramatically from the high range of the VQO, (Retention). The acres of Preservation dropped slightly due to a mapping inaccuracy in the 1986 VQO, where the category was incorrectly assigned to non-wilderness areas, but not because of a decrease in wilderness.

Table 2. Forest-wide comparison of existing VQOs to proposed SIOs

VQO	Acres	SIO	Acres
Preservation	133,669	Very High	108,742
Retention	49,157	High	442,171
Partial Retention	213,137	Moderate	668,214
Modification	636,934	Low	33,375
Maximum Modification	222,902	Very Low	2,959

Another component of SMS is the landscape character. This is a verbal description of what the area looks like in terms of physical and biological features combined with the values that people assign to it. What are the things that make an area unique. Landscape character can be expressed in terms of the existing condition and the desired condition. In the 1987 plan, the existing landscape character descriptions were again done on a regional scale and 92 percent of the Prescott NF fell within one landscape character description. A Landscape Character Description report prepared in 2009 divided the forest into 10 geographical areas each having its own identifiable characteristics. A detailed existing landscape character description was created for each of these areas.

The communities associated with the Prescott NF have expressed a desire to maintain their rural nature and small town character, and the preservation of open space is one of the approaches that can be used to achieve this goal. The retention of open space values is not listed among the criteria for acquiring private holding in the current forest plan. Management direction is needed to promote the sustainability of undeveloped landscapes within the Forest boundary and to develop a coordinated effort between private landowners, other government entities, and the public to protect open space within and adjacent to the Prescott NF.

Summary of Alternatives

A full summary of the alternatives considered in detail can be found in Chapter Two of the Draft Environmental Impact Analysis. Below is a summary of how each alternative relates to scenic integrity and land acquisition.

Alternative A (No action)

Alternative A represents the guidance provided by the current plan for the Prescott NF. Under the current plan, emphasis on management for the value of open space would be limited to visual values as described by Visual Quality Objectives. The current plan does not recognize ecological services provided on other jurisdictions or ownerships, and does not provide guidance for encouraging the conservation of other lands.

About 13 percent of the Forest would be classified for retention or preservation of scenery values, but the remaining areas would allow for modification or maximum modification of visual character. Areas with high visual quality goals would be concentrated next to the Verde River and around highly traveled roads and developed recreation areas, including the roads leading to recreation areas. The predominant Visual Quality Objective within Grief Hill and Black Canyon areas would be partial retention of scenic values.

Direction for the acquisition of lands through exchange focuses on conveying isolated tracts that cannot be efficiently managed, consolidating public lands through acquisition, providing lands needed for expanding communities, and meeting overriding public needs. The land acquisition and exchange criteria in the current plan are based on policy direction set forth in the Federal Land Policy and Management Act and the Land and Water Conservation Fund Act.

Alternative B (Proposed Revised Forest Plan)

Alternative B would implement a new framework for evaluating scenic integrity. Approximately 43 percent of the Forest would be classified as High or Very High scenic integrity. A classification of High Scenic Integrity would be assigned to nearly all of the Grief Hill and Black Canyon areas.

Alternative B would also provide direction to act upon up to 10 opportunities to acquire lands in the Verde Valley. Preference would be given, as feasible and as presented, to those areas along the middle and upper Verde River and in other portions of the forest to retain open space values and to enhance riparian habitat, as shown on Map F in the Proposed Revised Plan. The Prescott NF would take scenic and open space values, as well as community vision statements, into account when responding to these land exchange proposals.

Alternative C (Vegetation & Wildlife Emphasis)

Response to this revision topic in Alternative C would be identical to that described in Alternative B.

Alternative D (Dispersed Recreation Alternative)

Response to this revision topic in Alternative D would be identical to that described in Alternative B.

Methodology and Analysis Process

The analysis of the environmental consequences of the proposed actions was based on the professional judgment of the Forest Landscape Architect and the Lands Program Manager for the Prescott NF.

The Scenery Management System (SMS), a tool developed and deployed nationally by the USDA Forest Service, was used to map, inventory, and assess the current state of the scenic resource on the Prescott NF. It provides a systematic approach for determining the relative value and importance of scenery on National Forest lands.

