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Service

**Southwestern
Region**

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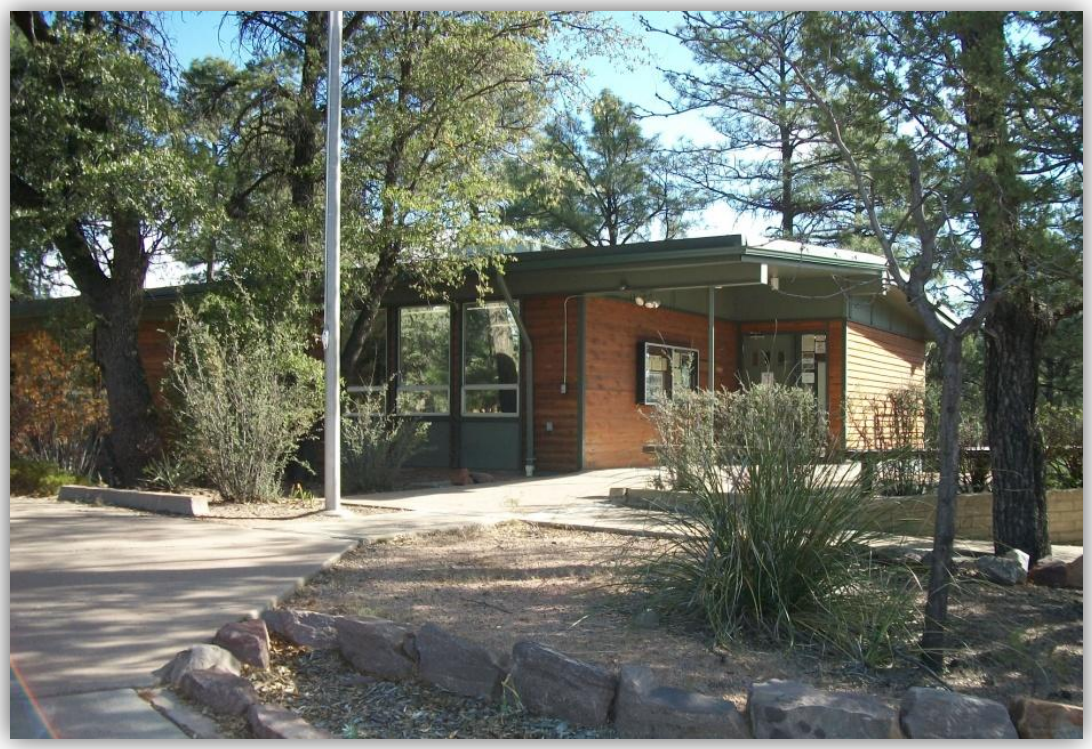
Environmental Assessment

Payson Ranger District Administrative Site Sale and Facilities

Tonto National Forest, Gila County



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Summary

The Payson Ranger District administrative facilities are located at 1009 East State Highway 260 in Payson, Arizona on the Tonto National Forest in Gila County. The existing helitack facility is separate from the main administrative complex and is located near the Payson Airport. The current administrative facilities are located on National Forest System (NFS) land; they occupy approximately 30 acres of a 296-acre NFS parcel that is surrounded by county, city, and private property.

The current administrative facilities are inadequate and outdated for ranger district staffing, fire organization and storage needs and do not meet current standards, including Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Architectural Barriers Act Accessibility Guidelines (ADAABA). New or upgraded facilities are needed. There is a need to increase safety, reduce operation and deferred maintenance costs, increase management efficiency, increase energy efficiency and improve public service.

The passage of the Arizona National Forest Improvement Act of 2000 gave the Forest Service legislative authority to convey NFS land at this site and to use the resultant revenues for appropriate facility improvements. Congress passed this legislation in recognition of limited funding available to construct new facilities. This action is needed because the existing facilities are not able to provide quality public service or effective employee work conditions due to their locations and conditions. The existing site is surrounded by county, city, and private property. A large portion of the site is open space that is not being utilized as part of the administrative site; where trespass, user created trails, and unauthorized use occurs.

Sale of a portion of this land is desirable to consolidate land ownership patterns around the Town of Payson. The Rim Country Educational Alliance Separate Legal Entity (SLE) has shown an interest in acquiring the site for a possible university campus and other associated commercial development. This action would help to promote overall implementation of the Forest Plan by providing quality administrative facilities that better serve the public and meet administrative service needs.

This environmental assessment (EA) presents the results of direct, indirect, and cumulative environmental consequences of the proposed action and no action. As described in summary form at the end of chapter 2 and in detail in chapter 3, direct/indirect and cumulative effects would range from negligible to moderate and would be both short term and long term. Management and operational efficiency would improve with implementation of this proposal while effects to natural and cultural resources would be minimal.

Chapter 1 – Purpose and Need

Introduction

The U.S. Forest Service, Tonto National Forest has prepared this environmental assessment (EA) in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and other relevant federal and state laws and regulations. This EA discloses the direct, indirect, and cumulative environmental impacts that would result from the no-action alternative and the proposed action.

Background

The Payson Ranger District administrative facilities are located near the Town of Payson in Gila County, Arizona. The Tonto National Forest Payson Ranger District office and associated facilities (hereafter referred to as Payson Ranger District facilities) are located on approximately 296 acres of NFS land at 1009 East State Highway 260 in Payson (figure 1). The existing fire management helicopter base (helitack) facility is currently located near the Payson Airport (hereafter referred to as helitack facilities).

The current administrative facilities are inadequate and outdated for ranger district staffing, fire organization and storage needs and do not meet current standards, including Americans with Disabilities Act and Architectural Barriers Act Accessibility Guidelines (ADAABA). The current facilities occupy only approximately 30 acres of the 296-acre NFS parcel that is surrounded by county, city, and private property. New and/or upgraded facilities are needed as described in detail in the next section.

The development of this project is guided by several laws and agency direction, as summarized below.

- The Tonto National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan, U.S. Forest Service 1985, as amended) prescribes construction or reconstruction of capital improvements to support fire, administrative, and other multifunctional activities and to maintain or upgrade these facilities to abate serious health hazards and/or prevent deterioration (U.S. Forest Service 1985, replacement page 136 and 143).
- The Forest Service Facilities Management Strategy (U.S. Forest Service 1999) identified the need to reduce each Forest's deferred maintenance costs and take a corporate approach regarding the management of Forest Service facilities. This strategy requires each individual Forest to prepare a facilities master plan to outline the management of existing and future facilities forest wide and then to develop a more specific preliminary project analysis for each individual site. The facilities master planning process provides recommendations to categorize assets as either ones to acquire, retain for existing use, develop for alternative use, or decommission. The preliminary project analysis then examines the recommendation in the master plan in more detail and supports and finalizes a recommendation on a specific facility. The project analysis identifies the most cost-effective method to achieve the designated disposition for an individual asset through such methods as construction, leasing, purchasing, exchange, sale, disposal, or functional changes.
- *The Arizona National Forest Improvement Act of 2000* (Public Law 106-458) authorizes the Forest Service to convey (sell or exchange) certain administrative sites in national forests in Arizona. The 296-acre Payson Administrative Site is specifically listed in this

Act for conveyance. Funds from the proceeds of this conveyance can be used for the acquisition, construction, or improvement of administrative facilities on the Tonto National Forest or the acquisition of land and/or an interest in land in Arizona.

- We prepared the Tonto National Forest Facilities Master Plan in 2002 (U.S. Forest Service 2002) and it includes recommendations for the Payson Ranger District facilities. In May 2011 and February 2012, we prepared a more site-specific preliminary project analysis (U.S. Forest Service 2011 and U.S. Forest Service 2012) that included an in-depth evaluation of administrative needs and multiple options for how to address these needs. We evaluated several alternatives in order to determine the best location and configuration for all administrative needs using a Value Analysis/Choosing by Advantages protocol (which factors in costs and benefits). Our preferred option based on the preliminary project analyses results forms the basis for the proposed action as described in more detail later in this document.

Purpose and Need for Action

The Payson Ranger District facilities are comprised of six different offices and a warehouse, approximately 23 portable storage containers, buildings and sheds scattered throughout the compound, and the road crew facility (office/garage/storage building and a fenced wareyard). The facilities vary in size, age and condition but overall they are poorly configured, outdated, overcrowded and in need of substantial maintenance and repairs or replacement to bring them up to current standards. Parking is also not adequate for the number of employees and visitors. Current facilities are not energy-efficient and are costly to heat and cool. Buildings are not consolidated and are instead scattered throughout the compound creating inefficient management and communication for employees and visitors.

Due to issues with the previous helitack facilities located at the current administrative site (noise and safety issues due to proximity to residential areas), the helitack operation was moved to the Payson Airport. The ranger district is paying approximately $40,000 per year for modular office rental at the airport. Every year employees must move in and out of this modular and move into a temporary trailer on the Payson Admin Site. There is not a permanent location for our helitack employees at the current site. In addition, the site is not large enough to accommodate all of the current and future needs of the helitack facilities and equipment. There is a need to locate permanent helitack facilities on National Forest System lands to alleviate these concerns.

There is a need to increase safety, reduce operation and deferred maintenance costs, increase management efficiency, increase energy efficiency and improve public service for the Payson Ranger District facilities. As described above, the passage of Public Law 106-458, also known as the Arizona National Forest Improvement Act of 2000, authorizes the sale or exchange of six administrative sites in Arizona, one of which is the 296-acre Payson administrative site. The statute states that:

> The Secretary may, under such terms and conditions as the Secretary may prescribe, sell or exchange any and all right, title, and interest….

The statute also provides for rejecting offers if the Secretary determines that it is not adequate or not in the public interest. The proceeds from the sale would then be used, as authorized by the legislation, for constructing new administrative facilities on the Tonto National Forest. The ranger district has not been actively pursuing sales authorized by this legislation since the crash of the real estate market in 2006. As any sale would be predicated on obtaining fair market value based

on the highest appraised use or value of the land, it is important that sufficient funds are generated by a sale to construct new administrative facilities.

Congress passed this legislation in recognition of limited funding available to construct new facilities. This action is needed because the existing facilities are not able to provide quality public service or effective employee work conditions because of their locations and conditions.

The existing site is surrounded by county, city and private property. A large portion of the site is open space that is not being utilized as part of the administrative site where trespass, user created trails, and unauthorized use occurs. Sale of a portion of this land is desirable to consolidate land ownership patterns around the Town of Payson.

This action responds to the goals and objectives outlined in the Forest Plan, the 2002 Tonto National Forest Facilities Master Plan and the 2011 and 2012 Payson Ranger District Facilities Preliminary Project Analyses; it helps move the Tonto National Forest toward desired conditions described in these plans.

This action helps to promote overall implementation of the Forest Plan by consolidating land ownership patterns and minimizing isolated NFS parcels surrounded by private land, and providing quality administrative facilities that better serve the public and meet administrative service needs.

Project objectives include:

- Provide for public and employee health, safety, and welfare. Improve safety and security of the helitack operation
- Provide ease of access, good public and community visibility and visitor contact services
- Enhance energy efficiency and strive to meet Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) and Forest Service Built Environment Image Guide (BEIG) with a facility that is a long-term asset to the community and meets all current standards, including Americans with Disabilities Act and Architectural Barriers Act Accessibility Guidelines (ADAABA) compliance
- Maximize operational efficiency
- Minimize driving distance and time spent in government vehicles
- Satisfy space needs in a timely manner and within budget constraints
- Provide a parcel large enough to accommodate future growth or consolidation and buildings of sufficient size and flexibility to accommodate future personnel growth
- Minimize and mitigate impacts to natural and cultural resources
- Provide modern, convenient, flexible and useful office space (with technologically advanced infrastructure) and grounds with minimal and reasonable operating expenses

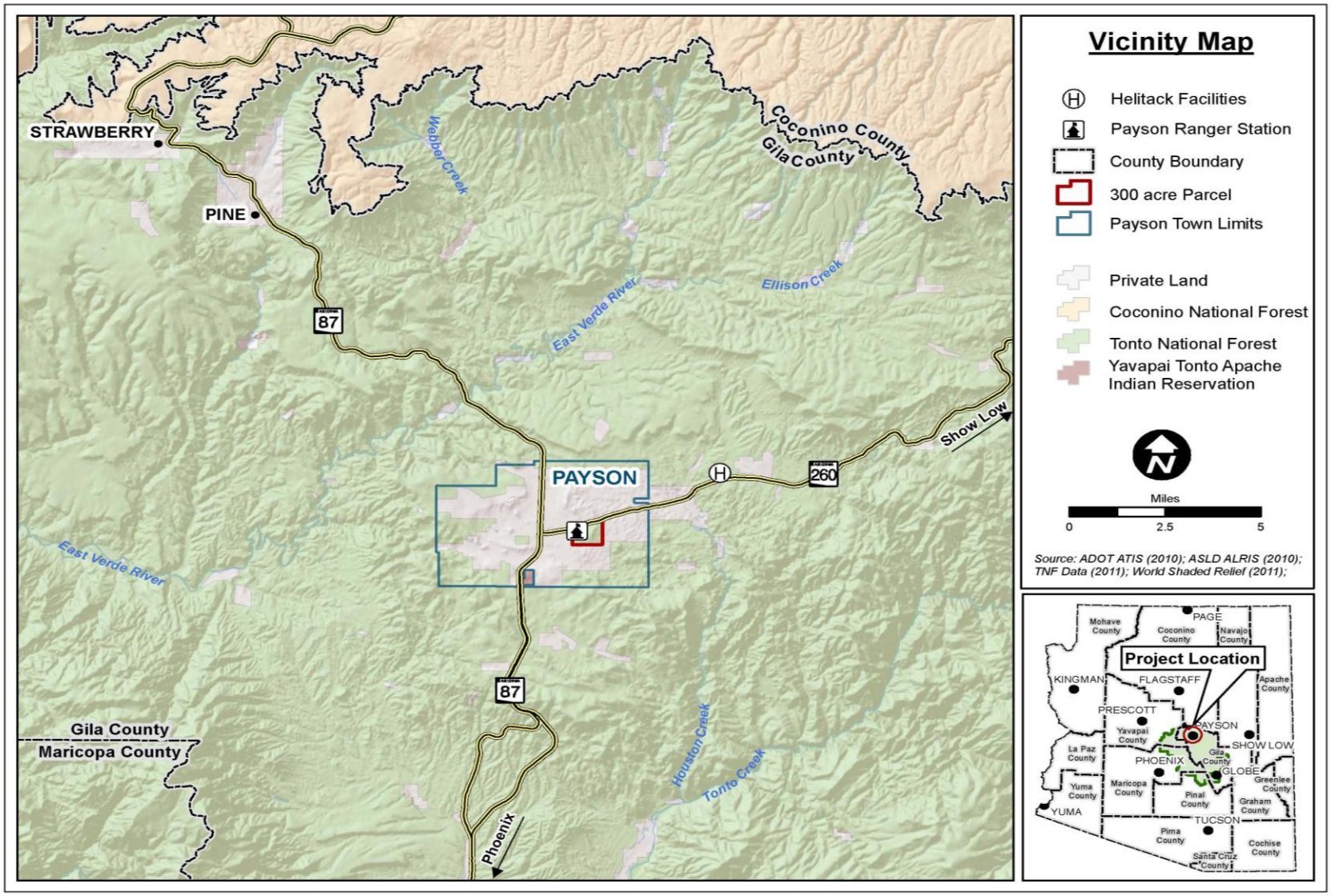

Figure 1. Vicinity map

Proposed Action

In order to meet the purpose and need for action and the project objectives listed above, we propose to:

1. Construct a new administrative office and associated facilities, covered storage and fire facilities on 43 acres of the current 296-acre administrative site (the existing ranger district facilities occupy approximately 30 acres) in Section 2, T.10N, R.10E;
2. Construct new fire management helitack facilities and a bunkhouse for seasonal housing on 31 acres (approximately 5 acres of construction and 26 acres of buffer around site) of NFS land adjacent to the north end of the Gila County maintenance yard approximately 4.5 miles east of Payson along Highway 260 in Section 29, T.11N, R.11E.; and
3. Sell 253 acres of the current administrative site that is not needed for current or future Forest Service needs in order to pay for construction of the proposed new administrative facilities.

More specific details regarding the proposed action are provided in chapter 2.

Decision Framework

The Tonto National Forest Supervisor will be the responsible official and will make the decision whether to implement the Payson Ranger District Administrative Site Sale and Facilities Project based on the thorough analysis presented in this EA, consideration of public input, and review of the project record. The Forest Supervisor will also decide what project design features and monitoring would be applied to the project.

A decision would not be made until a 30-day public review and comment period for this EA is completed. After the 30-day review period, a decision notice would be issued after an analysis of all comments is completed. A 45-day appeal period may begin after issuance of the decision notice, if necessary. If comments received identify significant impacts not previously analyzed, an environmental impact statement may be completed and a record of decision issued.

Public Involvement

The proposal was listed in the Schedule of Proposed Actions in October 2011. The scoping letter was mailed on September 14, 2011, with a detailed purpose and need and proposed action description to 182 interested and affected parties including private landowners, business owners, agencies and organizations. This same information was mailed to nine American Indian Tribes on November 14, 2011. The information also was posted on the Tonto National Forest website. A public open house to provided project information and answer questions was held at the Best Western in Payson on September 24, 2011. This meeting was attended by 71 people and 63comment letters were received. The comments received as a result of the scoping and the public meeting were analyzed using a process called content analysis to identify issues. The summary table of all comments received during scoping is included in the final project record. This table shows how these comments have been addressed, and which ones were considered issues.

The notice of the EA and "Request for Comment" Letter was sent out on December 11, 2012 to 182 interested and affected parties, including private landowners, business owners, agencies, and organizations. This same information was mailed to nine American Indian Tribes on December 14, 2012. Availability of the EA for a 30-day notice and comment period was advertised as a legal notice in the *Payson Roundup* newspaper on December 11, 2012, consistent with 36 CFR

215.5, and through publication on the Forest website. The comment period closed on January 11, 2013. Appendix A includes a table that displays the consolidation of all comments received during the formal request for comments. The table shows how these comments have been addressed.

Issues

Issues serve to highlight effects or unintended consequences that may occur from the proposed action and alternatives, giving opportunities during the analysis to reduce adverse effects and compare trade-offs for the decision maker and public to understand. An issue is phrased as a cause-effect statement relating actions under consideration to effects. An issue statement describes a specific action and the environmental effects expected to result from the action (Forest Service Handbook 1909.15.12.4).

Issues are defined as those directly or indirectly caused by implementing the proposed action that could not be addressed with updates to the proposed action or mitigation measures or project design features.