The first step in SMS is to describe the valued landscape character. The Landscape Character Description includes the valued attributes of the landscape, including the important elements of the social environment and environmental regimes, creating a “sense of place.” A description of the biological and physical elements is drawn from data available for ecological or planning units. This Landscape Character Description provides the frame of reference for defining the Scenic Attractiveness classes.

The Landscape Character Description is also used as a reference for the Existing Scenic Integrity. Existing scenic integrity (ESI) indicates the degree of intactness and wholeness of the landscape character. Conversely, ESI is also a measure of the degree of visible disruption of the landscape character. For example, a landscape with very minimal visual disruption is considered to have a higher ESI; while landscapes with conflicting scenic attributes are viewed as having a lower ESI. ESI is expressed and mapped in terms of very high, high, moderate, low, very low, and unacceptably low. There were no areas on the Prescott NF determined to have an unacceptably low level of scenic integrity, so the ESI determination contained only the five categories described below.

- **Very High** - A scenic integrity level that generally provides for ecological change only. The landscape character is intact. Examples would include all designated wilderness areas.
- **High** - A scenic integrity level meaning human activities are not visually evident; the landscape character appears intact. In high scenic integrity areas, activities may only repeat attributes of form, line, color, and texture found in the existing landscape character. Examples would include the Black Hills area west of the Verde Valley and areas southeast of Granite Mountain Wilderness.
- **Moderate** - A scenic integrity level meaning human activities must remain visually subordinate to the attributes of the existing landscape character. Activities may repeat form, line, color, or texture common to these landscape characters, but changes in quality of size, number, intensity, direction, pattern, and so on, must remain visually subordinate to these landscape characters. Examples include areas immediately west and south of Prescott along the Forest boundary.
- **Low** - A scenic integrity level meaning human activities begin to dominate the attributes of the existing landscape character, but they borrow from naturally established form, line, color, or texture so that its visual characteristics are those of natural occurrences within the surrounding area. Examples include areas on the eastern end of the Santa Maria Mountains along the Forest boundary.

- **Very Low** - A scenic integrity level meaning human activities of vegetative and landform alterations may dominate the original, natural landscape character but should appear as natural occurrences when viewed at background distances. Examples include certain areas disturbed by flagstone quarries northeast of Drake.

The next step of the SMS inventory is the mapping of “Scenic Classes,” which show the relative importance of scenery. Scenic Classes are determined from a combination of the uniqueness of lands (called Scenic Attractiveness) and who is viewing those lands (called Landscape Visibility). There are 7 Scenic Classes, with 1 being the highest and 7 being the lowest.

Scenic Attractiveness is used to determine the relative scenic value of lands within a particular landscape character. The three scenic attractiveness classes are: Class A - distinctive; Class B - typical; and Class C - indistinctive. The landscape elements of landform, vegetation, rocks, cultural features, and water features are considered when determining each of these classes.

Landscape Visibility is composed of two parts: human values as they relate to the relative importance to the public of various scenes and the relative sensitivity of scenes based on distance from an observer. Human values that affect perceptions of landscapes are derived from constituent analysis. Constituent analysis serves as a guide to perceptions of attractiveness, helps identify special places, and helps to define the meaning people give to the landscape. Constituent analysis leads to a determination of the relative importance of aesthetics to the public. This importance is expressed as a concern level. Sites, travelways, special places, and other areas are assigned a concern level value of 1, 2, or 3 to reflect their relative high, medium, or low importance.

As part of the Landscape Visibility analysis, seen areas and distance zones are mapped from these concern level areas to determine the relative sensitivity of scenes based on their distance from an observer. These distance zones are identified as:

- **Foreground** – up to 1/2 mile from observer
- **Middleground** – 1/2 to 4 miles from the observer
- **Background** – 4 miles from the observer to the horizon

Seldom seen areas not seen from travel routes or identified use points are assigned a concern level 1, 2, or 3, based on concern for a specific area, and they may occur in any distance zone or scenic attractiveness class.

A composite scenery base map was produced in ArcMap showing the Existing Scenic Integrity and the Scenic Classes. This was then used to develop new Scenic Integrity Objectives (SIOs) for the proposed revised forest plan.

Assumptions

In the analysis of the plan revision alternatives, the following assumptions have been made:

- These land management plans provide programmatic frameworks for future site-specific actions.
- These land management plans do not have direct effects. They do not authorize or mandate any site-specific projects or activities (including ground-disturbing actions).

- These land management plans may have implications for, or longer term environmental consequences from, management on the Prescott NF under these programmatic frameworks.
- The plan decisions (desired conditions, objectives, standards, guidelines, management areas, monitoring) will be followed when planning or implementing site-specific projects and activities.
- Law, policy, and regulations will be followed when planning or implementing site-specific projects and activities.
- Monitoring will occur and the land management plan will be amended, as needed.
- The planning period is 10 years.

Environmental Consequences

The land management plan provides a programmatic framework that guides site-specific actions but does not authorize, fund, or carry out any project or activity. Because the land management plan does not authorize or mandate ground-disturbing actions, there are no direct effects. However, there may be implications, or longer term environmental consequences, of managing the Prescott NF under this programmatic framework.

Table 3. Comparison of Alternatives

	<u>Alternative A</u>	<u>Alternative B</u>	<u>Alternative C</u>	<u>Alternative D</u>
Scenic integrity near communities	Less protection, long-term decrease in visual quality	More protection, improved visual quality	More protection, most long-term improvement	More protection, improved visual quality
Open space values	No emphasis	Strong emphasis		
Riparian benefits	Strong emphasis			

Alternative A (No action)

Management of the scenic resources of the Prescott NF would remain under the goals, objectives, standards, and guidelines in the 1987 Forest Plan (as amended), and this direction fails to address current issues regarding open space and threats to the scenic integrity of the Forest. This could result in the degradation of the visual quality near communities that are adjacent to the Forest. In addition, the lack of specific direction to consider open space values during land exchanges could negatively affect communities adjacent to the forest.

In Alternative A, all of the visual quality analysis would be under the outdated 1986 Visual Quality Objectives (VQO). These do not reflect changes in visitor use or reflect the public's concern for open space and scenery. They do not provide protection of the forest from many of today's threats to the scenic resource. In particular, the views into the forest from the communities of Camp Verde and Cottonwood could be in danger of negative change. The Black

Hills, the backdrop for these communities, currently has a VQO of Partial Retention, which provides only a moderate amount of protection of the visual resource.

The current plan does provide guidance and criteria for the acquisition and exchange of land parcels, but the primary focus is on facilitating forest management and meeting public and community needs for infrastructure growth. As such, acquisition guidelines include direction for the preservation of wetlands and riparian areas, but do not provide guidance for encouraging the retention of open space, either on Prescott NF lands or those in adjacent ownership. According to the Verde Valley Regional Management Plan, "...open space is possibly the most prized asset of the Verde Valley Region's residents", and the residents are concerned with "... preventing the loss of openness, which epitomizes the sense of place in the Verde Valley".

This alternative does not contain descriptions of the desired conditions, which help to provide guidance for managing visual quality on the Forest. It does, however, contain standards and guidelines for visual quality which are no longer needed, or not feasible to accomplish. Because the VQOs do not reflect the current conditions of the scenic resource, a plan amendment is often required to update the VQO in the area of a specific project.

There would be some protection for the visual quality of designated Wilderness Areas and Inventoried Roadless Areas (IRAs) due to the restrictions placed upon development, but there is little to protect visual quality from the impacts of utility lines or mining activities outside of these areas. There would be no Potential Wilderness Areas (PWAs) recommended for wilderness designations, therefore there would be no additional acreage receiving visual quality protection or withdrawn from consideration for conveyance.

Alternative B (Proposed Revised Forest Plan)

The adoption of the Scenery Management System and resulting Scenic Integrity Objectives (SIOs) in Alternative B would lead to improved guidance and flexibility for protecting the scenic resources of the Forest and addressing threats to the scenic integrity. Specific direction to retain open space values would provide guidance for land acquisitions. The result of this alternative would be increased protection for the visual quality, especially near communities that are adjacent to the forest, which in turn would provide positive benefits by retaining scenic integrity and helping to preserve the sense of openness and rural character in these communities. The rural character and sense of openness would be further enhanced by plan guidance to act on opportunities to acquire land, as feasible, to retain open space values.

A small number of land uses which have a large impact, such as utility corridors and some mining activities, may still override visual quality concerns, however, the higher the SIO the more mitigations that could be required to better blend the use into the existing landscape. This is also true in the case of road building, which is required for many activities. In some cases a road could later provide access for forest visitors to then afford views of the scenery which they might not otherwise have seen.