If comments were either: (1) outside the scope of the proposed action; (2) already decided by law, regulation, Forest Plan, or other higher level decision; (3) irrelevant to the decision to be made; or (4) conjectural and not supported by scientific or factual evidence, they were not carried forward as key issues. The Council for Environmental Quality (CEQ) NEPA regulations require this delineation in Sec. 1501.7, "…identify and eliminate from detailed study the issues which are not significant or which have been covered by prior environmental review (Sec. 1506.3)…." Appendix A shows how each comment was categorized into key issues and non-key issues.

The following key issues were identified based on the results of public scoping:

Noise

Constructing new facilities on currently undeveloped land may result in changes in ambient noise levels and these changes have the potential to affect residents living in nearby areas. Alternatives are compared using the following indicators:

- Noise generated from helicopter use at the proposed new helitack facility near the county maintenance yard, measured by decibel level, duration, timing and proximity to residential areas
- Short-term (during construction) and long-term (after construction is complete and facility is in use) change in ambient noise levels at the proposed new helitack facility near the county maintenance yard and proximity to residential areas
- Short-term (during construction) and long-term (after construction is complete and facilities are in use) change in ambient noise levels at the proposed new Forest Service administrative and fire facilities at the existing site in Payson and proximity to residential areas
- Relative short-term and long-term change in ambient noise levels on the 253 acres of sold land in Payson, assuming this land would change from undeveloped land to developed land

Lighting

Constructing new facilities on currently undeveloped land may result in changes in lighting in the area and these changes have the potential to affect residents living in nearby areas. Alternatives are compared using the following indicators:

Relative short-term (during construction) and long-term (after construction is complete and facility is in use) change in lighting levels at the proposed new helitack facility near the county maintenance yard and proximity to residential areas.

- Short-term (during construction) and long-term (after construction is complete and facilities are in use) change in lighting levels at the proposed new Forest Service administrative and fire facilities at the existing site in Payson and proximity to residential areas
- Predicted short-term and long-term change in lighting levels on the 253 acres of sold land in Payson, assuming this land would change from undeveloped land to developed land

Land Use and Economics

Constructing new facilities on currently undeveloped land may affect property values for residents living nearby Alternatives are compared using the following indicators. Possible effects related to environmental justice (any adverse human health and environmental effects of agency programs that could disproportionately impact minority and low income populations) will also be discussed.

- Predicted overall qualitative change in land use and property market values in the vicinity of the 253 acres of sold land in Payson
- Predicted overall qualitative change in land use and property market values in the vicinity of the proposed new fire facility near the county maintenance yard

The following non-key issues have also been identified. Non-key issues are important for understanding the full context of alternatives. Design criteria are generally used to minimize or alleviate these types of concerns which we discuss in chapter 2. Unlike key issues, these non-key issues are not subject to detailed analysis, so these will be addressed more briefly in chapter 3.

- Watershed (soil and water, including surface water and groundwater)
- Vegetation
- Wildlife and wildlife habitat (including threatened, endangered and sensitive [TES] species; management indicator species [MIS]; and migratory birds)
- Cultural resources
- Visitor experience
- Visual quality
- Management and operational efficiency
- Air quality
- Climate change

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Chapter 2 – Alternatives

This chapter describes and compares the alternatives considered for the Payson Ranger District Administrative Site Sale and Facilities Project. It includes a description of each alternative considered in detail, as well as those alternatives that were initially considered but not developed for further analysis. Alternatives considered in detail are compared based on alternative components, measurement indicators, and how well they achieve the purpose and need for action and address the key issues. Table 2, at the end of this chapter, summarizes how each alternative addresses project objectives and table 3 summarizes the environmental effects of each alternative.

Alternatives Analyzed in Detail

No Action

Under the no-action alternative, we would continue to use the Forest Plan and other agency direction to guide management of the project area. We would not sell any NFS land and no revenue would be created; the 296-acre parcel would stay in federal ownership. We would not build any new Payson Ranger District administrative facilities because of the limited funding. This alternative does not accomplish the purpose and need for action or address project objectives.

Proposed Action

To meet the purpose and need for action and the project objectives, we propose to:

1. Construct a new administrative office and associated facilities, covered storage and fire facilities on 43 acres of the current 296-acre administrative site in Payson (the existing ranger district facilities occupy approximately 30 acres) in Section 2, T.10N, R.10E. This is referred to in this document as Land Proposed for Retention;

2. Construct new fire management helitack facilities on 31 acres (approximately 5 acres of construction and 26 acres around site) of NFS land adjacent to the north end of the Gila County maintenance yard approximately 4. 5 miles east of Payson along Highway 260 in Section 29, T.11N, R.11E. Figure 4 shows the approximate size and layout of the proposed helitack facilities that would encompass approximately 5 acres. The surrounding 26 acres would be included within the designated administrative site but would not be developed as part of this project. This is referred to in this document as Land Proposed for Helitack Facilities; and

3. Sell 253 acres of the current administrative site that is not needed for current or future Forest Service needs to pay for construction of the proposed new administrative facilities (figure 2). This is referred to in this document as Land Proposed for Sale.

The following specific actions are proposed for the new Payson Ranger District facilities on Land Proposed for Retention (figures 2, 3, and 4 and photos in appendix D):

- The current Ranger District office would be demolished and a new, approximately 16,000 - 17,000 square foot administrative office would be constructed. All existing modular offices would be removed and all non-helitack district employees would be housed in this new building.

- The existing warehouse would either be demolished and rebuilt or remodeled, adding approximately 3,000 – 4,000 square feet of space. The new or remodeled warehouse facilities would be used for ranger district storage and garage bays.
- Approximately 10,500 square foot fire facility would be constructed near the current warehouse. This would accommodate the hot shot crew and other ranger district fire needs. This new facility would include warehouse and workshop space, fire engine bays, fire cache, office space, storage, wellness room, showers, restrooms, fencing and lighting. The existing hot shot crew trailer would be removed.
- The current road crew facility would be either demolished and rebuilt, or remodeled and add approximately 500 – 1,000 square feet of space.
- We would include horse facilities (corrals and temporary pasture) at the Payson administration site.
- Parking would be added for the administrative office to accommodate current and projected future visitor and employee needs and would include space for large vehicles and trailers/campers.
- A new fire management helitack facility would be constructed on NFS land adjacent to the north end of the Gila County maintenance yard on East Highway 260 (approximately 1 mile east of Star Valley and 4.5 miles east of Payson). The facility would be accessed through the county maintenance yard, using the existing access road off of Highway 260. The constructed facilities would be approximately 6,000 –7,000 square feet and would house the ranger district helitack organization and the future National medium helitack crew. The helitack facility would include office space, warehouse and workshop space, garage bays, fire cache, storage, wellness room, showers, restrooms, fencing and lighting. The pad and the helicopter would be located here. Seasonal crew bunkhouses would also be considered at this site. The existing helitack facilities located at the Payson Airport would be removed. The primary flight pattern from this proposed new site would be to the west and north.
- The existing utilities and access roads would be used, wherever feasible, for all proposed facilities.

While conceptual site plans are shown for these facilities in figures 2, 3 and 4, the exact layout, design and configuration would be determined through additional site planning and design. The details noted above regarding size and locations of structures and facilities could change based on additional site planning and design. However, based on initial preliminary design, it is estimated that approximately 50 acres of new ground disturbance would occur. New ground disturbance for construction of buildings, parking and needed infrastructure would occur within or adjacent to areas already developed as part of the current 30-acre administrative facility and at the proposed new helitack facility, which is adjacent to a county maintenance yard and has some existing utilities.

We propose to sell 253 acres of NFS land adjacent to the 43 acres retained for the proposed new administrative facilities in Payson. The land sold would be used to serve local community objectives. The Rim Country Educational Alliance Special Legal Entity (SLE) has expressed interest in purchasing this land for development of a university campus and other associated commercial development.

Connected Actions

Actions are connected if they automatically trigger other actions or cannot proceed unless other actions are taken. The following connected actions are a part of this proposal and are analyzed as such in chapter 3:

New Forest Service administrative site - The proposed new helitack facility located on NFS lands north of the Gila County maintenance yard (Land Proposed for Helitack Facilities) would be officially designated a 31-acre Forest Service administrative site. This is needed to ensure the proper management is in place for the site. Administrative Sites have Forest Service Capital Improvements located on them, and management of the area is conducted in a manner to protect these assets.

Mineral Withdrawal - We would seek issuance of a Public Land Order (PLO) withdrawing the Land Proposed for Helitack Facilities from mineral entry in accordance with the Tonto Forest Plan – Decision Unit 41, Activity J04, which states: "Obtain mineral withdrawals for locatable minerals and appropriate surface protection stipulations for leasable minerals on all proposed developed recreation sites and administrative sites two years ahead of construction". Subject to valid existing rights, the Land Proposed for Helitack Facilities would be withdrawn from location and entry under the mining laws, but not from the leasing laws. The withdrawal is needed since the Forest Service surface management regulations specified in Code of Federal Regulations Title 36 Part 228 (36 CFR 228) do not provide adequate protection from prospecting disturbance or mining operations. These surface management regulations cannot substitute for a withdrawal from mineral entry in order to protect the use of the site as a helitack facility. An administrative request would be submitted to the U.S. Department of Interior, Bureau of Land Management (BLM) seeking issuance of this withdrawal, as discussed briefly in the minerals section of chapter 3.

Forest Plan amendment and administrative change – This proposal would not meet current Forest Plan direction for a retention visual quality objective (VQO), or be consistent with Urban ROS class, as discussed in more detail in the visual quality section of chapter 3, on Land Proposed for Retention. Therefore, the VQO maps would be revised, changing the VQO for the Land Proposed for Retention two classification levels below retention, to modification, which would be more typical of administrative sites and developed areas. Further, because the proposal would establish a new administrative site on NFS land where there is not one now (Land Proposed for Helitack Facilities) an administrative change to the Plan Land and Resource Map would be required. Appendix C provides the proposed Forest Plan Amendment language.

Water– For purposes of this analysis, we assume that the water needed for operating the proposed new helitack facility would either come from sharing the existing well at the Gila County maintenance yard under an agreement with Gila County or from a new well we would install on the proposed administrative site, as discussed in more detail in the watershed section of chapter 3. In addition, a connection to the Star Valley water system may also be an alternative water source for the helitack facilities. These actions would require adding a new water pipeline and water storage tank(s) within the boundaries of the proposed new administrative site. We also assume that we would either continue to use our existing well (and the underground storage tanks and pipeline under a short-term authorization since these are on Land Proposed for Sale) or tie into the Town of Payson public water utility for the new Forest Service facilities in Payson.

Land development and construction-related actions – As described in more detail in the management and operational efficiency section of chapter 3, there are some existing facilities on

the Land Proposed for Sale (e.g., helipads, storage facilities, septic tank and leach field, underground water storage tanks, an access road) as well as overhead and buried telephone and electric lines, and water and sewer lines. Under the proposed action, these facilities would be left in place. We would reserve an easement (66 feet wide and 2,222 feet in length) for Granite Dells Road until the jurisdiction for this road is transferred after sale of the land. All existing special use authorizations would remain in place and would be transferred to the new owners of the parcel. On the Land Proposed for Helitack Facilities, we would pursue an easement from Gila County to access the site through their property off of Highway 260.

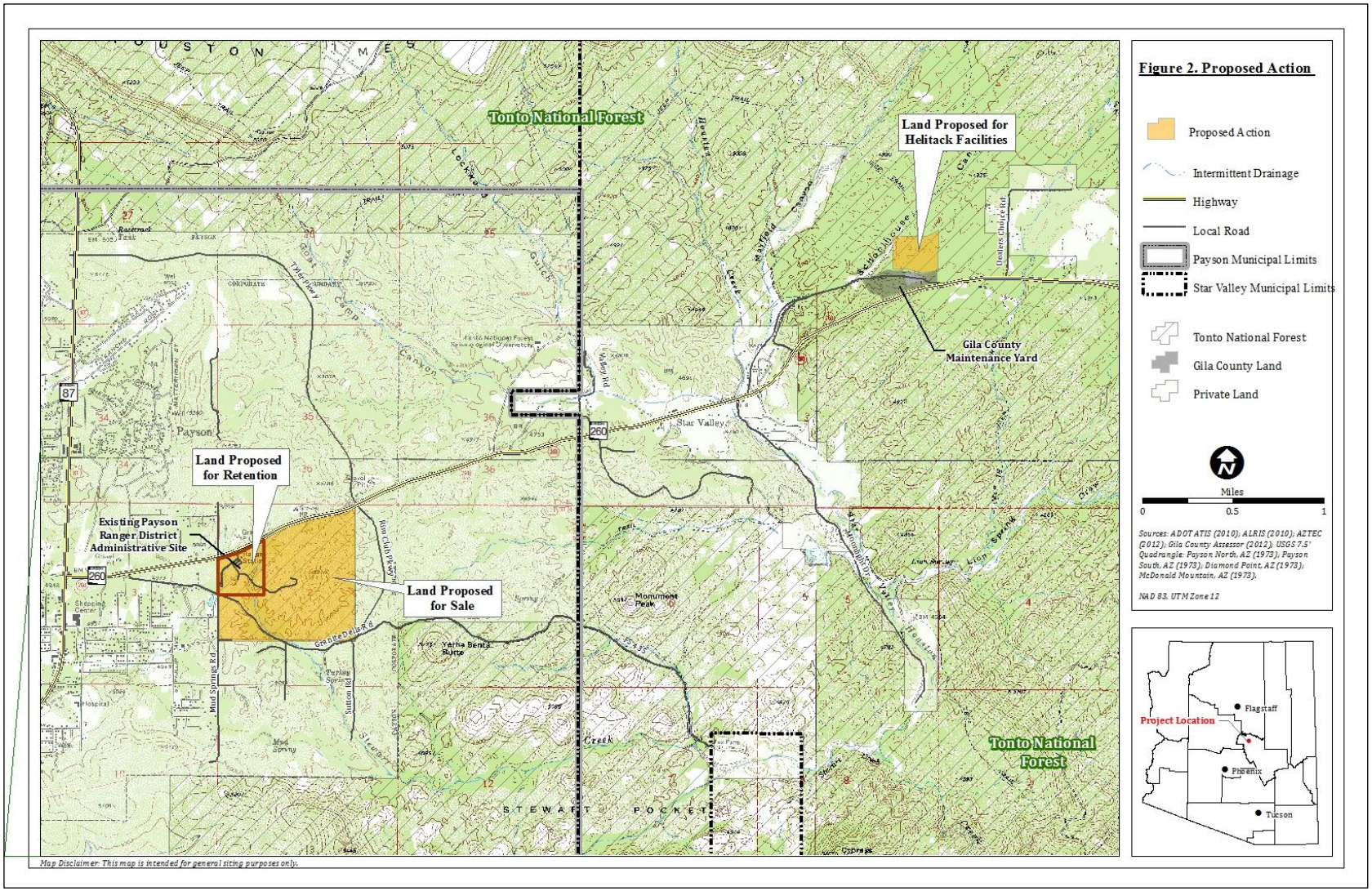

Figure 2. Proposed action project area map

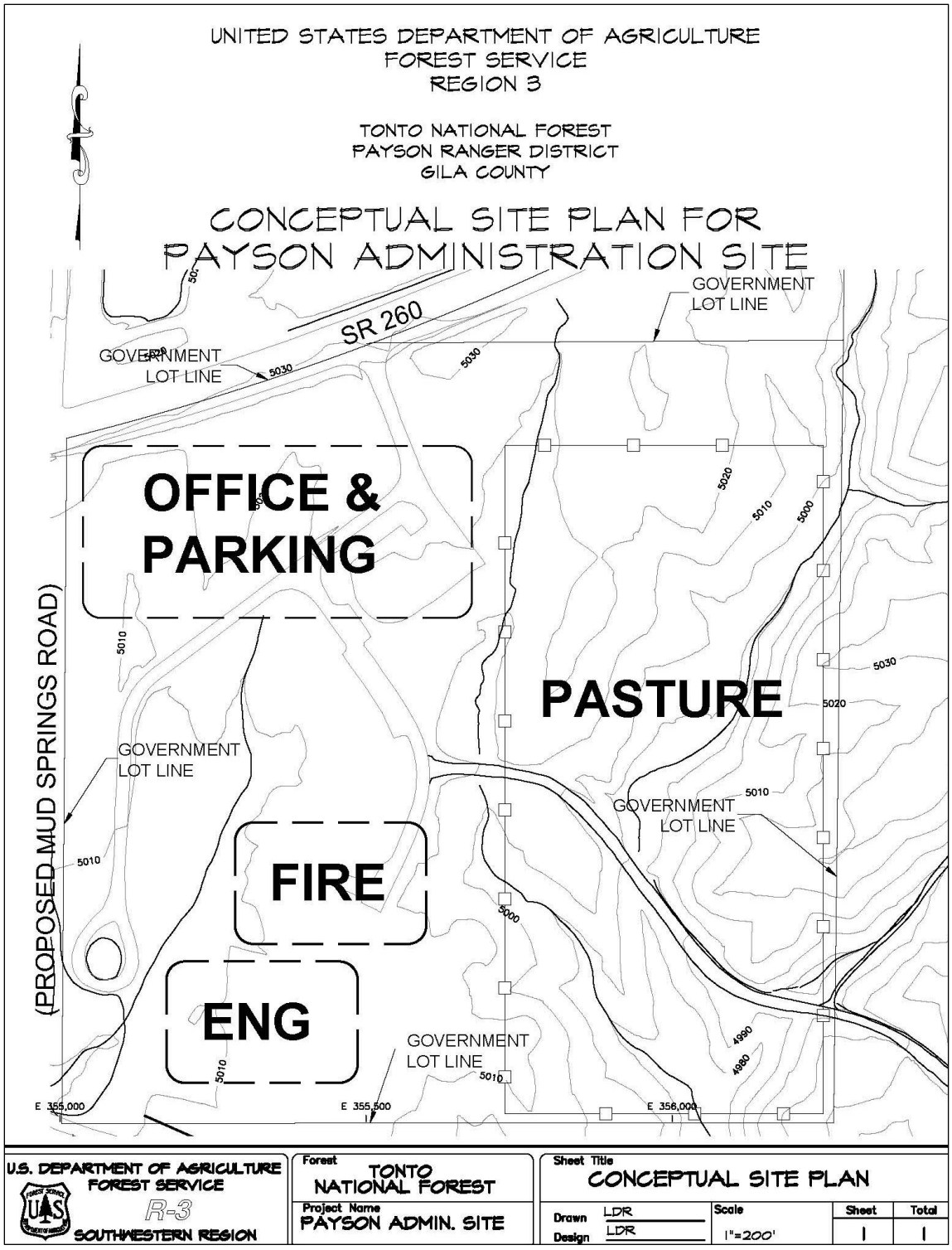

Figure 3. Land proposed for Retention–Payson Administrative Facilities Conceptual Site Plan