More protection of the visual quality of the areas surrounding the Verde Valley and Prescott communities would be provided by increasing the amount of lands adjacent to the communities which have an SIO of High and decreasing the amount in the Low and Very Low categories. The changes between the existing VQO and the proposed SIO for these communities are seen in the

tables below. Again the decrease in the Preservation/Very High is due to an area west of Cedar Bench which was mapped in 1986 as a wilderness area.

Table 4. Comparison of existing VQOs to proposed SIOs for the Verde Valley

Existing VQO	Acres	Percentage	Proposed SIO	Acres	Percentage
Preservation	8,436	6.0 %	Very High	9,922	7.0 %
Retention	20,264	14.4 %	High	67,946	48.2 %
Partial Retention	57,178	40.6 %	Moderate	59,368	42.1 %
Modification	47,707	33.9 %	Low	3,607	2.6 %
Maximum Modification	7,261	5.2 %	Very Low	17	0.0 %

Table 5. Comparison of existing VQOs to proposed SIOs for the Prescott Basin

Existing VQO	Acres	Percentage	Proposed SIO	Acres	Percentage
Preservation	0	0.0 %	Very High	0	0.0 %
Retention	12,307	22.4 %	High	33,440	60.9 %
Partial Retention	18,298	33.3 %	Moderate	21,407	39.0 %
Modification	23,585	43.0 %	Low	58	0.1 %
Maximum Modification	693	1.3 %	Very Low	0	0.0 %

Desired condition descriptions would provide a vision for scenic quality across the Prescott NF and provide targets for managers to move toward.

Objectives, guidelines and standards for scenery and other resources are more relevant to today's Forest and provide better protection of the scenic resource.

Guidelines have an increased emphasis on resource protection and rehabilitation. Minimizing erosion and rehabilitation of disturbed areas in particular, would protect or improve visual quality

Vegetation/Fire

Vegetation/Fire treatments to meet objectives 1-5 would have an initial negative consequence on scenery because of the change in conditions due to the activity. Over time these landscapes would recover to a more natural state and the visual quality would be the same or improved.

In the case of burning grasslands, the area would at first be unattractive, (blackened) but within one season, new growth would appear and within 3 years it should look similar to what it was originally. (Semi-Desert Grasslands, Great Basin Grasslands)

For a forest thinning project, opening up a dense stand allows more light to reach the forest floor and therefore more understory vegetation; variety of vegetation is a positive visual quality. Increasing tree spacing allows crowns to spread, producing a healthier and more attractive tree which should live longer. A thinning project could also open up views into and through a stand. (Ponderosa Pine-Gambel Oak and Ponderosa Pine-Evergreen Oak)

Guideline # 6 in Wildland Fire, lessens the initial visual consequences of fire to the viewing public by stating that scorch and char on trees is to be minimized when burn is in highly visible areas. Similarly, Guideline #7, states that location of slash piles are to be outside of sensitive areas and placement and timing of burning shall minimize scorch.

Guidelines #2-7 in Forest Health Management Vegetation deal with mitigations to lessen the impacts of the timber activity on the scenic resource. They focus on the areas which would be most visible to the public, which are identified as Concern Level 1 and 2 roads.

The suggested treatment of the interior chaparral, juniper grasslands, and piñon-juniper evergreen shrub vegetation types includes biomass removal and mechanical treatments as well as fire. Biomass and mechanical treatments require a considerable amount of mechanized equipment to be traversing the land. There is greater opportunity to leave unsightly wheel ruts that could last for years, and potentially cause erosion. The machinery could also damage vegetation that was meant to be left in place. Mitigation measures for these treatments could help to minimize these short term consequences. Long term positive consequences are less dense vegetation and more varied sizes of shrubs in the landscape.

The interior chaparral vegetation type may be considered less aesthetically pleasing than some of the others. Depending on the type and scale of any one treatment area it would be a noticeable change and at first because of the change could be visually unattractive for a period of a few years. As new vegetation returns the visual quality would return to what it was or possibly improve.

The juniper grasslands and piñon-juniper evergreen shrub vegetation types are visually attractive in small areas but often large expanses of these vegetation types can be visually monotonous. Use of mechanical treatments in these areas could open up views through often dense vegetation and improve visual quality. The resulting slash could at first be visually unattractive until it weathers, typically less than a year.

The treatment of 75-90 percent of non-native invasive species would have an initial negative impact from the removal or killing of vegetation, but in time as these are replaced with native species. Invasive plants may be recognized by some but not all of the general population as unattractive vegetation, however, not eradicating them could have negative impacts on the visual character of an area. Because these plants tend to be aggressive they will often crowd out desirable natives and could produce a large area of a monoculture species. Variety in the landscape is an important attribute of High scenic quality.

The proposed action calls for implementation of 3 projects to protect sensitive specie plants. Guideline 3 Plants, calls for improving severely disturbed sites which would improve the scenic quality of the areas.

Recreation

Objective 7, to add 2-5 developed recreation areas, would have an effect on the scenic quality. Creating a new recreation area could help manage large numbers of individuals, and cause less resource damage. Construction of a facility could be done in a manor to blend in with surrounding landscape and not detract from the existing scenic quality. Objective 8 to create designated dispersed camping improves the visual quality by directing where to camp which could decrease the amount of disturbed area since the same location is re-used.

Objective 16, decommissioning old recreation sites would return the developed area to its natural state and better fit with the surrounding landscape.

Improving trailheads would have a minor positive consequence. Defining a place to park would keep cars grouped and not spread out along a roadway. Design for proper drainage would reduce the visual scars of erosion. A negative consequence of trailhead improvement could be a larger area and therefore a greater visual impact of defined surface and parked vehicles.

Watershed Integrity

Objectives 18 and 21 could have positive consequences to the scenery by restoring disturbed areas to a natural state. Projects such as stream stabilization, increasing vegetative cover, mining restoration or obliteration of roads or trails all increase the scenic value of the land.

Aquatic and Terrestrial Wildlife Habitat

Objective 25, the removal of fencing to allow for the movement of pronghorn antelope improves scenic quality since the fences are often in poor condition. Reduction of the woody species in the corridor would create openings in the otherwise monotonous looking Juniper woodlands. Openings in the woodlands create visual interest. This could increase the chances of wildlife viewing by the public.

Open Space and Scenic Values

The SMS classifications for the PWAs that were not recommended for designation are much higher than it is under VQO's. This ensures that these areas would be better protected from activities and the visual quality of the areas would remain high. In addition the changes to the Recreational Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) mapping would afford greater protection to these areas. The new ROS increased the percent of Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized (SPNM) use to 21.3 percent. The category Semi-Primitive Motorized (SPM) is now 44.4 percent. Both of these have a setting of semi-primitive which is to be maintained in order to provide a quality of recreation experience. This means that any development (structures, roads or trails) must use materials that would blend in with a semi-primitive setting and therefore would be less visually obtrusive. In addition some of the potential wilderness areas not selected were originally IRAs and that designation continues afford some protection of the natural scenic resource in these areas.

The Grief Hill area has an SIO classification of High and an ROS of about 95 percent SPNM. These in addition to its IRA designation should protect the scenic quality of this area.

The recommendation of wilderness designation for 43,440 acres of potential wilderness would ensure that the highest level of protection of the scenery for those acres of the Forest would be retained. If the areas become designated wilderness, the SIO would change to “Very High”. The naturalness of the designated Wilderness areas are protected through numerous restrictions to activities as stated in the Wilderness Act. Recommended wilderness areas, like designated wilderness areas, would not be identified for conveyance out of federal ownership. Wilderness designation for Black Canyon PWA in particular, would benefit the communities of the Verde Valley by increasing the adjacent visual quality and protected open space on the Forest.

Alternative C (Vegetation & Wildlife Emphasis)

Alternative C also adopts the new SIOs and therefore affords further protection of the visual quality for the communities of Verde Valley and Prescott which were discussed under Alternative B. In addition, the visual quality around these communities may improve depending on the proximity of the vegetation treatments to them. An increase in the number of activities would cause both long term positive and short term negative changes to the scenic resource as discussed in Alternative B. Alternative C would increase protection for visual quality and provide positive benefits by retaining scenic integrity. It would also help preserve the sense of openness and rural character through land acquisition in communities adjacent to the Forest, but would not provide the additional protection to open space granted by the recommendations for wilderness designation.

Vegetation/Fire

An increase in the number of acres treated in semi-desert grasslands and Great Basin grasslands would have an increased negative short term effect to visual quality, but the long term benefits would also be greater. The positive effects of vegetation treatments would be the same as discussed in Alternative B.