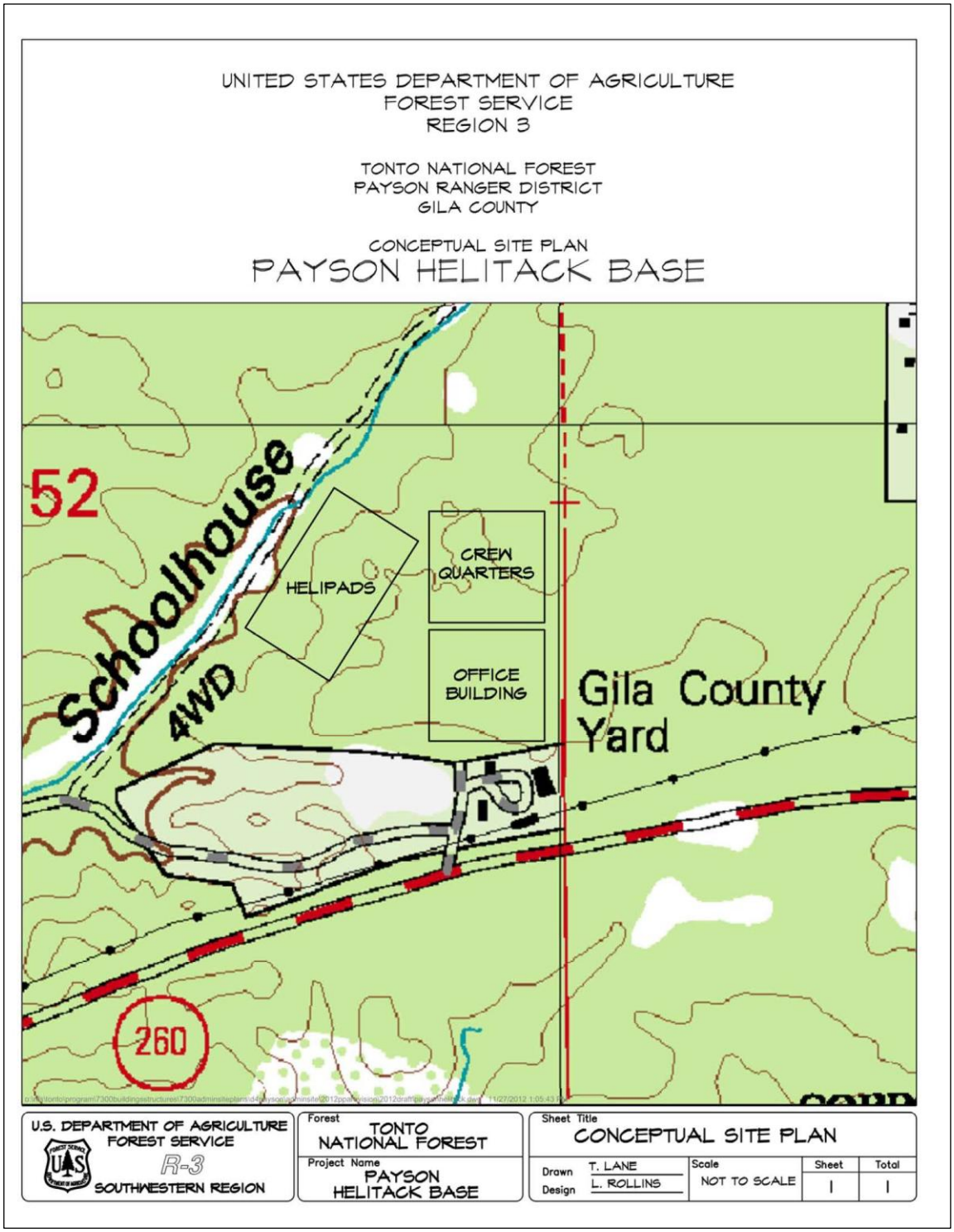

Figure 4. Land Proposed for Helitack Facilities

Project Design Features

Table 1 includes design features that would be implemented to avoid, minimize, or eliminate adverse impacts that might result from implementation of the proposed action. These design features are integral to, and are considered part of, the proposed action; the analysis of effects presented in chapter 3 is based on the implementation of these non-discretionary features.

Table 1. Project design features

Resource	Design Feature
Noise and Visitor Experience	Implement appropriate curfews on construction activities involving heavy equipment or blasting (e.g., allowing construction activities only during daylight hours) when in the proximity of residential areas and provide residents and businesses at least two weeks notice before the start of construction activities. Whenever possible, restrict construction activites that would affect access to the visitor contact station and its facilities (like portable toilets) at the Ranger Station during the busiest times of the year (e.g., summer holidays and weekends) and ensure appropriate traffic controls are used. Traffic in any one direction would not be stopped for more than 15 minutes
Lighting and Visual Quality	All new Forest Service facilities would be appropriately designed and built to adhere to the following: • Americans with Disabilities Act and Architectural Barriers Act Accessibility Guidelines (ADAABA), 2004 • Forest Service Handbook 7309.11, 06.3.k, which requires all new Forest Service ranger district offices and climate-controlled warehouses with 2,500 gross square feet or more to be registered and certified under the LEED rating system at the silver certification level. • 2001 Built Environment Image Guide (BEIG) which reinforces item 6 in the Forest Service Manual section 7313.3—Design Standards requires that administrative sites be designed to project the image of an environmentally aware, concerned, professional land management organization (USDA 2001). • Guidebook for Implementing Best Practices of Sustainable Design on National Forest Lands (currently being written) • Using materials that borrow from existing line, form, texture, and color of the natural characteristic landscape that blend in with the forest setting Retaining as much natural vegetation and trees on site as feasible and installing new landscaping so facilities appear as a natural occurrence when viewed from foreground or middle ground. • If vegetation must be removed, avoid removing in straight lines so retained vegetation is natural appearing • When feasible, consider following the Town of Payson's Unified Development Code, Section 15-03 (Landscaping, Screening, buffering and lighting 2011), Town of Payson Design Principles (Design Review manual),and Town of Star Valley Dark-Sky Ordinance • When feasible, direct light downward/shielding lights to minimize reflection upward, specify light fixtures in paved areas that average 1 to 3 footcandles; shield and screening light fixtures to reflect light away from adjacent properties; and provide only enough lighting for safety and security purposes.
Minerals	Continue to pursue through the BLM a mineral withdrawal for the proposed new 31-acre administrative site for helitack facilities

Resource	Design Feature
Watershed (soil, surface water and groundwater)	Implement an approved list of best management practices in consultation with the Forest Hydrologist during Forest Service facility engineering design and construction to ensure proper drainage, protection of ephemeral water ways, and minimizing soil movement and run-off (e.g silt fences, sand bags, or equivalent control methods). Ensure any areas of unstable soils are identified and avoided or mitigated during engineering design and construction Evaluate the need for a Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan (SWPPP) prior to any ground-disturbing activities and ensure all National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) requirements are met Ensure any new development/construction plans on NFS land are provided to the local floodplain administrator for review and comment prior to construction
Vegetation	Implement an approved list of best management practices in consultation with the Forest Invasive Species/Noxious Weeds Coordinator during Forest Service facility engineering design and construction to ensure any introduction or spread of noxious weeds is minimized. These practices may include but are not limited to requiring construction equipment and vehicles to be cleaned to insure they are free of soil, seeds, vegetative matter or other debris before entering National Forest System land. Conduct a weed survey of each area of construction prior to ground disturbance. If any new noxious weed infestations are discovered prior to or during implementation, they would be mapped and treated. Post-treatment surveys would be conducted to document any new infestations of noxious weeds. Populations would be hand-pulled or treated with herbicide application prior to seed-set. Where appropriate, seeding of weed-treated areas with native grass species would be done to reduce, through competition, further weed establishment or expansion of existing infestations.
Air Quality	To reduce dust, loose material loads on construction vehicles would be tarped, and water would be applied to problem areas Whenever possible, constuction equipment would not be left idling any longer than necessary to reduce tailpipe emissions To reduce dust during earthwork, water would be applied to soil as it is disturbed
Hazardous Materials	Asbestos containing materials (ACM) and lead-based paint (LBP) may be present in structures on the project area. Prior to any demolition, an AHERA certified building inspector would sample all suspect materials within structures. Any regulated asbestos would be removed and a National Emissions Standards for Hazardous Air Pollutants notification submitted to ADEQ. Painted surfaces would be tested for LBP prior to disturbance and treated accordingly. The new helitack facility would include provisions for appropriate refueling of helicopters on site to ensure all appropriate safety measures are in place to store fuel and minimize spillage.
Cultural Resources	All cultural resources within the Area of Potential Effects (which includes the current 296-acre administrative site and the proposed 31-acre helitack facility) that are eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places would be mitigated in a manner consistent with the standards and criteria of 36 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 800.4 and 800.5. A Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) was signed July 26th, 2013 by the Forest Supervisor and the State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO), and a Treatment Plan for data recovery excavations has been developed in consultation with State Historic Preservation Office and the Tribes to resolve the adverse effect. As part of that consultation, an ethnohistoric study has been undertaken by the Hopi Tribe to specifically identify their concerns with the proposed action that they may also be addressed by the data recovery effort.

Resource	Design Feature
Management and Operational efficiency	Ensure that all existing special use permit holders on Land Proposed for Sale are protected and that their permits are transferred to the new owners of this parcel. Fence the boundary of the proposed 31-acre new helitack administrative site so it not accessible by livestock that use this pasture during the winter months. Ensure that the new 43-acre boundary of the Ranger District administrative site is also fenced to exclude livestock. Ensure that the new owners of the Land Proposed for Sale are aware of their fencing responsibilities if livestock use this pasture. All fencing maintenance would be the requirement of the Forest Servie (for Forest Service sites) or the new owners of the land. The Forest Service is keeping easements on FR 435 and for the water storage tanks and associated pipelines.

Summary of Effects

Table 2 summarizes the effects of each resource to the No-Action and the Proposed Action alternatives.

Table 2. Summary of effects

Resource	Effects
If the proposed action were implemented	
Noise	The proposed action would result in direct and indirect effects on sensitive receptors (residential areas) due to helicopter noise within the project area. However, the effects are minor and short in duration because they would occur only during helicopter operation. There would be an overall increase in noise but it would be less than 2.3 dBA Ldn. There would no helicopter noise at night and all predicted noise increases would be within established thresholds. Minor cumulative effects are anticipated as a result of the implementing the proposed action in combination with other past, present, and future projects (appendix B) but these actions would also be subject to federal, state, and local regulations to reduce substantial cumulative effects from noise.
Lighting	Lighting levels would increase on the Land Proposed for Helitack Facilities but this increase is expected to be minor; would not likely be visible from nearby residences; would adhere to project design features, and if feasible; would follow the Town of Star Valley Dark Sky Ordinance. Lighting is expected to increase on Land Proposed for Sale due to development but would be designed in accordance with Town of Payson Unified Development Code Section 15-03 (Landscaping, Screening, Buffering and Lighting 2011). Lighting would not measurably change on Land Proposed for Retention as new Forest Service facilities would use minimal lighting and would adhere to project design features.
Land Use and Socioeconomics	Impacts to adjacent residential properties would depend greatly on the actual type and design of the future sites. It is not anticipated that the Land Proposed for Helitack Facilities or the Land Proposed for Retention would negatively impact adjacent residential property values. The configuration and type of facilities envisioned for the Land Proposed for Retention would be consistent with what exists on the administrative site today. The facilities envisioned for the Land Proposed for Helitack Facilities would be situated over 0.5 mile from any residential development, and each residential property currently bordering undeveloped forest lands would still have this buffer. Design details of the Land Proposed for Sale are not available, and specifics of impacts would need to be assessed during the future re-zoning of the property. Any future development would adhere to policies from the Town of Payson's General Plan Update and ordinances or codes from the Unified Development Code (UDC). Many factors could dictate the direct or indirect impacts on adjacent residential property values from improvements on the Land Proposed for Sale, which could be partly or potentially fully mitigated by the design and layout or orientation of the proposed facilities. In any case, prior to any future changes in zoning and eventual construction of facilities on the Land Proposed for Sale, opportunities for public involvement would be afforded through the Town of Payson. The Town of Payson 2003 General Plan Update encourages compatible development that preserves the property values within and adjacent to the respective SR 260 Growth Corridor. Design features could eliminate issues with off-area parking in adjacent neighborhoods, light spillage into neighborhoods, and egress and ingress concerns from adjacent neighbors with points of access planned to avoid connections on neighborhood streets to and from any new facilities on the Land Proposed for Sale. No direct or indirect impacts are expected from the Land Proposed for Helitack Facilities or Land Proposed for Retention.
Minerals	There would be no measurable indirect/direct adverse effects with implementing the proposed action because there are no active mining claims, leases, lease applications, prospect permits or prospecting applications in or near the project area and the potential for salable mineral resources is low to moderate.

Resource	Effects
Watershed (soil and water)	Effects to surface water and soils would be negligible to moderate and short-term, and would be minimized through the implementation of project design features. Effects to groundwater would also be minimal and localized. We would monitor groundwater levels near the Land Proposed for Helitack Facilities to ensure any withdrawal for purposes of this project does not measurably affect other wells in the area.
Vegetation	The Forest Plan and agency direction includes conducting noxious weed assessments prior to ground disturbing actions and reducing the risk of introducing or spreading noxious weeds Field visits were conducted in April, May and August 2012. No invasive or noxious weeds were observed. There are no rare plants or federally listed threatened or endangered plant species known to occur or with the potential to occur in the project area.
Wildlife	The proposed action has the potential to adversely affect wildlife individuals and habitat. However, habitat in the project area is widespread and relatively common and no protected species or suitable habitat for protected species is present or would be affected by the proposed action. Proposed actions may affect individuals, but is not likely to result in a trend toward federal listing or loss of viability to any species. There are no designated migratory bird important bird areas (IBAs) or designated important overwintering areas in the project vicinity. Forestwide trends for MIS species in the project area would not be affected.
Cultural Resources	The proposed action will adversely affect cultural resources on NFS land. Therefore, a Memorandum of Agreement has been implemented and a treatment plan has been developed and approved in consultation with State Historic Preservation Office and the Tribes concerns.to resolve the adverse effect through data recovery excavation.
Visitor Experience	Implementing the proposed action would not result in more than minor adverse effects to overall recreational use, experience or access in the project area. There would be no changes to Recreation Opportunity spectrum (ROS) classes. Long-term, moderate beneficial effects would result with improved visitor facilities and services on the Land Proposed for Retention. Short-term adverse effects during the construction period would be minimized with implementation of project design features (chapter 2).
Visual Quality	Land Proposed for Helitack Facilities would comply with the assigned Visual Quality Objective (VQO) of Partial Retention. New facilities would adhere to project design features. Additional man-made alterations on Land Proposed for Retention would not be consistent with the assigned Retention VQO since human activities would be evident to the casual forest visitor. The Visual Resource Inventory would be revised, changing the VQO for the Land Proposed for Retention two classification levels below Retention to Modification. This reclassification would be more typical of administrative sites and developed areas and more consistent with Urban ROS class. New facilities would adhere to project design features. The man-made alterations that would occur on the Land Proposed for Sale would not meet the assigned Retention and Partial Retention VQOs; however, since the land would no longer be under FS ownership or management, current Forest Plan direction would no longer apply, including that related to visual quality. It is anticipated that development would comply with Town of Payson Unified Development Code Section 15-03 (Landscaping, Screening, Buffering and Lighting) (2011), and Town of Payson Design Principles (Design Review Manual) (2009).
Management and Operational Efficiency	Implementing the proposed action would respond to the goals and objectives outlined in the Forest Plan, the 2002 Tonto National Forest Facilities Master Plan and the 2011 and 2012 Payson Ranger District Facilities Preliminary Project Analyses and helps move the Tonto National Forest toward desired conditions described in these plans for more efficient management operations and improved facilities that better serve employees and the public.
Air Quality	The proposed action is likely to cause direct and indirect effects to air quality within the project area. However, the effects are minor and short-term in nature, would occur during the construction period only and would be minimized by implementation of project design features (chapter 2).

Resource	Effects
Climate Change	At this time there are no regulations to limit greenhouse gas emissions. The current state of science does not allow for site-specific analysis of greenhouse gas emissions at local or regional levels. Likewise, global climate change models are not yet able to determine specific impacts of greenhouse gases on local climate patterns. Implementing the proposed action would contribute to greenhouse gas emissions, but this would not be measurable at larger scales.
If no action were taken to address the purpose and need	
All Resources	Current project area conditions would remain the same; there would be no changes in facilities or development and thus ongoing impacts from routine operations and ongoing management in the project area would continue. There would be no measurable indirect/direct or cumulative effects to natural or cultural resources. There would be no change in overall land status or current management in the project area. The current administrative site would remain 296 acres in size. Existing Payson Ranger District facilities would remain in their current location and condition. The helitack operation would continue to be located at the Payson Airport. Existing facilities would not meet current standards and overall management and operational efficiency would continue to be less than desired, as described in chapter 1. The purpose and need for action would not be met. The goals identified by the Town of Payson in their General Plan Update would not be met in this area.

Alternatives Considered but Eliminated from Detailed Study

We carefully considered each of your suggestions to determine whether they should be carried forward and analyzed in detail in this EA or if they do not meet the criteria for further consideration (see the following paragraphs).

For an alternative to be analyzed in detail, it should meet the purpose and need for action, address one or more key issues and reduce the potential for impacts. Reasonable alternatives include those that are practical or feasible from a technical and economic standpoint and use common sense; they do not necessarily have to be within agency jurisdiction to implement.

Alternatives not considered in detail in an EA may include, but are not limited to, those that fail to meet the purpose and need, are technologically infeasible or illegal, or would result in unreasonable environmental harm.

Public Suggestions for Alternative Components

We would like to see an area set aside for walks; we currently use the area south and north of Granite Dells and east of Mud Springs Road.

- The specific design and layout for future facilities on the sold land in the area you currently use is outside the scope of this project. Please consider sharing this suggestion in the future with the purchasers and/or developers of the land when specific site plans are being developed. For this reason, this suggestion was dismissed from further detailed analysis.

Please consider sharing parking as a means to reduce the total hardscape on the site.

- The specific design and layout for future facilities on the sold land is outside the scope of this project. Because it is likely that the timing of the construction of new Forest Service facilities would be different than the timing of potential development on sold land, it would be difficult to plan for shared parking. For this reason, this suggestion was dismissed from further detailed analysis.

For the proposed helitack facility, please consider using the same access road as is used for the county maintenance yard and not using Dealer's Choice Road. This would minimize safety concerns with residents and other users of Dealer's Choice Road, especially in the summer months when traffic congestion is high on this road.

- The proposed action for the fire facility near the county maintenance yard already includes using the same access road as the county and not using Dealer's Choice Road. It was determined that Dealer's Choice Road was not the most favorable access route to use. For this reason, this suggestion was dismissed from further detailed analysis.