More acres of ponderosa pine-Gambel oak and ponderosa pine-evergreen oak would mean more change but less negative impact than the grasslands since trees remain yet the density may be less.

In all treatments, mitigation for the short term negative effects would be to locate the proposed treatment areas in different parts of the forest and vary the amount along Concern Level 1 and 2 roads and trails.

A reduction in the high end range of the acres to be treated in the interior chaparral, juniper grasslands, and piñon-juniper evergreen shrub vegetation types would minimize the negative effects of the mechanized work. At the same time there would be a reduction in the positive consequences of more open areas and variety in the landscape from the treatment.

The increase in sensitive plant species project from 3 to 4 would have a minimal but positive consequence on scenery. This alternative includes a guideline concerning Verde Plant Formation Plants. Areas of high, medium and low potential habitat for these plants were mapped throughout

the Verde Valley Management Area. While these are fairly small areas, the guideline to not allow mineral development or motorized trails should help to preserve their scenic quality.

Recreation

The changes in Alternative C have very minimal consequence on visual quality, and for the most part would be similar to Alternative B. A slight reduction in trail maintenance could mean more un-natural appearing erosion and loss of vegetation. Fewer trailhead improvements could promote negative visual consequences from people parking off road and causing erosion and compaction. Fewer improvements would have the benefit of not increasing size of parking areas.

Watershed Integrity

Objectives 18 and 21 are the same for Alternatives B, C, and D so the consequences to visual quality would also be the same.

Aquatic and Terrestrial Wildlife Habitat

Alternative C proposes the largest increase in the number and scope of habitat restoration projects of all of the alternatives. The results would be the same as in Alternative B, but at a greater scale.

Open Space and Scenic Values

Alternative C does not have the additional recommended wilderness acres and therefore 43,440 acres less of highly visually protected lands than proposed in Alternative B. Alternative C does, however, contain the same guidance to acquire lands for the purpose of retaining open space values. In this alternative Black Canyon is not recommended to be wilderness area, however, the SIO is approximately 65 percent High and the rest Medium. Also the area has an ROS designation of about 70 percent SPNM and the rest SPM. Existing IRAs would continue to provide some protection of the scenic resource. Since there are no areas that would be recommended for wilderness designation, the acreage contained in the potential wilderness areas could be considered for conveyance.

Alternative D (Dispersed Recreation Alternative)

The visual impacts from increased recreation activities in Alternative D are generally small and dependent on the location and would have little consequence on the Verde Valley and Prescott communities. The recommended wilderness areas are not close enough to be seen from these communities. The result of this alternative, similar to Alternative B, would be increased protection for the visual quality, especially near communities that are adjacent to the forest. This would provide positive benefits by retaining scenic integrity and helping to preserve the sense of openness and rural character in these communities. The rural character and sense of openness would be further enhanced by plan guidance to act on opportunities to acquire land, as feasible, to retain open space values. Alternative D would not recommend Black Canyon PWA for wilderness designation, and so there would be no benefit to the communities of the Verde Valley from the protection of open space provided by wilderness.

Vegetation/Fire

The amount of treatment in semi-desert grasslands, Great Basin grasslands, ponderosa pine-Gambel oak, and ponderosa pine-evergreen oak vegetation types for this alternative are the same as Alternative B and therefore would have the same consequences. Acres and consequences for the interior chaparral, juniper grasslands, and piñon-juniper evergreen shrub vegetation types would be same as for Alternative C.

Recreation

Consequences to scenery of fewer new developed recreation sites, slightly more designated dispersed camping areas and improvement of more trailheads is minimal. Pros and cons of these types of developments as it affects visual quality have been discussed in previous alternatives.

Construction of new trails proposed only in this alternative could change scenery, but how much will depend on the location. Critical factors are the type of vegetation, the terrain, and whether it would be seen from recreation sites, roads, or other trails. New trails could also have a positive effect for scenery in that they may allow visitors to enjoy views into the forest that were not previously accessible.

Five miles of decommissioning trails would have a minor positive consequence in that it would restore the land to its natural appearance, but only if the decommissioned trail is highly visible from roads, trails or recreation sites.

Watershed Integrity

Objectives 18 and 21 are the same for Alternatives B, C, and D so the consequences to visual quality would also be the same.

Aquatic and Terrestrial Wildlife Habitat

The objectives for Aquatic and Terrestrial Wildlife Habitat are the same for Alternatives B and D, so the consequences to visual quality would also be the same.

Open Space and Scenic Values

The increased acreage (116, 262 acres) of recommended wilderness areas in this alternative would enhance visual quality. The naturalness of Wilderness Areas are protected through numerous restrictions to activities as stated in the Wilderness Act. Due to the limited amount of activities, the naturalness and high scenic value of a large block of land is protected. In addition, recommended wilderness areas, like designated wilderness areas, would not be identified for conveyance out of federal ownership.

If these recommended areas are designated as wilderness, the SIO would change to Very High. Arnold Mesa PWA was originally included in the Preservation VQO, but since it is not a designated wilderness, it was dropped from the Very High SIO category. In this alternative it is recommended for wilderness designation, and were it to become so, the SIO would be returned to Very High.

Although this alternative has an overall increase in recommended wilderness areas, the Black Canyon PWA is not recommended for designation in this alternative. The scenic quality of this

area would be partially protected by its SIO of approximately 65 percent High and the rest Medium, and its primitive ROS designation of about 70 percent SPNM and the rest SPM.

Relationship of Short-Term Uses and Long-Term Productivity

Short-term uses are those that generally occur for a finite time period. Long-term productivity refers to the ability of the land to produce a continuous supply of a resource, in this case, visual quality.

The mechanical treatments and prescribed fire proposed in the revised plan may have both short-term and long-term effects on the visual quality of the area. Prescribed fire treatments are proposed in conjunction with mechanical treatments in some areas, and as stand-alone treatments in others. In the short term, fire would leave scorch on the landscape, which could appear visually unattractive. Mechanical treatments could also have a negative short-term impact on visual quality. However, these treatments are anticipated to improve the overall health and sustainability of the resulting vegetation, which would have positive consequences on the visual quality. In the long term, the objectives for scenery would be met and the mitigation measures would play a large role in ensuring proposed mechanical treatments and prescribed fire meet the SIOs for the affected areas.

Longer-term consequences to visual quality are also linked to permanent facilities such as maintained roads, utility corridors, quarries and mining, and developed recreation sites. The forest-wide SIOs would determine the amount of alteration of the landscape that is allowable, but the effects would be analyzed on a case by case basis.

Cumulative Consequences

Cumulative consequences are those consequences of foreseeable activities on lands that are not managed by the Prescott NF that, in conjunction with management activities likely to occur on the Forest, may intensify, negate, improve or otherwise affect the open space and scenic values on the Forest. Viewsheds containing portions of the Forest affect the quality of life for many people living in the Verde Valley and the Quad-Cities area (Prescott, Prescott Valley, Chino Valley, and Dewey-Humboldt). The urbanization of lands adjacent to the Forest affects the visual quality and recreation setting on the Prescott NF. In some areas, development is encroaching on the forest boundary, reducing the amount of open space in private ownership and increasing the demand for open space on public lands. When limited development is designed to blend into the landscape, the effect is minimal; however, if the structures or associated developments are not blended into the landscape or are large in scale, they could have a negative impact on the visual quality and the perception of open space.

Lands managed by other government agencies at the county, state, and federal levels have the potential to affect the visual quality of the Prescott NF. Appropriate differences in agency missions and their management of scenic resources could result in inconsistencies between agencies, with the potential to negatively alter the appearance of lands adjacent to the Forest. Other agencies' management activities that do not result in a natural landscape could affect the experience of forest users who are viewing scenery.

Unavoidable Adverse Impacts

The land management plan provides a programmatic framework that guides site specific actions but does not authorize, fund, or carry out any project or activity. Before any ground-disturbing actions take place, they must be authorized in a subsequent environmental analysis. Therefore none of the alternatives cause unavoidable adverse impacts. Mechanisms are in place to monitor and use adaptive management principles in order to help alleviate any unanticipated impacts that need to be addressed singularly or cumulatively.

Irreversible and Irretrievable Commitment of Resources

The land management plan provides a programmatic framework that guides site-specific actions but does not authorize, fund, or carry out any project or activity. Because the land management plan does not authorize or mandate any ground-disturbing actions, none of the alternatives cause an irreversible or irretrievable commitment of resources.

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