Alternate Sites Considered for Payson Ranger Station Administrative Facilities and Helitack Facility

Five possible sites for the Payson Ranger District administrative site and the helitack facility were initially explored and considered during an April 2011 Choosing by Advantages process, as documented in the Preliminary Project Analysis (U.S. Forest Service 2011). During this process, five factors (site visibility for public access, facility sustainability, public and employee safety and health, management efficiency, and positive and professional agency image) were used along with estimated costs to evaluate and compare each possible site. These sites, and the reasons for their dismissal from detailed analysis, are described briefly in this section.

Gila County Shop site - approximately 1.1 miles east of Star Valley and 4.4 miles east of Payson; this site is directly east of the existing Gila County shop and is adjacent to and north of SR 260. This alternative included constructing all administrative facilities and the helitack facility at this site.

- The visibility of the site is limited due to its location at the top of a hill.
- Acceleration and deceleration lanes would be needed for entrance and exit to and from the site off of SR 260.
- A well would be necessary to provide water and onsite sewage treatment would be needed. Propane or electricity would be needed for facility heating; electricity is available.
- The site is fairly flat and rolling but a substantial amount of clearing would be required.
- Due to its location out of town, employee driving time would increase and facility security could be an issue.
- In the winter, during heavy snowfall, SR 260 is closed just east of Star Valley. This closure would limit the access to the office during these periods.

For these reasons, constructing all needed facilities at this site was dismissed from further detailed analysis. However, the proposed action includes use of this site for the proposed helitack facility.

Houston Mesa North site - approximately 0.7 miles north of the intersection of SR 87 and the Houston Mesa Road (Forest Service Road, FSR 199) on the east side of SR 87; this alternative included constructing all administrative facilities at this site and constructing new helitack facilities at the Payson Airport.

- The visibility of the site is limited due to its location at the bottom of a hill.

- Travel speeds on the highway are very fast. Acceleration and deceleration lanes would be needed for entrance and exit to and from the site. The lane construction would be expensive due to the topography of the highway and the location of a new intersection. There is an existing guardrail on the highway that would need to be moved. This would result in added cost for the lane construction.
- Utilities would need to be extended from near the Houston Mesa Campground. This is over one-half mile, and the extension would be costly.
- The site is rolling and not very flat, resulting in higher development costs. A substantial amount of clearing would also be required.
- Due to its location north of town, employee driving time would be higher than current levels and site security would be a concern.

For these reasons, constructing needed administrative facilities at this site was dismissed from further detailed analysis. The alternative to locate the helitack facility at the Payson Airport is discussed in the section below.

Payson Pit Site - approximately 0.3 miles north of the intersection of SR 87 and FSR 199, on the west side of SR 87; this alternative included constructing all administrative facilities and the helitack facility at this site.

- Travel speeds on the highway are very fast. Acceleration and deceleration lanes would be needed for entrance and exit to and from the site. The lane construction would be expensive due to the topography of the highway and the location of a new intersection. There is an existing guardrail on the highway that would need to be moved. This would result in added cost for the lane construction.
- Utility costs could be high; utilities would need to be extended from the Payson Pines subdivision. A well could be drilled on the site or water could possibly be obtained from the Town of Payson. A septic system would likely be needed.
- Much of the site would be in the location of a former gravel pit, so the site has been leveled. Development would be fairly easy, but somewhat expensive since this is a new site.
- Due to its location north of town, employee driving time would be higher than current levels and site security would be a concern.
- For these reasons, constructing needed administrative facilities at this site was dismissed from further detailed analysis.

Houston Mesa Campground site - adjacent to the Houston Mesa Campground entrance and south of FSR 199; this alternative included constructing all administrative facilities at this site and constructing new helitack facilities at the Payson Airport.

- Due to its proximity to the campground, lighting and noise would be an issue.
- Development could be relatively costly due to the rolling topography and a substantial amount of vegetation clearing would be needed.
- The site is not directly visible from the highway.
- A new intersection for access to the site would be needed near the campground entrance.

For these reasons, constructing needed administrative facilities at this site was dismissed from further detailed analysis. The alternative to locate the helitack facility at the Payson Airport is discussed in the next section.

Gun Range Road site - south of Payson and east of SR 87; this site is located approximately 2.3 miles south of the intersection of SR 87 and the Green Valley Parkway and is adjacent to and north of the Gun Range Road, FSR 375B. This alternative included constructing all administrative facilities and the helitack facility at this site.

- Development could be relatively costly due to the rolling topography.
- While the site would be somewhat visible from SR 87, it would be easy to pass by due to the high travel speeds on SR 87.
- A well and septic system would be needed.
- Due to its location south of town, employee driving time would be higher than current levels and site security would be a concern.
- The site is the location of a former mill. Preliminary inspections have not found any hazardous materials, but further investigation would likely be needed.
- The site is approximately 2.3 miles south of the southern part of Payson. Security at the site would be an issue. Also, FSR 375B provides access to the Payson Gun Range. Shooting and discharge of firearms in the area could be a concern.

For these reasons, constructing needed administrative facilities at this site was dismissed from further detailed analysis.

Alternate Sites Considered for a Separate Helitack Facility

Four possible sites for a separate helitack facility were also initially explored and considered during the April 2011 Choosing by Advantages process, as documented in the Preliminary Project Analysis (U.S. Forest Service 2011). These sites, and the reasons for their dismissal from detailed analysis, are described briefly below.

Construct new helitack facilities at the Payson Airport on land currently in state ownership (south of the airstrip, at the corner of Falconcrest Drive and Airport Road).

This alternative was dismissed from further consideration for the following reasons:

- The Forest would have to purchase the property; a bid on the property at fair market value would be required and funds to cover the cost would have to be found.
- If we cannot purchase the land, we would have to lease a facility.
- The Forest would still have to rent space for the helicopter from the airport since this site would not provide a good location for the larger helicopter we will be getting soon; it is not centrally located for this use.
- The site is not large enough to accommodate all of the needs of the helitack facilities.

Construct new helitack facilities on private land at the western end of Airport Road, bordering the Payson Airport property

This alternative was dismissed from further consideration for the following reasons:

- The Forest would have to purchase the property and would have to find funds to cover that cost.
- The Forest would still have to rent space for the helicopter from the airport.

Construct new helitack facilities on private land along SR 87 (north of the town hall and adjacent to the Verizon store).

This alternative was dismissed from further consideration for the following reasons:

- The Forest would have to purchase the property and would have to find funds to cover that cost.
- The Forest would still have to rent space for the helicopter from the airport.
- Response time from this location to the helicopter is not adequate. It would take too long to respond in an emergency.

Construct new helitack facilities on private land along Highway 87 (behind City Hall and Basha's).

This alternative was dismissed from further consideration for the following reasons:

- The Forest would have to purchase the property and would have to find funds to cover that cost.
- The Forest would still have to rent space for the helicopter from the airport.
- Response time from this location to the helicopter is not adequate. It would take too long to respond in an emergency.

Moving all Payson Ranger District administrative facilities (including the fire management helitack operation) to NFS land south of SR 260 (and directly south of the Gila County maintenance yard site) and selling the entire 296 acre parcel.

This alternative was initially explored and considered during a March 2012 Choosing by Advantages process as documented in a revised Preliminary Project Analysis (U.S. Forest Service 2012). This was done because of internal discussions regarding management and operational efficiency with the current situation (and Alternative 2- proposed action described in more detail in the next section) where the helitack operation is separate from other Ranger District administrative functions. While this configuration works, it is not ideal; it results in some administrative disconnect, lack of ranger district staff cohesiveness and more challenging employee communications. For these reasons, we explored an option to move all Ranger District facilities to NFS land further east along SR 260 where both the helitack operation and the other Ranger District operations could be located together.

However, while this alternative had a very similar cost to benefit ratio and similar advantages and disadvantages when compared to Alternative 2 - Proposed Action (described in more detail in the next section), this alternative was dismissed from further detailed analysis for the following reasons:

- It would not maintain the presence of the Forest Service Ranger Station within the Town of Payson
- It would require more travel time for the public and employees who live in Payson

- Although some utilities are available, it would require water well(s) and a septic system
- It would not provide for continuity of necessary office space during construction because the entire 296 acre parcel would be sold; existing facilities at the current Ranger District site would not be available during construction and temporary facilities would need to be provided

Consolidating all Payson Ranger District fire operations at a separate fire facility located at the Gila County maintenance yard site and constructing new Ranger District facilities at their current site in Payson.

This alternative was initially considered because of internal discussions regarding management and operational efficiency. As described previously and in more detail in the next section for Alternative 2- Proposed Action, the proposed action includes a fire management helitack facility that is separate from other ranger district operations (including the rest of the fire management operation that includes the hot shot base, engine crews, fire cache, etc.), a continuation of the current situation. While this situation works, it is not ideal; it results in some administrative disconnect among fire management personnel, lack of ranger district fire staff cohesiveness and more challenging employee communications. For these reasons, we explored an option to locate all ranger district fire operations (not just helitack) at the Gila County maintenance yard site near Star Valley.

However, this alternative was dismissed from further detailed analysis for the following reasons:

- While it would benefit internal communication and cohesiveness among fire management personnel, it would result in splitting ranger district operations even more by separating all fire management functions from the rest of the ranger district operations.
- It would require a larger facility, with additional ground disturbance, greater water and utility needs, and different access off of the highway due to the higher volume of employee ingress and egress year-round.

Relocating the helitack operation back to the current administrative site in Payson as was the situation prior to 1999.

This alternative was initially considered because of internal discussions regarding management and operational efficiency. As discussed in the alternatives shown previously, the proposed action includes a fire management helitack facility that is separate from the other Ranger District operations, a continuation of the current situation. While this situation works, it is not ideal; it results in some administrative disconnect among fire management personnel, lack of ranger district fire staff cohesiveness, and more challenging employee communications. For these reasons, we explored (but ultimately dismissed from further analysis) several options to consolidate all ranger district facilities in one location (see previous discussions of the Gun Range Road Site, Payson Pit Site and Gila County Shop Site earlier in this section) and an option to move all Payson Ranger District administrative facilities to NFS land south of SR 260 (and directly south of the Gila county maintenance yard site). For these same reasons, we also initially explored the option of keeping Ranger District facilities in their current location (as proposed in Alternative 2 – Proposed Action below) but also moving the helitack facility back to this location where it was located up until 1999.

However, this alternative was dismissed from further detailed analysis because there were significant safety issues identified in 1998 due to the location of the helitack operation at the

current administrative site. Agency reviews at that time documented safety concerns related to the helicopter arrival and departure path and the proximity of the facility to urban areas ('urban interface encroachment'). For these reasons, the helitack operation was moved to Tonto Basin Ranger District and then ultimately to its current location at the Payson Airport. These previously-identified safety issues with having the helitack operation co-located with other ranger district operations at the current Ranger Station have not changed since 1998.

Chapter 3 – Environmental Consequences

This section summarizes the physical, biological, social and economic environments of the affected project area and the potential changes to those environments due to implementation of the alternatives. It also presents the scientific and analytical basis for the comparison of alternatives presented in chapter 2. Key issues (noise, lighting, and land use & economics) are discussed first, followed by a more brief discussion of non-key issues.

Methodology

The impact analysis and conclusions contained in this chapter were based on Forest staff knowledge of the resources and site, reviewing of existing literature and agency studies, information provided by specialists within the Forest Service, other agencies and contractors, and professional judgment.

The specialist reports used in preparation of this chapter are listed below. These reports provide a more detailed description of affected environment, methods, and environmental consequences for this project. These reports are incorporated by reference, discussed briefly below, and available (subject to specific laws) in the project record.

- A Cultural Resources Survey of Approximately 360 Acres for the Proposed Payson Ranger District Administration Site Sale and Helitack Base Construction, Tonto National Forest, Payson Ranger District, Gila County, Arizona (Langan 2012)
- Payson Administration Site Preliminary Data for Waters of the U.S. Report (MacIntosh 2012)
- Phase I Environmental Site Assessment: Payson Ranger District Administrative Site Sale (Hoppman 2012)
- Environmental Noise Report (Shu 2012)
- Small Project Biological Evaluation (Rybczynski and Wilcox 2012a)
- Migratory Bird Analysis (Rybczynski and Wilcox 2012b)
- Management Indicator Species Analysis (Rybczynski 2012c)
- Environmental Assessment for Payson Ranger District Administrative Site Sale and Facilities Outdoor Lighting Report (Lohide 2012)
- Scenery (Visual Quality) Report (Jones 2012)
- Groundwater & Water Rights Report (Loomis 2012)
- Recreation (Visitor Experience) Report (Hohl 2012)
- Lands and Special Uses Report (Hoffman 2012)
- Mineral Potential Reports (Harbour 2012a and 2012b)

Potential impacts in this chapter are described in terms of type (direct, indirect, cumulative and whether the effects are beneficial or adverse), context (site-specific, local, or regional) duration (short-term or long-term) and intensity.

Direct effects occur at the same time and in the same locations as the actions that cause them. Indirect effects are those that occur at a later time or in a different location than the actions that were their cause. Cumulative impacts result from the additive impacts of past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions in or near the area.

For purposes of this analysis, short-term effects are those expected within the next 1 to 10 years (throughout the course of project implementation. Long-term effects are those that are expected between 10 and 20 years or more (after implementation is complete), unless specifically defined in individual resource sections below.

The baseline used for cumulative effects analysis is the current condition. The cumulative effects analysis, while it includes some consideration of past human actions, it does not fully quantify all effects of past human actions by adding up all prior actions on an action-by-action basis. By looking at current conditions, we are sure to capture residual effects of past human actions and natural events, regardless of which particular action or event contributed those effects. The CEQ issued an interpretive memorandum on June 24, 2005, regarding analysis of past actions, which states, "agencies can conduct an adequate cumulative effects analysis by focusing on the current aggregate effects of past actions without delving into the historical details of individual past actions." The cumulative effects analysis in this EA is also consistent with Forest Service NEPA Regulations (36 CFR 220.4(f)). For these reasons, while some past actions are listed and considered, the focus of the cumulative analysis is based on current environmental conditions.

Current, on-going management activities and reasonably foreseeable future actions with relevance to this project are summarized briefly in appendix B. How these on-going and routine activities influence current conditions is discussed in the affected environment sections of each specific report and is not included here.

Key Issues

Noise

Constructing new facilities on currently undeveloped land may result in changes in ambient noise levels and these changes have the potential to affect residents living in nearby areas. Increased noise due to development of new facilities, particularly a new helitack facility and its associated helicopter operation, was a concern raised both internally and by the public for this project, as discussed in the issues section of chapter 1.

The project vicinity is generally private residential land and undeveloped NFS land. The main noise source in the area is highway traffic noise from SR 260, specifically the acceleration and deceleration noise from heavy trucks. Because of the proximity of residential areas, we considered these sensitive receptors (individuals or groups of individuals who are sensitive to high noise levels, such as individuals at residences, schools, playgrounds, and hospitals).

Because noise was raised as a concern for this project and because the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) requires noise modeling to quantify noise exposure due to helicopter operations, we conducted noise monitoring in the project area and used the FAA Integrated Noise Model (INM) version 7.0 (FAA 2007) to model all aspects of the noise environment generated from proposed helicopter flights to and from the helipad locations within the Land Proposed for Helitack Facilities. We used the model to determine helicopter operation noise effects based on forecast uses, helicopter types, and flight paths to and from the proposed helipad.

As described in more detail in the Noise Report (Shu 2012), we used the following assumptions for the model:

- Four transports in a busy day (four helicopter arrivals and four departures).
- A Bell 206L helicopter
- Daytime only use
- An expected flight path used to arrive and depart the proposed helipad, based on prevailing winds as shown in figure 5.

We generated helicopter noise contours to evaluate the noise impact to residential properties in the following ways:

1. **Day-Night Average Sound Level (Ldn or DNL):** Ldn is the average noise level over a 24 hour period. The noise between the hours of 10 pm and 7 am is artificially increased by 10 dB. This noise is weighted to take into account the decrease in community background noise of 10 dB during this period. In determining compatible land uses, the FAA established guidelines in Part 150 of Title 14 of the CFR that indicated that all land uses are compatible with aircraft noise at exposure levels below 65 dBA Ldn.
2. **Maximum Sound Level (Lmax):** Lmax is the highest instantaneous sound level measured during a specified period. The maximum level describes only one dimension of an event; it provides no information on the cumulative noise exposure generated by a sound source. In fact, two events with identical maximum levels may produce very different total exposures. One may be of very short duration, while the other may continue for extended period and be judged much more annoying.
3. **Single Exposure Level (SEL):** SEL is an Leq normalized to 1 second. It can be used to compare the energy of noise events that have different time durations. It will almost always be larger in magnitude than the maximum A-weighted level for the event. For most aircraft over flights, the SEL is on the order of 7 to 12 dB higher than the Lmax. Also, the fact that it is a cumulative measure means that not only do louder fly-overs have higher SEL than do quieter ones, but also fly-overs with longer durations have greater SEL than do shorter ones.

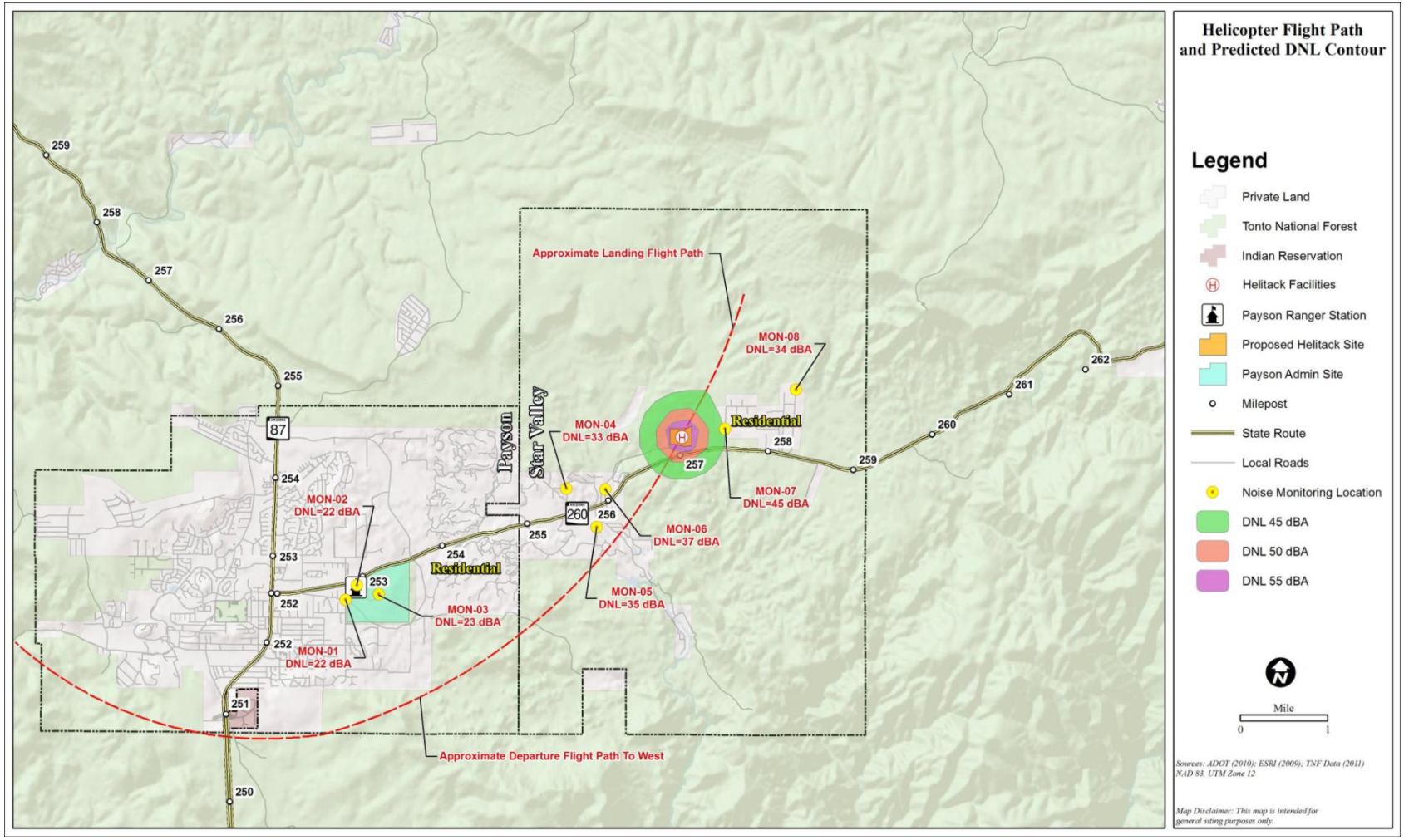

Figure 5. Approximate helicopter flight path and predicted noise contours

The Forest Service does not have a noise ordinance that regulates time periods and allowable decibels (dBA). Although no federal regulations limit overall environmental noise levels, agencies developed federal guidance documents and regulations that regulate specific noise sources. For example, the FAA specified 65 dBA in terms of day-night average sound level Ldn (DNL) for airport land use compatibility analyses. The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) specified 67 dBA in terms of hourly equivalent noise level (Leq) for federally funded highway traffic noise analyses. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) identified an Ldn of less than 55 dBA to avoid outdoor activity interference and annoyance. EPA's noise guidelines are not regulatory.

In order to document existing ambient noise conditions, we conducted noise monitoring at eight different sites (including residential areas along Mud Springs Road and Granite Dells Road and Dealer's Choice Road, among others, as shown on figure 5) within and near the project area. As described in more detail in the noise report for this project (Shu 2012), average existing ambient noise levels ranged from 38 dBA to 50 dBA. These levels are typical for a suburban environment setting.

No specific noise criteria from the state or county are applicable to the project. The Town of Payson has a noise ordinance that incorporates a general prohibition on unreasonable noise. The Town of Star Valley does not have a noise ordinance.

No Action

Under the no-action alternative, noise levels in the project area would remain unchanged from current conditions. Helicopter use would continue at the Payson Airport. As a result, no direct or indirect effects on noise are expected under this alternative.

Because there would be no direct/indirect effects from implementing the no-action alternative, there would be no cumulative impacts.

Proposed Action

Based on modeling results, implementing the proposed action would result in the following:

- There would be no residential properties (Diamond Point Shadows and residential areas surrounding the Payson Administrative Site) exposed to 65 dBA or greater noise in terms of the Ldn (DNL) metric.
- The total noise exposure in residential areas would increase by less than 2.3 dB Ldn (DNL). These are very small increases that would not be noticeable due to existing ambient noise levels. The modeled Ldn (DNL) from helicopter operations alone ranged from 23 dBA to 45 dBA. No residential properties would be within the FAA criteria of 65 dBA Ldn for land use compatibility determination, as described in more detail in the Noise Report (Shu 2012) and shown in figure 5.
- It is likely that residents in residential areas would be able to hear helicopter operations just as they currently hear heavy trucks on SR 260 and local roads. Because helicopters have a unique sound, the community would know the sound source is from a helicopter.
- Helicopter operations would not result in any indoor speech interference (based on maximum noise levels (Lmax) contours) because residential areas are outside the 75-dBA Lmax contour. There may be minimal outdoor speech interference, similar to the effects from other noise sources. However, these minimal effects would be of short duration (seconds).

- Very few residential properties occur within the 95-dBA sound exposure level (SEL) contour. In this contour, up to 10 percent of the population could be awakened from the outdoor noise exposure level. However, this is provided for information only since there would be no night time helicopter operations.

The proposed action would result in increased traffic in the project area due to changing undeveloped land to developed land in the Land Proposed for Sale and the Land Proposed for Helitack Facilities and improved facilities in the Land Proposed for Retention. Local access roads would be built inside the proposed helitack site, but because there are no residential properties within 1,000 feet from of the helitack site, impacts from this noise are not expected. Traffic increases in the Land Proposed for Sale and the Land Proposed for Retention would result in noise levels consistent with a suburban setting and similar to existing ambient noise levels.

Temporary noise impacts may be experienced during the construction of proposed improvements. The construction noise only lasts for the duration of the construction period. Construction activities are generally short term in nature and are often intermittent and would be minimized by project design features (chapter 2).

The effects of the proposed action was considered, combined with other past, present and future actions, as described in appendix B. For purposes of determining the cumulative effects on existing conditions, the modeled helicopter Ldn (DNL) at the noise measurement points were combined with existing ambient calculated Ldn (DNL) to derive a new Ldn (DNL) for each site with the helicopter operations. As described in more detail in the noise Report (Shu 2012), the combined Ldn ranged from 43 dBA to 54 dBA. This is an Ldn increase in total community noise exposure from helicopter operations of less than 2.3 dBA Ldn, which is an insignificant change based on ambient noise levels.

Future traffic noise on local roads would increase following the construction of new facilities but would be minimal due to low traffic volumes and low traffic speeds. The existing traffic noise level at the roundabout between Mud Springs Road and Granite Dells Road is approximately 50 dBA. Future traffic noise levels would be similar to existing condition if Mud Springs Road is extended from the roundabout to SR 260 and noise impacts would be minimal to the nearby residents. Local access roads would be built inside the proposed helitack site. Because there are no residential properties within 1000 feet from the helitack site, no traffic noise impact would be expected. ADOT has two projects planned on SR 260 east of the Payson Ranger District facilities and would provide mitigation measures to reduce noise as warranted in adherence to that agency's Noise Abatement Policy.

Conclusion

The proposed action would result in direct and indirect effects on sensitive receptors (residential areas) due to helicopter noise within the project area. However, the effects are minor and short in duration because they would occur only during helicopter operation. There would be an overall increase in noise but it would be less than 2.3 dBA Ldn. There would no helicopter noise at night, and all predicted noise increases would be within established thresholds. Minor cumulative effects are anticipated as a result of the implementing the proposed action in combination with other past, present, and future projects (appendix B) but these actions would also be subject to federal, state, and local regulations to reduce substantial cumulative effects from noise.

Lighting

Constructing new facilities on currently undeveloped land could result in changes in lighting in the area and these changes have the potential to affect residents living in nearby areas. This concern was raised both internally and by the public for this project, as discussed in the issue section of chapter 2.

The current administrative site is somewhat screened to the public by existing vegetation and topography. Current outdoor lighting is minimal and consists of three types throughout the complex (pole mounted unshielded security lights with photocells, flood lights activated by motion or manual switch, and unshielded box type flood lights mounted to the building exterior). The existing paved access drive is not lighted. The Land Proposed for Helitack Facilities and Land proposed for Sale are undeveloped with no outdoor lighting.

The Town of Payson Unified Development code Section 15-03 (Landscaping, Screening, buffering and Lighting 2011) includes facility design guidelines related to lighting, and the Town of Star Valley has a Dark Sky Ordinance.

No Action

Current lighting within the existing administrative site would remain the same and would continue to have only minimal effects to surrounding areas. The Land Proposed for Sale would remain undeveloped with no lighting.

The Land Proposed for Helitack Facilities adjacent to the county maintenance yard would remain in its natural condition with no lighting because the proposed facilities would not be constructed. Therefore, the no-action alternative would not result in any direct or indirect effects relative to lighting.

Because there would be no direct or indirect effects from implementing the no-action alternative, there would be no cumulative effects.

Proposed Action

The proposed new facilities on Land Proposed for Retention would be located in the same general area although 13 additional acres would be added to the boundary of the administrative site. We have developed a list of project design features (chapter 2) that would apply to the construction and renovation of these facilities that would minimize the potential for adverse effects from increased lighting. While not required, outdoor lighting, when feasible, would follow the Town of Payson Unified Development Code Section 15-03 (Landscaping, Screening, Buffering and Lighting 2011), by adding light fixtures in paved areas that average 1 to 3 foot candles; shielding and screening light fixtures to reflect light away from adjacent properties; and providing only enough lighting for safety and security purposes. While the new facility would be larger than the existing, with adherence to these design features, the new facility would likely not be any brighter than the current facility.

Lighting for the Proposed New Helitack Facilities would only include those areas that need it for safety or security purposes. Typical airport lighting would not be required at or around the landing pads because Forest Service helicopters are restricted to flying during daylight hours only. Project design features (chapter 2) would be incorporated into the design of these facilities and would include fixtures that direct light downward/shielding lights to minimize reflection upward or toward residential areas. If feasible, lighting would meet the Town of Star Valley Dark Sky Ordinance.

There is a buffer (approximately one-half mile) between the proposed helitack facility and private residences in Diamond Point Shadows. Existing vegetation and topography would screen the new facility from the residences and the minimal security lighting is not likely to be visible from these residences. However, the area currently has no lighting; therefore, although minor, there is the possibility that lighting could be perceptible by nearby residents, minimized by the distance between the facility and residences and the topography and vegetation within this buffer.

The Land Proposed for Sale would change from undeveloped to developed and how this development would occur is outside the scope of this project and the jurisdiction of the Forest Service. However, we anticipate that any proposed development on the sold land would comply with the Town of Payson Unified Development Code, Section 15-03 (Landscaping, Screening, Buffering and Lighting 2011). Lighting could increase in the short-term during construction on Land Proposed for Retention, Land Proposed for Helitack Facilities, and Land Proposed for Sale due to heavy equipment operation and increased traffic and activity, with the potential for some activity during dawn and dusk to require added artificial light for safety or security. These short-term light impacts would last only the duration of the construction period and would be minimized with the implementation of project design features (chapter 2).

Combining the effects of implementing the proposed action with other past, present and reasonably foreseeable future actions (appendix B) lighting would be expected to increase in the area of the Land Proposed for Sale. However, these effects would likely be reduced by compliance with the Town of Payson Unified Development Code, Section 15-03 (Landscaping, Screening, Buffering and Lighting 2011). Because the proposed development on the Land Proposed for Retention would be similar to what currently exists and lighting is not expected to measurably increase, there would be no cumulative effects from implementing this action. There are also no measurable cumulative impacts reasonably foreseen with developing the Land Proposed for New Helitack Facilities. The lighting for this facility would be minimal, for safety and security only, and if feasible would follow Town of Star Valley Dark Sky Ordinance. This lighting would add to existing lighting levels associated at the Gila County maintenance facility located adjacent to the proposed helitack facility. This combined lighting is still expected to be minimal and would not likely be perceptible by private residences in Diamond Point Shadows.

Conclusion

Implementing the proposed action would increase lighting on the Land Proposed for Helitack Facilities but this increase is expected to be minor and would not likely be visible from nearby residences. Implementing the proposed action would result in changing undeveloped land to developed land on the 253 acres Land Proposed for Sale; lighting is expected to increase due to this development but would likely be designed in accordance with Town of Payson Unified Development Code, Section 15-03 (Landscaping, Screening, Buffering and Lighting 2011). Lighting would not measurably change on Land Proposed for Retention as new Forest Service facilities would use minimal lighting and would adhere to project design features and, if feasible, would follow Town of Payson Unified Development Code.

Land Use and Socioeconomics

Constructing new facilities on currently undeveloped land has the potential to affect social and economic resources such as land use and property market values for residents living nearby as well as environmental justice (any adverse human health and environmental effects of agency programs that could disproportionately impact minority and low-income populations). These land

use and socioeconomic concerns were raised both internally and by the public for this project, as discussed in the issues section of chapter 1.

The existing Payson administrative site is situated within the incorporated boundaries of the Town of Payson and bordered by SR 260 on the north, residential parcels to the east, residential and commercial lots to the west, and Granite Dells Road and residential parcels to the south. North of SR 260 is both undeveloped land and the Gila Community College. The land proposed for helitack facilities is currently undeveloped NFS bordered by the Gila County maintenance yard and SR 260 to the south and more undeveloped NFS land to the west, east, and north.

The administrative site is zoned by the Town of Payson as R1-175 (residential with a minimum lot size in excess of 175,000 square feet). This zoning designation is not recognized by the Forest Service because it is not consistent with its current federal designation as an administrative site, and no federal policy recognizes a municipality's ability to define the status of federal land. It is not uncommon, however, for municipalities to provide zoning overlays on federal lands for planning purposes in case the land is ever sold or otherwise converted from federal land as allowed by public law. Current zoning surrounding the administrative site includes residential, open space, transitional multi-family, and commercial units (figure 6).

The Land Proposed for Helitack Facilities lies within the incorporated limits of the Town of Star Valley. Zoning classifications surrounding the proposed site includes Incorporated Public Lands and General Rural District (figure 7). The General Rural District designation is applied to the parcel containing the Gila County maintenance yard. The residential area located approximately one mile east of the proposed helitack facilities is zoned as Suburban Ranch.

The Town of Payson's 2003 General Plan Update defines the Administrative Site (Land Proposed for Sale and Land Proposed for Retention) as future Mixed Use Development #1 as well as a part of the SR 260 Growth Corridor. The General Plan defines various uses for this area including government and education facilities, a park, and additional recreational (e.g., trails) and public uses such as a conference center. The General Plan also identifies goals and policies for the respective land use or growth elements of the plan based on considerations such as employment opportunities, incompatible land uses and zoning, preservation of open space, and mobility issues. The General Plan Update involved community participation through both the formation of a Technical Advisory Committee comprised of members of the Town's Planning and Zoning Commission, Town staff, and citizens, as well as open meetings and general outreach throughout the update process.

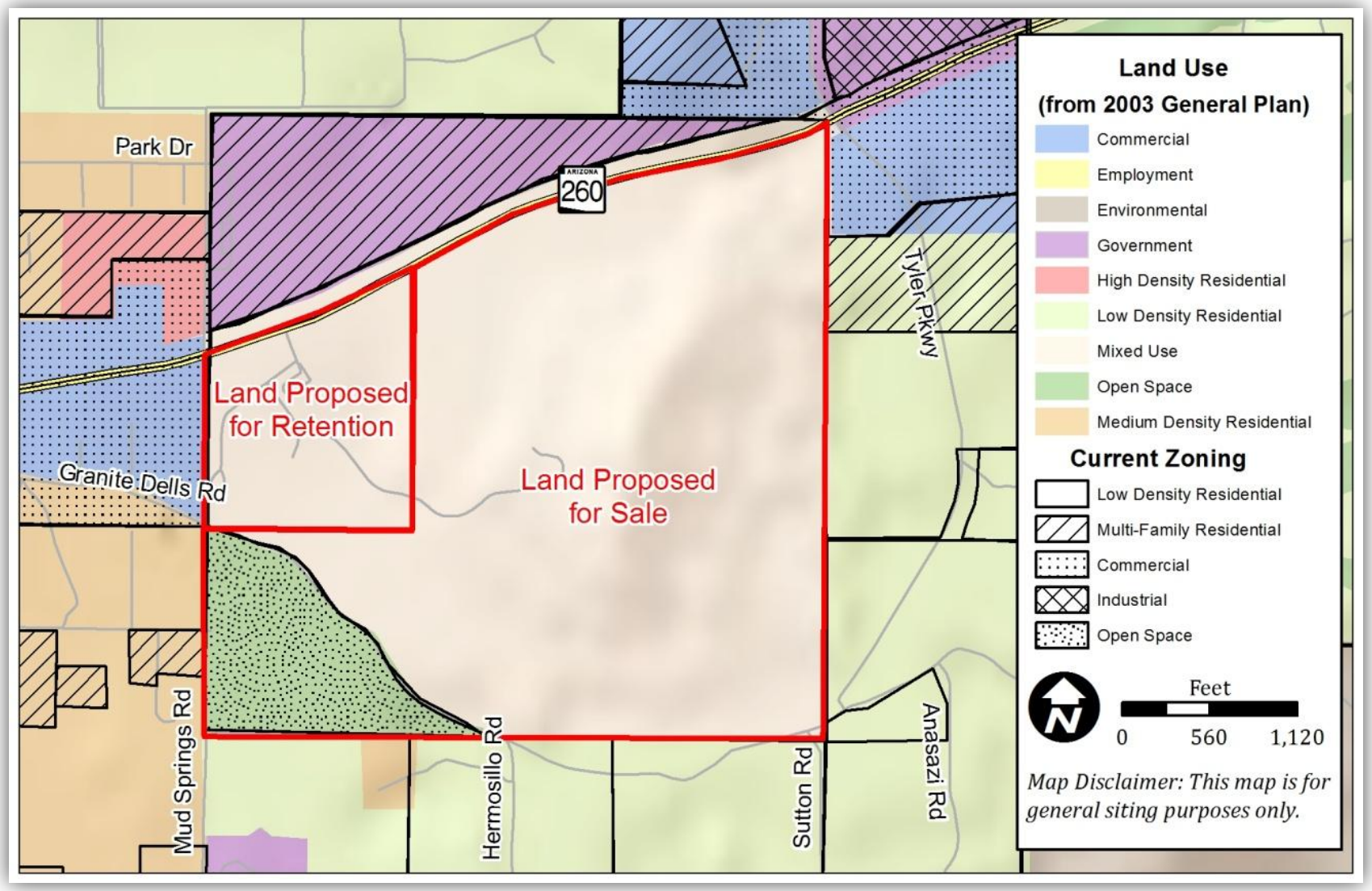

Figure 6. Existing zoning and general plan update land use–Payson Administrative Site

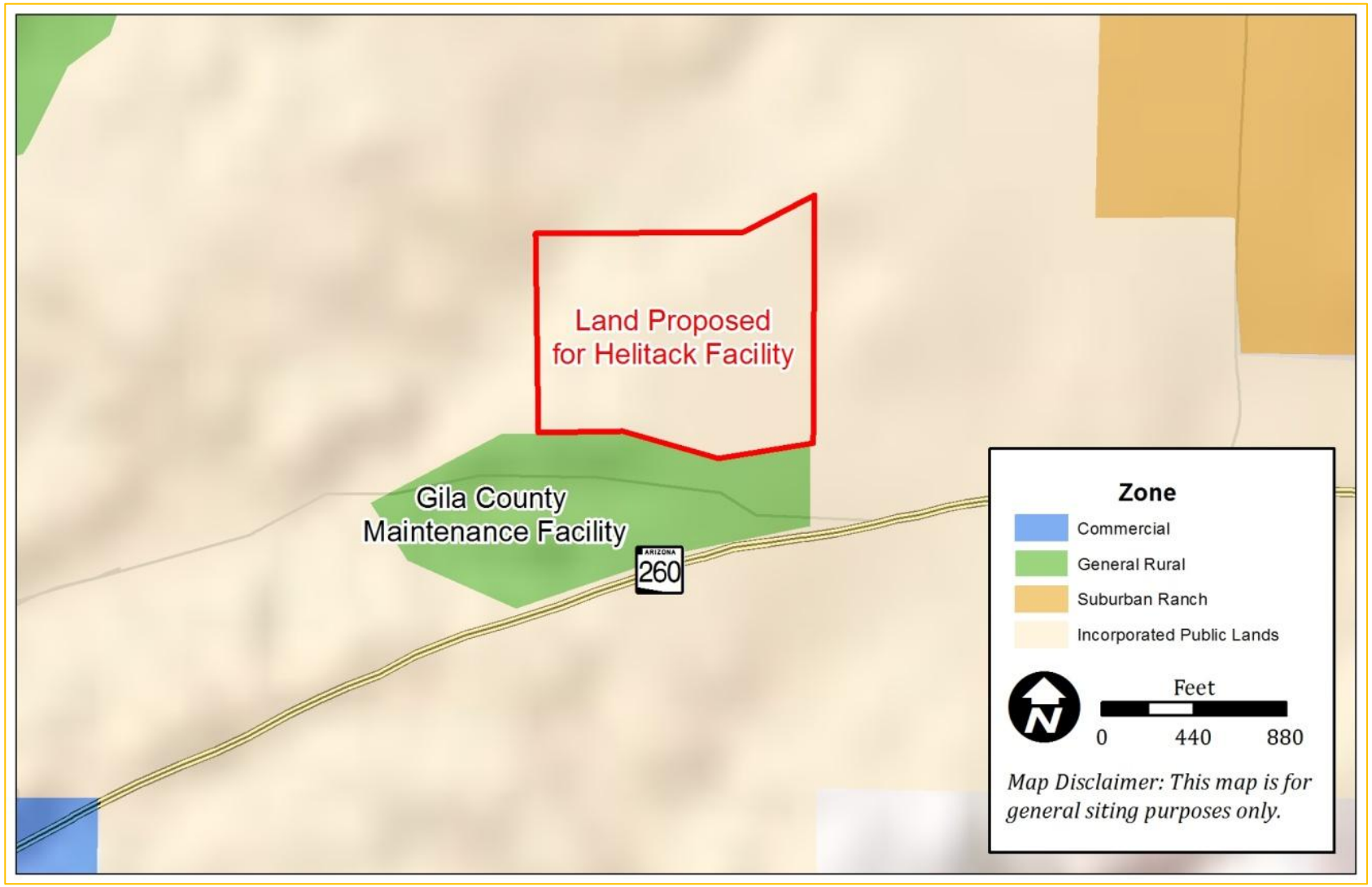

Figure 7. Existing zoning and existing land use–Land proposed for helitack facility

Title VI and Environmental Justice

Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and related statutes ensure that individuals are not excluded from participation in, denied the benefit of, or subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, sex, or disability. Executive Order 129898, *Environmental Justice,* directs that programs, policies, and activities not have a disproportionately high and adverse human health and environmental effect on minority and low-income populations. The rights of women, the elderly, and low-income populations are protected under related statutes. A comparison of disabled, low-income, elderly, female head-of-household, and minority population percentages by census tracts between the study area and the surrounding municipalities and counties is shown on tables 3 and 4.

Census tracts are small, relatively permanent statistical subdivisions of a county for tallying census information and do not cross county boundaries. The size of census tracts varies depending on the population density of the area. They are delineated with the intention of being maintained over a long period to allow statistical comparisons from census to census. Information on poverty status was determined from the American Community Survey from the Census Bureau. Disability information was only available from the 2000 Census data.

According to the US Census Bureau 2010 data, the study area is comprised primarily of populations identified as white, representing approximately 92% of the 9,910 individuals recorded within the two tracts. No other substantial populations, meaning those populations that comprise greater than 50% of a population, are located within the study area.

Table 3. 2010 Population and racial demographics [1]

Area	Total Population	White alone		Black or African American alone		American Indian and Alaska Native alone		Asian alone		Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander alone		Some other race alone		Two or more races		Hispanic or Latino	
		#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Census Tract 4	4,481	4,163	92.9	5	0.1	50	1.1	37	0.8	4	0.1	137	3.1	85	1.9	385	8.6
Census Tract 5	5,429	4,915	90.5	16	0.3	185	3.4	33	0.6	5	0.1	171	3.1	104	1.9	557	10.3
Payson	15,301	14,021	91.6	65	0.4	355	2.3	101	0.7	18	0.1	475	3.1	266	1.7	1,481	9.7
Gila County	53,597	41,162	76.8	233	0.4	7,946	14.8	273	0.5	47	0.1	2,865	5.3	1,071	2.0	9,588	17.9

[1] All data from Summary File 1 (SF1)

Table 4. Age 60 years and over, below poverty level, disabled, and female head of household populations

Area	Total Population	Age 60 Years and Over		Poverty Level [1]		Disabled [2]		Female head of Household	
		#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Census Tract 4	4,481	1,949	43.5	627	13.1	948	23.6	610	28.6
Census Tract 5	5,429	1,923	35.4	376	8.0	1,165	25.4	690	29.2
Payson	15,301	6,058	39.6	1,242	8.3	3,341	25.5	2,047	29.8
Gila County	53,597	16,961	31.6	9,923	18.9	11,844	24.9	6,295	28.6

[1] U.S. Census Bureau, 2006-2010 American Community Survey

[2] 2000 Census

No Action

The administrative site (Land Proposed for Sale and Land Proposed for Retention) would remain under federal ownership and management responsibility of the US Forest Service. No substantial changes to the site would be anticipated. No changes to types of land uses other than those consistent with an administrative site as exists today would occur. Adjacent residential property values would remain consistent with current or future market trends as there would be no basis for any upward or downward trend based on this parcel alone.

The SR 260 Growth Corridor identified in the 2003 General Plan Update would not be fully implemented because this parcel is the core of developable land. Improvements identified in the General Plan Update for this site include a new 80-acre educational site, government facilities, a new park area, and other public uses such as trails and a conference center. The planning within this growth corridor was intended to improve economic conditions and opportunities within the Town of Payson. All improvements were planned to maintain the adjacent property values. The Town of Payson would need to consider amending their planning documents and develop new visions for growth along the SR 260 corridor, if the no-action alternative were selected.

No residential development occurs adjacent to the Land Proposed for Helitack Facilities, and under the no-action alternative no changes would occur from what exists today. Adjacent residential property values would remain consistent with current or future market trends as there would be no basis for any upward or downward trend based on this parcel alone. Therefore, there are no direct or indirect effects.

Based on the US census data, there are no protected populations within the study area. The No Action Alternative would not require the acquisition of any residential properties, nor would it require full acquisition of any properties. Therefore, there would be no disproportionate impact to protected populations.

Combining the effects of taking no action at this time to address the purpose and need with other past, present and foreseeable future actions (appendix B), would not result in measurable cumulative effects to property market values or land uses. The Town of Payson would lose a substantial amount of developable land in the core of their SR 260 Growth Corridor. However, no cumulative effects to residential property are reasonably foreseen as conditions and market trends would be consistent with what exists today.

Proposed Action

The Land Proposed for Retention would remain as a designated administrative site with ranger district office facilities still remaining to serve the public similar to what exists there today. It is anticipated that proceeds from selling the 253 acres of NFS land out of federal ownership would be used to construct new and upgraded facilities on this site. These changes to the retained Forest Service parcel would not impact the land values or uses of adjacent residential parcels because new facilities would be of similar intent and function to what occurs today.

No changes would occur adjacent to any current or planned residential parcels near the Land Proposed for Helitack Facilities. Proposed development would be limited to approximately 5 acres within a 31-acre administrative site on NFS land. This proposed development is approximately one-half mile from the nearest residential community. All residential properties that are currently adjacent to undeveloped forest land would continue in the future. Therefore, no impacts on residential property values are expected in this area.

The Land Proposed for Sale would be transferred out of federal ownership and we assume that this land would change from undeveloped land to developed land. Specific details related to how this sold land would be developed are outside the scope of this analysis. However, we discuss here its relationship to the Town of Payson's General Plan and local zoning in order to analyze potential effects to nearby residences and property values.

This parcel is currently zoned as residential. However, the Town of Payson has identified this parcel in their 2003 General Plan Update (Town of Payson 2003) as future mixed use development. This land use designation is also located within their greater SR 260 Growth Corridor identified in the General Plan. It is reasonable to assume that a zoning change would occur for this parcel prior to development to be consistent with land use designations in the General Plan. Mixed use development could include government and educational facilities, conference centers, parks, and recreational features such as trails. No design details for this parcel are provided in the Town of Payson's General Plan Update.

Prior to reclassification, zoning changes are recommended for approval to the town's Planning and Zoning Commission, and public input is taken prior to making any official recommendation for the change to the town council. Details of any development would be required to comply with the Town of Payson UDC. The UDC requires developments to preserve and augment existing vegetation and the natural topography. The intent is to protect the natural environment and preserve and enhance the ponderosa pine forest character of Payson (Town of Payson, 2011a). The UDC also provides direction to buffer adjacent parcels of land zoned for different uses, as would be the case for the residential areas paralleling Granite Dells Road to the south of the sale parcel.

Policy 1A in the Growth Element section/chapter of the 2003 General Plan Update encourages compatible development that preserves the property values within and adjacent to the respective growth area.

Because proposed design details for how this sold land might be developed are not available, it is not possible to reasonably determine specific direct/indirect impacts to adjacent residential properties. However, it should be noted that any changes to existing zoning would be conducted by the Town of Payson through open meetings to allow public input prior to changes occurring. Future facility designs would be developed per UDC that would likely minimize any adverse direct impacts to land values of adjacent parcels as required by Policy 1A.

Therefore, we assume additional development would occur in the event that the Land Proposed for Sale occurs. The details of this development are only a vision at this point and are, in concept, compatible with the General Plan Update. In addition to the development of this land, other improvements (e.g., water, sewer, electrical, and roads) would be required. It is possible that implementing project design features during development of this parcel would minimize the possibility of adverse effects due to off-area parking in adjacent neighborhoods, light spillage into neighborhoods, and egress and ingress concerns from adjacent neighbors with points of access planned to avoid connections on neighborhood streets to and from any new facilities. Overall impacts to the residential parcels would be addressed during re-zoning of any property within the SR 260 Growth Corridor.

Based on the US census data, there are no protected populations within the study area. The Proposed Action would not require the acquisition of any residential properties, nor would it require full acquisition of any properties. Therefore, there would be no disproportionate impact to protected populations.

Combining the impacts of implementing the proposed action with other past, present and reasonably foreseeable future actions (appendix B) for the Land Proposed for Retention or Land Proposed for Helitack Facilities would not result in measurable cumulative impacts. With the implementation of Town of Payson UDCs and adherence to the General Plan update would minimize the possibility of adverse cumulative effects due to the implementing the proposed action.

Conclusion

Impacts to adjacent residential properties would depend greatly on the actual type and design of the future sites. It is not anticipated that the Land Proposed for Helitack Facilities or the Land Proposed for Retention would negatively impact adjacent residential property values. The configuration and type of facilities envisioned for the Land Proposed for Retention would be consistent with what exists on the administrative site today. The facilities envisioned for the Land Proposed for Helitack Facilities would be situated over one-half mile from any residential development, and each residential property currently bordering undeveloped forest lands would still have this buffer.

Design details of the Land Proposed for Sale are not available, and specifics of impacts would need to be assessed during the future re-zoning of the property. Any future development would adhere to policies from the Town of Payson's General Plan Update and ordinances or codes from the UDC.

Many factors could dictate the direct or indirect impacts on adjacent residential property values from improvements on the Land Proposed for Sale, which could be partly or potentially fully mitigated by the design and layout or orientation of the proposed facilities. In any case, prior to any future changes in zoning and eventual construction of facilities on the Land Proposed for Sale, opportunities for public involvement would be afforded through the Town of Payson. The Town of Payson 2003 General Plan Update encourages compatible development that preserves the property values within and adjacent to the respective SR 260 Growth Corridor. Design features could eliminate issues with off-area parking in adjacent neighborhoods, light spillage into neighborhoods, and egress and ingress concerns from adjacent neighbors with points of access planned to avoid connections on neighborhood streets to and from any new facilities on the Land Proposed for Sale. No direct or indirect impacts are expected from the Land Proposed for Helitack Facilities or Land Proposed for Retention.

Non-Key Issues

Minerals

Public Land Order 5279 issued in 1972 withdrew the existing Payson administrative site (Land Proposed for Sale and Land Proposed for Retention) from mineral location and entry under the U.S. Mining Laws, but not Mineral Leasing Laws. We reviewed the BLM automated mining claim data and case recordation system on September 5, 2012, and verified that there are no active or closed mining claims, no active leases, lease applications, prospect permits or prospecting applications in or near this 296-acre parcel.

As described in more detail in the mineral potential reports for this project (Harbour 2012a and 2012b), this parcel is not located within any oil and gas field and no energy resources are identified. The potential for locatable minerals is also low. This area is composed primarily of decomposed granite; decomposed granite is useful for borrow material (a salable mineral) and

other common variety uses (e.g., road work and landscaping) but there are no established material sources identified in the parcel and other deposits (outside the parcel) are more readily available for development. The level of potential for salable minerals is moderate.

We reviewed the BLM automated mining claim data and case recordation system on September 5, 2012 and verified that there are no active or closed mining claims, no active leases, lease applications, prospect permits or prospecting applications in or near the Land Proposed for Helitack Facilities. As described in more detail in the mineral potential reports for this project (Harbour 2012a and 2012b), this parcel is not located within any oil and gas field and no energy resources are identified. The potential for locatable minerals is also low. Like the Payson administrative site, the Land Proposed for Helitack Facilities is composed primarily of decomposed granite; decomposed granite is useful for borrow material (a salable mineral) and other common variety uses (e.g. road work and landscaping) but there are no established material sources identified in the parcel and other deposits (outside the parcel) are more readily available for development. The level of potential for salable minerals is moderate.

No Action

There are no direct/indirect effects from implementing the no action alternative. Currently, the Payson administrative site is withdrawn from locatable mineral entry but is subject to leasing or salable activities; this would continue if the no action alternative were selected. Currently, the Land Proposed for Helitack Facilities is subject to locatable, leasable and salable mineral activities, and this would continue with implementation of the no action alternative. Because of the low potential for leasable resources in these areas, it is not likely this use would occur in the future. Because the potential for salable mineral resources (such as decomposed granite as a borrow material) is moderate, it is possible this development could occur in the future. However, development of salable mineral resources is discretionary on public lands and, therefore, would be site-specifically evaluated if a proposal were received in the future to determine if it was compatible with current land uses in the area.

Because there are no direct or indirect effects, there would no cumulative effects from implementing the no-action alternative.

Proposed Action

There would be no measurable direct or indirect effects from implementing the proposed action. The Land Proposed for Sale would be transferred out of public ownership under implementation of the proposed action. As stated in the Public Law 106-458 (issued in 2000 and described in more detail in chapter 1) the Secretary of Agriculture is authorized to sell or exchange any and all right, title, and interest of the United States in and to the Payson administrative site. It also stated that "Notwithstanding any other provision of law, on conveyance of land by the Secretary under this section, any public order withdrawing the land from any form of appropriation under the public land laws is revoked." Therefore, the 253 acres sold under the proposed action would be removed from the mineral withdrawal under Public Land Order 5279 upon completion and conveyance of the land. Upon transfer out of federal ownership, this parcel could be subject to locatable, leasable and salable entry. However, as stated for the no action alternative, because of the low potential for leasable resources, it is not likely this use would occur in the future. Because the potential for salable mineral resources (such as decomposed granite as a borrow material) is moderate, it is possible this development could occur in the future. Because this potential future development would be proposed on land no longer in federal ownership, it would be evaluated by the new owners of the land to determine if it was compatible with current land uses in the area.

Under the proposed action, the Land Proposed for Helitack Facilities would be withdrawn from mineral entry. The process would involve submission of an administrative request from the Forest Service to the Bureau of Land management (BLM) for issuance of the mineral withdrawal; the Secretary of the Interior has authority to withdraw the parcel. Upon withdraw the parcel would no longer be subject to locatable entry but would continue to be subject to leasable and salable entry. However, because of the low potential for leasable resources, it is not likely this use would occur in the future. Because the potential for salable mineral resources (such as decomposed granite as a borrow material) is moderate, it is possible this development could occur in the future. However, development of salable mineral resources is discretionary on public lands and, therefore, would be site-specifically evaluated if a proposal were received in the future to determine if it was compatible with current land uses in the area. Since the compatibility of such activity with that of the Payson helitack administrative site would be extremely low, the likelihood of any future development of salable mineral resources would be very low.

Considering the impacts of past, on-going and future actions (including the list of projects described briefly in appendix B with implementing the proposed action, cumulative impacts are not expected. Because there are no existing mining claims or leases in any of the areas considered under the proposed action, withdrawing the Land Proposed for Helitack Facilities would not result in any measurable direct/indirect effects and, therefore, would not contribute to cumulative effects. Retaining the mineral withdrawal for the Lands Proposed for Retention would continue the existing condition and therefore would not contribute to cumulative effects. Removing the mineral withdrawal on the Land Proposed for Sale would not result in measurable direct/indirect effects and, therefore, would not contribute to cumulative effects.

Conclusion

There would be no measurable indirect/direct adverse effects with implementing the proposed action because there are no active mining claims, leases, lease applications, prospect permits, or prospecting applications in or near the project area and the potential for salable mineral resources is low to moderate.

Watershed (soil and water)

A watershed includes all water sources flowing above or below an area of land. Surface water includes water present above the soil surface such as rivers, streams, lakes, pools, and stormwater runoff. Groundwater is water that flows below the soil surface that can be collected by underground wells or other facilities constructed for water collection or monitoring purposes. Groundwater discharge maintains base flows in streams, springs, and seeps, and supports wetland and riparian vegetation.

The majority of the Land Proposed for Sale, Land Proposed for Retention, and Land Proposed for Helitack Facilities is located within the Tonto Creek basin and sub-basin of the Salt River watershed. The Salt River basin is an important water supply source for the Phoenix metropolitan area. The mountainous topography creates a branching drainage pattern; however, all drainages within this watershed have a potential downstream connection to the Salt River. Waters on the Land Proposed for Helitack Facilities flow westerly into Schoolhouse Canyon; Stewart Creek drains most of the Land Proposed for Sale and Land Proposed for Retention. These systems are eventual tributaries to the Salt River approximately 40 miles downstream, via Houston and Tonto creeks and Roosevelt Lake.

In March 2008, wells in this area measured the depth to groundwater at approximately 49.2 feet at the eastern portion of the administrative site and at approximately 176.9 feet at the proposed

helitack site (ADWR 2012). The extreme northwestern corner of the administrative site is located within the Lower Verde River basin and Verde Canyon sub-basin of the Verde River watershed, and drainage within this area has a potential downstream connection to the East Verde River (ADEQ 2012). Depths to groundwater at this site have ranged from 73.5 feet to 92.9 feet (ADWR 2012). None of the project locations occur within a sole source aquifer.

Surface Water

The Clean Water Act (CWA) is the primary federal statute regulating the discharge of point (concentrated output) and nonpoint (widely scattered output) pollutants into waters of the United States. The CWA establishes water quality standards to restore and maintain the chemical, physical, and biological integrity of perennial and ephemeral waters and wetlands. All channels within the proposed project area are ephemeral, flowing only in response to rainfall or snowmelt. Water quality standards applicable to these channels are those that apply to ephemeral tributaries of named streams or lakes listed in appendix B of the State of Arizona Water Quality Standards. Applicable standards include those intended to protect aquatic and wildlife (ephemeral) and partial body contact. Violations of these standards have not been detected. The only downstream water body listed as impaired for water quality is Roosevelt Lake which has a fish consumption advisory due to mercury accumulation in fish. Fish consumption advisories have also recently been applied to reaches of Tonto Creek below the confluence with Spring Creek due to mercury contamination. These sites are well downstream of the proposed project area. The Forest Service protects water quality on NFS lands by implementing Best Management Practices (BMP's) that reduce discharge of nonpoint source pollutants.

We conducted field visits in April and August 2012 to determine the presence of potential jurisdictional waters of the U.S .within the project area. A total of 24 drainages were identified as possessing characteristics of waters of the U.S., with an approximate total of 1.823 acres of proposed waters of the U.S. within the project area, including a 0.02-acre patch of potential wetlands containing bulrush (*Scirpus pungens*). The 0.02-acre potential wetland patch is located immediately east of the Mud Springs Road northern terminus, and is likely perpetuated by a combination of roadway runoff and localized depressed topography. No other riparian or wetland vegetation was observed. Waters within the project area are ephemeral, and there are no perennial water sources.

We reviewed the List of Outstanding Arizona Waters (Arizona Administrative Code R18-11-112(G)), and Arizona's 2006/2008 303(d) List of Impaired and Not Attaining Waters, and Draft 2010 Impaired Waters List were reviewed to determine whether any outstanding or impaired waters are present. No outstanding waters, Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) 303(d) non-attaining impaired waters, or EPA 303(d) impaired waters occur in or within one mile of the project area.

Executive Order 11988, Floodplains, requires impacts to floodplains be evaluated for all federal actions. Floodplains are delineated and managed by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). A floodplain is generally level land subject to periodic flooding from an adjacent body of water. The Land Proposed for Sale, Land Proposed for Retention, and Land Proposed for Helitack Facilities are all in an area that has not been delineated for the 100-year floodplain.

Groundwater

Region 3 Forest Service Manual Supplement 2500-2001-1 states "Ground water beneath NFS lands in the Region is a valuable resource that requires thoughtful and prudent management. Understanding ground and surface water interactions facilitates the protection of surface water

rights. Where surface and ground water are connected, ground water discharge sustains base flows in NFS streams and is the source of water for springs and seeps. This ground water discharge may be critical for sustaining aquatic and riparian ecosystems along with the numerous resources and activities dependent upon them". The R-3 manual supplement also states "When a project proponent proposes to drill a well on NFS lands and/or transport ground water across NFS lands through a pipeline, it is appropriate to analyze the potential impacts of water removal along with the impacts of well and/or pipeline construction (40 CFR § 1508.25 Scope, 40 CFR § 1508.7 Cumulative impact). The analysis should consider impacts upon neighboring landowners and water users." Furthermore, the manual supplement says "special use authorizations for water developments on NFS lands should be approved using the appropriate decision document only when the long-term protection of NFS streams, springs, seeps, and associated riparian and aquatic ecosystems can be assured." Although a new well drilled for National Forest System (NFS) purposes does not require a special use permit, the Forest Service would apply the same standards to a new well for NFS purposes as it would a well requiring a Special Use Permit.

Water for the current Payson Ranger District administrative site is provided by a well (Well Registration No. 55-600871) that was drilled in 1969. The well is 220 feet deep and provided with a pump that has the capacity to pump 7 gpm. Water is pumped to two 15,000 gallon storage tanks and gravity fed throughout the administrative site. The well and pump provide adequate water to meet the needs of the facilities at the site. The depth of the water in the well on the existing administrative site was 73.5 feet when measured by ADWR in May of 2009.Numerous small domestic wells exist adjacent to the site.

In the vicinity of the Land Proposed for Helitack Facilities, wells typically developed in granite formations derive their water from fractures in the granite. A number of wells have been drilled nearby and yields range from 10 to 20 gpm. The nearest well is at the Gila County maintenance yard adjacent. Numerous small domestic wells exist within the Town of Star Valley west of the project area and the Diamond Point Shadows subdivision located just east of the proposed facilities. These are primarily small volume wells that provide water to individual landowners. The Town of Star Valley also operates a municipal water system that is entirely dependent on groundwater.

Soils

Soil types are determined by climate, vegetation, lithology, and physical geography. A detailed soil survey has not been conducted within the project area. According to the Arizona General Soil Map, local soils are Mesic Subhumid soils of the Lithic Haplustolls-Lithic Argiustolls-Rock Outcrop Association, which consists of well-drained, gravelly and cobbly, moderately coarse to moderately fine-textured soils formed in residuum on igneous and sedimentary hills and mountains (Hendricks 1985). More refined soils information was obtained and extrapolated from the North Tonto Terrestrial Ecosystems Survey (TES) (U.S. FS 1985). Four TES map units were identified as occurring within the project area: Soil Map Units (SMU) 26 (Fluventic Ustochrepts), 4240 and 4457 (Typic Ustochrepts), and 5350 (Udic Ustochrepts). Soils in SMU 26 are typically mesic and deep and occur along drainages. Within the project area, this soil type is found along Stewart Creek. The other SMUs are typically mesic, gravelly to sandy loam.

No Action

Under the no-action alternative, existing environmental conditions would remain. Waterways within the project area would undergo current flow processes. In undeveloped areas, topsoil would continue to erode from natural forces such as wind and precipitation. No drainage

improvements or new structures would be built. Waters would continue to be located on federal land and therefore would continue to be subject to federal regulations.

Water use at the existing administrative site would continue at current levels. The well that provides water to the administrative site is adequate for current uses and would continue to negligibly reduce water available for wells down gradient. The helitack base would continue to be located at the airport and would be provided with city water. No changes would occur at the Land Proposed for Helitack Facilities.

Because there would be no direct or indirect effects from implementing the no-action alternative, there would be no cumulative effects.

Proposed Action

Surface Water and Soils

Construction of new facilities (buildings, parking lots, roads, and helicopter pads) on both previously disturbed and undisturbed lands would occur at the Land Proposed for Retention and Land Proposed for Helitack Facilities. Approximately 253 acres of current NFS land would be sold and would change from developed to undeveloped land.

It is possible that implementing these proposed actions could result in some minor direct permanent and/or temporary effects to surface waters due to construction-related actions (e.g., dredging or filling activities, installing drainage structures or maneuvering equipment within drainages). However, waters within the project area are ephemeral, and potential effects are unlikely to result in a substantial loss or modification of functions and values of the watershed. These adverse effects would be minimized by implementing project design features (chapter 2).

The 100-year floodplain has not been delineated within the project area. However, as identified in project design features (chapter 2), we would ensure that any new development/construction on NFS land would be provided to the local floodplain administrator for review and comment on the project design.

Construction would require excavating soils, and displacing soils with nonnative materials such as concrete and pavement. Heavy equipment such as bulldozers and backhoes are likely to compact soils both from moving around on site and in a deliberate manner for road or building pad construction. Impervious or compacted substrates have a reduced ability to perform natural processes such as water filtration and seedling establishment. However, these effects would occur only at a site-specific scale, would be minimized by project design features (chapter 2), and would not have local or regional effects.

New construction would result in an increase in impermeable surfaces within the project area which would reduce infiltration into soils and increase runoff to nearby drainages. Runoff, especially from parking lots, roadways, and facilities such as the proposed helitack site, has the potential to accumulate hazardous substances such as fuels and oils. Therefore, increases in runoff may adversely affect soil or water resources in the immediate area or downstream, but again, would be minimized by project design features (chapter 2).

If during final design it is determined that the proposed action would impact waters of the U.S., a jurisdictional delineation would be required to determine the limits of the Corps' jurisdiction and the extent of impacts to waters of the U.S.. Impacts to waters of the U.S. would require a CWA Section 404 permit. Furthermore, because the project would generate greater than 1 acre of

ground disturbance an Arizona Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (AZPDES) permit with a Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan (SWPPP) would be required. The contractor would be required to adhere to the conditions of the Sections 401 and 404 permits as well as implement best management practices and a SWPPP to ensure protection of water quality.

Groundwater

Using the existing well for the Payson administrative site is expected to be able to provide for the water needs of new facilities, based on initial estimates. Changing undeveloped land to developed land on the Land Proposed for Sale would likely have minimal effects on groundwater. Development details are not known nor is the potential source of water used to supply the development. City water is the most likely source of supply and use of this source would not impact groundwater at the site. If groundwater is used to supply development, then it is possible that this could decrease water table elevations within and beyond the parcel that could conceivably impact existing nearby wells, including the well for the administrative site. These possible impacts are difficult to predict and would depend on the rate and volume of ground water removed and aquifer characteristics beneath the parcel.

As described in chapter 1, we would either jointly use the Gila County maintenance yard well or drill a new groundwater well to supply the water needed for the proposed new helitack facility. In addition, hookup to the Star Valley water system is also a potential source of supply for the Helitack site. Water rights are not necessary when groundwater is the source of supply and the groundwater source lies outside the boundaries of Active Management Areas (AMAs) in Arizona. The proposed helitack facility is well beyond the boundary of any designated AMA and a well drilled in the project area would not require a surface water right or groundwater withdrawal right.

Groundwater withdrawal via a well may affect surface water sources that have surface water rights associated with them. Nearby surface water rights include an instream stock watering right (Certificate 4A-4344) for water in a channel described as Schoolhouse Canyon. This right (Certificate No. 2603) was issued to the permittee on the Cross V Allotment with a priority date of May 8, 1958. Other nearby surface water rights appears to be associated with private land along Mayfield Canyon (the area once known as the Calhoun Ranch). These lands are located approximately one-half mile west of the boundary of the proposed facilities. Priority dates for these rights are 1900 and 1905 respectively. Surface water rights would only become an issue if groundwater pumping has a direct and appreciable effect on surface waters; this is unlikely. Schoolhouse Wash is intermittent and other surface water rights are too far from the proposed groundwater withdrawal to affect perennial surface flows.

Groundwater pumping can affect water table elevations in adjoining wells. The nearest well to the proposed facilities area is the well at the Gila County maintenance yard but other small domestic wells exist within the Town of Star Valley just west of the project area and the Diamond Point Shadows subdivision located just east of the proposed facilities. These are primarily small volume wells that provide water to individual landowners. The Town of Star Valley also operates a municipal water system that is entirely dependent on groundwater. Due to the limited volume of water use anticipated from a new helitack facility in this area, impacts to these wells is not expected, however if a new well is selected as the water source of the facility a plan to test for impacts to the nearby Gila County Maintenance yard would be prepared and if impacts are detected mitigation measures would be developed. Groundwater pumping can also affect nearby groundwater-dependent ecosystems such as springs, seeps, riparian areas, or baseflows in streams. Recent riparian area mapping completed for the Tonto National Forest identifies an area

in Schoolhouse Canyon approximately one-quarter mile downstream of the proposed facilities project area as a Fremont Cottonwood – conifer riparian area. Field review of this site found the primary riparian species to be Arizona walnut which is a facultative riparian species that does not rely on access to a permanent shallow water table for its survival (ADWR, 1994). Springs or seeps do not occur within one half mile of the project area.

No cumulative effects are anticipated as a result of the proposed action. Past, present, and future projects (appendix B) have been and would be subject to federal CWA regulations to reduce substantial cumulative effects.

Conclusion

Effects to surface water and soils would be negligible to moderate and short-term, minimized through the implementation of project design features. Effects to groundwater would also be minimal and localized.

Vegetation

The vegetation community at the Land Proposed for Sale, Land Proposed for Retention, and Land Proposed for Helitack Facilities is ecotonal between Interior Chaparral and Great Basin Conifer Woodland at elevations ranging from 4,850 to 5,210 feet at the lands proposed for retaining and lands proposed for sale locations, and from 4,850 to 4,900 feet at the lands proposed for helitack facility. Vegetation at the three locations is dominated by pinyon-juniper woodland with scattered Ponderosa pine and a dense understory of low-lying shrubs, especially manzanita, scrub oak, Emory oak, and wait-a-minute bush. Although similar species occur at all locations, vegetative cover at the land proposed for the helitack facility is more open than the other two locations and fewer Ponderosa pine trees are present. In areas where soil moisture is more available, especially along Stewart Creek at the Land Proposed for Retention and Land Proposed for Sale locations, Ponderosa pine tends to replace pinyon/juniper and Arizona walnut is found in limited quantities. No mesic riparian habitat is located at the three locations, although bulrushes and a potential wetland are located in an ephemeral drainage at the southwestern corner of the Land Proposed for Retention.

There are no rare plants or federally listed threatened or endangered plant species known to occur or with the potential to occur in the project area.

Noxious weeds are defined in FSM 2080.5 as "those plant species designated as noxious weeds by the Secretary of Agriculture or by the responsible State official. Noxious weeds generally possess one or more of the following characteristics: aggressive and difficult to manage…." The Forest Plan and agency direction includes conducting noxious weed assessments prior to ground disturbing actions and reducing the risk of introducing or spreading noxious weeds. Under Executive Order 13112, dated February 3, 1999, projects on federal land or that are federally funded must: "…subject to the availability of appropriations, and within Administration budgetary limits, use relevant programs and authorities to: (i) prevent the introduction of invasive species; (ii) detect and respond rapidly to and control populations of such species in a cost-effective and environmentally sound manner; (iii) monitor invasive species populations accurately and reliably; (iv) provide for restoration of native species and habitat conditions in ecosystems that have been invaded…."

We conducted project area field visits in April, May and August 2012. No invasive or noxious weeds were observed.

No Action

The existing vegetative community and composition would remain if the no-action alternative is selected. Disturbed ground cover and vegetation near residential areas, along roads and along trails would continue to be affected by vehicle and pedestrian traffic and such areas would continue to present opportunities for invasive and noxious weeds to establish. Invasive species would continue to be prevented, monitored and managed at the three project locations under Executive Order 13112.

Because there would be no direct or indirect effects, there would no cumulative effects from implementing the no-action alternative.

Proposed Action

The proposed action would have a direct adverse effect on vegetation at the Land Proposed for Sale, Land Proposed for Retention, and Land Proposed for Helitack Facilities due to ground disturbance and vegetation removal required for new construction. Approximately 50 acres of NFS land would be developed (30 acres of which are on land already developed as part of the current Payson Ranger District facility) and 253 acres would change from undeveloped to developed land and transferred out of federal ownership. These 50 acres of ground disturbance on NFS land would require tree removal and other native plant species. Project design features would be implemented to minimize this removal as much as possible by retaining native vegetation for inclusion in landscaping and building screening.

New ground disturbance also has the potential to introduce new vegetative species and noxious weeds. Ground disturbance related to construction activities removes native vegetation that would regularly compete with new species introduced to a site for available resources, and instead, creates bare soils and low competition areas for new species and potentially noxious weeds to establish. The current species composition and vegetation dynamic at the three locations could be indirectly affected if new vegetative species are introduced to the project locations as a result of the proposed action.

Prevention and management of invasive species would continue to be under Executive Order 13112 at the lands proposed for retention and the proposed helitack facility. However, the 253 acres proposed to be sold would no longer be federal lands and federal funds may not be used for its development. Therefore, prevention and management of invasive species would no longer be required on the Land Proposed for Sale.

Combining the effects of implementing the proposed action with other past, present and future actions (appendix B) could result in some short-term minor to moderate cumulative effects with adding new ground disturbance for this project to new ground disturbance for planned highway reconstruction and other planned development projects. These other projects would likely be guided by best management practices to minimize spread of weeds and retention of native vegetation where possible.

Conclusion

The proposed action would result in vegetation removal on up to 50 acres of NFS land (30 acres of which are on land already developed as part of the current Payson Ranger District facility) and up to 253 acres that would change from undeveloped land to developed land after transferring out of federal ownership. In addition, construction activities and new development may introduce new species and potentially noxious weeds to the project locations. Project design features would be implemented to minimize these adverse effects. No rare plants would be affected.

Wildlife and Wildlife Habitat

General wildlife and wildlife sign (e.g., scat, track, fur, etc.) observed at the project locations during April and August 2012 field visits includes eastern cottontail, deer, elk, black bear, chipmunk, coyote, whiptail lizard, and raven. Other species that may utilize the project area include but are not limited to birds such as Western scrub-jay, Northern flicker, Western bluebird, lesser goldfinch and towhee, as well as reptiles such as sideblotch lizards, greater short-horned lizard, and rattlesnakes.

The Forest Plan was prepared in accordance with the implementing regulations established in 1982 for the National Forest Management Act. These regulations (36 CFR 219) outlined the process for developing a Forest plan. They also provided guidance for selecting management indicator species (MIS) and included requirements for monitoring MIS population trends and determining relationships to habitat changes. The Forest Plan designates specific MIS with habitats that could best be used to analyze effects of site-specific proposals on the Forest. MIS are a subset of all animal and plant species selected to monitor the effects of planned management activities on viable populations of all wildlife and fish species, including those species that are socially or economically important. MIS are identified in the Forest Plan as representing a group of species having similar habitat requirements. For purposes of this project, we evaluated the effects of the proposed action on MIS for pinon juniper woodlands and chaparral habitats, as documented in detail in the MIS analysis (Rybczynski 2012c).

We obtained and reviewed the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) list of threatened, endangered, proposed, candidate, and conservation agreement species potentially occurring in Gila County from the Arizona Ecological Services Field Office website (list date: April 23, 2012) to determine species potentially present at the project locations. As documented in detail in the Small Project Biological Evaluation (Rybczynski 2012a), there are no federally listed species or habitat for federally listed species are present in the project area and no designated or proposed critical habitat within or near the project locations. The nearest critical habitat is for the Chiricahua leopard frog, located along Lewis Creek approximately 6.5 miles northeast of the proposed helitack facility. As part of preparing the biological evaluation (BE), we used the Arizona Game and Fish Department On-line Environmental Review Tool to generate a list of special status species documented as occurring within five miles of the project locations. A single list was generated for species records within five miles of the Land Proposed for Sale and Land Proposed for Retention, and a second list was generated for species records within five miles of the Land Proposed for Helitack Facilities. The BE also evaluated potential project effects to Mexican spotted owl and Northern goshawk due to the proposed helitack facility being located within 4 miles of sensitive areas for these species.

A migratory bird analysis was also prepared (Rybczynski and Wilcox 2012b) which analyzed the project effects to migratory bird species of concern. Most avian species occurring in the study area are protected by the federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act and suitable nesting habitat for several migratory bird species is present at the project locations. No nests were observed at the project locations during field visits conducted in April and August, 2012. There are no designated important bird areas or designated important overwintering areas in the project vicinity.

In 2006, the Arizona Wildlife Linkages Workgroup completed Arizona's Wildlife Linkages Assessment, which identifies the locations of known wildlife movement, associated corridors, and wildlife linkage zones in Arizona. The Land Proposed for Retention, Land Proposed for Sale, and Land Proposed for Helitack Facilities are all located within the Payson-Heber potential linkage zone.

No Action

Under the no-action alternative, existing conditions would remain and direct or indirect effects to wildlife or wildlife habitats are not anticipated. Wildlife and wildlife habitats would remain on federal land and, therefore, be subject compliance with to existing federal regulation.

Because there would be no direct or indirect effects from implementing the no-action alternative, there would be no cumulative effects.

Proposed Action

The proposed action would result in vegetation removal on up to 50 acres of NFS land (30 acres of which are on land already developed as part of the current Payson Ranger District facility) and up to 253 acres that would change from undeveloped land to developed land after transferring out of federal ownership. This ground disturbance and vegetation removal could cause direct injury, death, or displacement of wildlife species present within the project limits or trying to utilize the project limits during construction activities. However, the majority of wildlife species and habitat present at these locations are widespread and relatively common. No federally protected species, special status species, or suitable habitat for these species is present at the project locations, or would be affected by the proposed action. Thus, the proposed action would not cause a substantial loss of wildlife or high-quality wildlife habitat.

The Land Proposed for Retention and Land Proposed for Helitack Facilities would remain NFS lands under the proposed action. Future actions on federal lands would require separate consultation pursuant to Section 7 of the ESA and thus not be considered cumulative.

The Land Proposed for Sale would be transferred out of federal ownership, and we assume it would change from undeveloped land to developed land. This would result in loss of habitat and potential loss of individuals for some species. However, this project location does not contain the majority of any wildlife species range, and the habitat at this location is relatively common.

Conclusion

The proposed action has the potential to adversely affect wildlife individuals and habitat. However, habitat present in the project area is widespread and relatively common and no protected species or suitable habitat for protected species is present or would be affected by the proposed action. Proposed actions may affect individuals, but is not likely to result in a trend toward federal listing or loss of viability to any species. There are no designated migratory bird important bird areas (IBAs) or designated important overwintering areas in the project vicinity. Forestwide trends for MIS species in the project area would not be affected.

Cultural Resources

Projects on federal land or funded with federal dollars require compliance with federal laws and regulations. The primary federal law for historic preservation is the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), which requires the Forest to evaluate the effect of an undertaking on significant historical and archaeological resources. The Act also requires that consultation occur with the State Historic Preservation Office. In cases involving resources or remains that are important to Native Americans, tribal consultation is also necessary.

As described in more detail in the cultural resources report (Langan 2012), the project area was surveyed for cultural resources in January, April and May 2012. Nineteen cultural resources (table 5) are present in the area of potential effects (APE), which consists of the three project locations

(Land Proposed for Retention, Land Proposed for Sale, and Land Proposed for Helitack Facilities). These sites include prehistoric artifact scatters and rock features as well as historic roads, telephone line, and artifact scatters. Twelve cultural resources are eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) and three are ineligible. The remaining four sites require archaeological testing to determine if they are eligible for listing.

Table 5. Summary of cultural resources within the project area

Site Description	Eligibility for Listing on the National Register of Historic Places
Land Proposed for Retention	
Historic road	Eligible
Land Proposed for Sale	
Prehistoric habitation site	Eligible
Historic road	Eligible
Historic road	Eligible
Historic phone tree line	Eligible
Prehistoric and historic artifact scatter	Eligible
Prehistoric rock feature with artifact scatter	Eligible
Prehistoric artifact scatter	Requires testing
Prehistoric rock features with artifact scatter	Eligible
Prehistoric artifact scatter	Requires testing
Prehistoric and protohistoric rockshelter	Eligible
Prehistoric rock feature with artifact scatter	Eligible
Prehistoric artifact scatter	Requires testing
Prehistoric rock feature with artifact scatter	Requires testing
Prehistoric habitation	Eligible
Historic artifact scatter	Not eligible
Historic artifact scatter	Not eligible
Historic artifact scatter	Not eligible
Land Proposed for Helitack Facility	
Prehistoric rock feature with artifact scatter	Eligible
Prehistoric rock feature with artifact scatter	Eligible

No Action

Existing conditions would continue if the no-action alternative is selected. The sites near residential areas that were found to be disturbed by the presence of unofficial trails and casual collecting would continue to be affected in this manner. More isolated sites would continue to be preserved. Any actions undertaken on NFS land would comply with the NHPA Section 106 process and, therefore, would either be avoided or subject to mitigation measures to recover the important information they contain.

Similarly, the cumulative effects of past, present, and future projects have been and would need to comply with Section 106 regulations for projects on NFS land.

The no-action alternative would not result in any direct effects on cultural resources. Any unrelated undertakings would need to comply with Section 106 regulations that require either avoidance or mitigation of the adverse effects that result.

Proposed Action

All cultural resource sites within the APE have the potential to be affected by proposed actions. Constructing new administrative and helitack facilities may affect cultural resources directly through building structures, buildings, and infrastructure within site boundaries or indirectly through increased official and recreational activities near sites. Converting undeveloped land to

developed land may affect cultural resources directly through building structures, buildings, and infrastructure within site boundaries or indirectly through increased official and recreational activities near sites. As described in the project design features section of chapter 2, all Tribes with affiliation to the area have been consulted and their concerns identified. A Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) was signed on July 26, 2013 by the Forest Supervisor and the State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO), and a Treatment Plan for data recovery excavations has been developed in consultation with State Historic Preservation Office and the Tribes to resolve the adverse effect and address Tribal concerns. All fieldwork directed by the treatment plan will be completed prior to the sale of the National Forest System lands As part of that consultation, an ethnohistoric study has been undertaken by the Hopi Tribe to specifically identify their concerns with the proposed action that they may also be addressed by the data recovery effort.

Combining the effects of implementing the proposed action with other past, present and future actions (appendix B) would result in the potential for some cumulative effects. Continued development of property and infrastructure within the limits of the Town of Payson and on nearby lands for residents and visitors could threaten the integrity of cultural resources on adjacent NFS land. Any planned future official undertakings would need to comply with Section 106 regulations. Unofficial actions, such as the continued creation of trails across NFS land by nearby residents, could adversely affect cultural resources and result in the loss of their information and an understanding of the prehistory and history of the area.

Conclusion

The proposed action will adversely affect cultural resources on NFS land. Therefore, a Memorandum of Agreement has been implemented and a treatment plan to resolve the adverse effect through data recovery excavation has been approved in consultation with State Historic Preservation Office and the Tribes

Visitor Experience

Overall recreation use within the Land Proposed for Sale, Land Proposed for Retention and Land Proposed for Helitack Facilities is generally low due to limited access; there are no designated roads, trails, parking areas or recreation sites within these areas. Informal recreational use does occur, however, and includes: Payson Ranger Station visitor center guests who meander through unfenced areas and onto the eastern portions of the Land Proposed for Sale and Land Proposed for Retention parcels; Payson residents who have private property adjacent to the Land Proposed for Sale parcel (there are user-created trails and evidence of use near residential areas); Star Valley residents who have private property near the Land Proposed for Helitack Facilities and, rarely, elk and deer hunters in the fall and winter. Forest Road 433 (Schoolhouse Canyon Road) near (but outside) the western boundary of the Land Proposed for Helitack Facilities, a utility corridor power line access road near the southern boundary and a user-created 4x4 route within approximately one-half mile from the parcel.

The Payson Ranger Station currently provides some limited public services and facilities. There is a small contact station/visitor center with a parking area, informal displays and signs, picnic tables and portable toilets. As described in detail in chapter 3and in the recreation report (Hohl 2012), these visitor facilities are outdated and in need of upgrading. The visitor reception area is very small with capacity for five people or less and display space for information and materials that is less than adequate. The building is not ADA accessible and there are no permanent restroom facilities for visitors. The parking lot is shared by employees and visitors and fills quickly in the busy summer months. There are no public services or facilities on the Land Proposed for Helitack Facilities.

ROS (U.S. Forest Service 1982) is a land classification system that the Forest Service uses to manage for a variety of visitor experiences across NFS lands. As described in more detail in the recreation report (Hohl 2012), ROS consists of six management class categories defined by setting and the probable recreation experiences and activities it affords including: urban; rural; roaded natural; semi-primitive motorized; semi-primitive non-motorized; and primitive. The Land Proposed for Sale and the Land Proposed for Retention are both in the Urban ROS, which is the most developed classification. The Land Proposed for Helitack Facilities is in the Roaded Natural ROS characterized by facilities that are designed primarily for user comfort and convenience with the use of some synthetic but harmonious materials.

No Action

If no action were taken to address the purpose and need for action, there would be no changes in overall visitor experience, recreation access, or ROS in the project area. The public services and facilities provided by the existing Payson Ranger Station would continue to be less than desired and would not meet the existing or anticipated future need for upgraded, energy efficient, safe, and ADA accessible facilities. Over the long term, it is possible that visitor service provided at the Ranger Station could decline as visitation increases and the facilities are not able to keep up with demand.

Because there would no measurable direct or indirect effects if the no-action alternative were implemented, there would be no cumulative effects. The purpose and need for this project related to enhancing visitor services would not be met.

Proposed Action

Implementing the proposed action would not result in more than minor long-term, direct/indirect effects to overall recreational use with the project area because there are no designated roads, trails, parking areas or recreation sites. However, incidental use (e.g., that occurring near residential areas where residents have created informal trails and hunting) could change. The ability for these users to access the Land Proposed for Sale following the land sale could be affected when this land changes out of federal ownership and from undeveloped to developed land. However, the degree of this effect is unknown because we do not know the location, extent, or design details for this development. It is possible that there would still be opportunities for hiking, biking, walking, and other dispersed recreational use on the parcel depending on the location and overall extent of the development; these aspects of the potential future use of the Land Proposed for Sale are outside the scope of this project.

Recreational uses like these as well as hunting would continue to be available throughout the rest of the Payson Ranger District. However, there would be a 253-acre reduction in available NFS public land with selling a portion of the current administrative site that equates to a loss of recreation opportunity in this area. Designating a new 31-acre administrative site in Star Valley would not measurably affect overall recreation use because it is not adjacent to any residential area and receives only low, occasional use currently; these opportunities would continue to be provided across the Payson Ranger District.

The Urban ROS class for the Land Proposed for Retention would continue to be met with the construction of proposed new facilities; these would be consistent with an Urban ROS. The Roaded Natural ROS class for the Land Proposed for Helitack Facilities would also continue to be met with the construction of proposed new facilities. Approximately 5 acres of the 31-acre administrative site are proposed for development and, with careful design that adheres to project design features, would be compatible with the Roaded Natural ROS. All facilities on both the

Land Proposed for Retention and Land Proposed for Helitack Facilities would be designed carefully to ensure compatibility with the surrounding natural setting, as described in more detail in the project design features section of chapter 2.

Implementation of the proposed action would address the purpose and need for action and the project objectives and would result in moderate beneficial effects. Public services and facilities would be improved at the Payson Ranger Station through the development of a modern and spatially sufficient building. Visitor contacts would also be improved with restroom facilities, adequate parking, and better access to forest staff.

Implementing the proposed action would result in some short-term, minor impacts during the construction period. These effects would be minimized by the implementation of project design features (chapter 2).

Combining the direct/indirect effects of the proposed action with other past, present and foreseeable future actions (appendix B) would result in short-term and long-term minor cumulative effects to visitor experience. Short term effects include construction-related changes in access to facilities and recreation experiences if these overlap with other planned development/construction. Long-term effects would be beneficial and include improved visitor and public facilities and services along SR 260 in Payson and Star Valley.

Conclusion

Implementing the proposed action would not result in more than minor adverse effects to overall recreational use, experience, or access in the project area. There would be no changes to ROS classes. Long-term, moderate beneficial effects would result with improved visitor facilities and services on the Land Proposed for Retention. Short-term adverse effects during the construction period would be minimized with implementation of project design features (chapter 2).

Visual Quality

The Built Environment Image guide (BEIG) applies to new facilities when we "repair, renovate, replace, and expand existing facilities or build new ones." The BEIG reinforces item 6 in the Forest Service Manual section 7313.3—Design Standards require that administrative sites be designed to project the image of an environmentally aware, concerned, professional land management organization. As stated in BEIG, the “built environment” refers to the administrative and recreation buildings, landscape structures, site furnishings, structures on roads and trails, and signs installed or operated by the U.S. Forest Service, its cooperators, and permittees. In 2007, a supplement was written titled ‘Portraying the Forest Image-Applying the Built Environment Image Guide to Administrative Sites”.

Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) (U.S. Forest Service 1982) is a land classification system that the Forest Service uses to manage for a variety of visitor experiences across NFS lands and is described in more detail in the recreation report (Hohl 2012). Land Proposed for Sale and Land Proposed for Retention are in the Urban ROS class, which is characterized by facilities mostly designed for user comfort and convenience with synthetic materials commonly used. Facility design may be highly complex and refined but in harmony or complimentary to the site.

The Visual Management System (VMS) is a means to inventory the visual resource of Forest Service land and provide measurable standards for management. These standards, Visual Quality Objectives (VQOs), describe a different degree of acceptable alterations of the natural landscape

based upon the importance of aesthetics. The degree of alteration is measured in terms of visual contrast with the surrounding natural landscape (Agriculture Handbook No. 462, 1974).

The Visual Management System (VMS) is the forerunner of the 2003 Scenery Management System (SMS). Forest Service direction is to use SMS to replace VMS at first opportunity. Since the Tonto NF's SMS inventory will not be completed until 2014, the VMS will be used for this analysis.

In the development of the Forest Plan (1985), the Visual Resource Inventory assigned a VQO to be used during project planning and implementation. Current Forest-wide Forest Plan direction is to "*Manage for Visual Quality Objectives (VQOs) ranging from preservation to maximum modification as defined for each prescription and delineated in the Forest Visual Resource Inventory. Apply design guidelines found in USDA handbooks, National Forest Landscape Management Series*" (U.S. Forest Service, 1985, p. 38).

Three VQOs will be discussed:

- Retention - man's activities are not evident to the casual forest visitor.
- Partial Retention - man's activities may be evident but remain subordinate to the characteristic landscape.
- Modification - man's activities may dominate the characteristic landscape but must, at the same time, utilize naturally established form, line, color, and texture. It should appear as a natural occurrence when viewed in the foreground or middle ground.

The Forest Service links each Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) class to a VQO (refer to VQO map in appendix D). Each ROS setting is assigned the minimum VQO that is appropriate. The Urban ROS class (most developed) is linked to a minimum of Maximum Modification VQO (allows the most man-made activities), which is three levels below Retention VQO (man's activities should not be evident to the casual forest visitor).

The Land Proposed for Sale (see photos in appendix D) is comprised primarily of Retention VQO (85 percent) and also includes some Partial Retention VQO (15 percent). Currently, the land meets the prescribed VQOs because the area has minimal man-made alterations (power lines, Granite Dells Road (FR 435), and other facilities). This parcel is visible from SR 260 and residential areas, making these critical viewpoints.

The Land Proposed for Retention (see photos in appendix D) is comprised entirely of the Retention VQO. There are man-made alterations (current Payson Ranger District facilities) spread out on approximately 30 acres of this 43-acre parcel, which includes the administrative office, warehouse, four modular trailers, access roads, and parking areas. These man-made alterations have contributed to a landscape that is not completely natural in appearance. These man-made alterations are not consistent with a Retention VQO (man's activities should not be evident to the casual forest visitor); the landscape throughout this area is more typical of a Modification VQO. In addition, Retention VQO is not consistent with Urban ROS class. On lands assigned Modification, man's activities may dominate the characteristic landscape but must, at the same time, utilize naturally established form, line, color, and texture. It should appear as a natural occurrence when viewed from foreground or middle ground (Tonto National Forest Land Management Plan, 1985).

The Land Proposed for Helitack Facilities (see photos in appendix D) is all in Partial Retention VQO, where man's activities may be evident but remain subordinate to the characteristic landscape. This parcel has no man-made alterations although its proximity to the Gila County maintenance facility contributes to a landscape that is not completely natural in appearance.

No Action

The Land Proposed for Sale would continue to meet its assigned Retention and Partial Retention VQOs because the land would not be sold and have man-made alterations. Existing man-made alterations (structures and parking areas) at the current Payson Ranger District facilities on the Land Proposed for Retention would continue not meeting its assigned Retention VQO (man's activities would be evident to the casual forest visitor). In addition, the Retention VQO would continue not being consistent with Urban ROS class (most developed). Since proposed facilities would not be built (no man-made alterations) on Land Proposed for Helitack Facilities, it would continue to meet its assigned Partial Retention VQO.

Proposed Action

On the Land Proposed for Retention, the currently developed Payson Ranger Station facilities would have additional man-made alterations including renovation of some existing facilities and new facilities constructed. Like the current condition, these man-made alterations would not be consistent with Retention VQO because man's activities would be evident to the casual forest visitor. Under the proposed action, the VQO maps would be revised, changing the VQO for Land Proposed for Retention two classification levels below Retention, to Modification. This reclassification would be more typical of administrative sites and developed areas and would more accurately reflect current and future use and development on this parcel. This change to Modification VQO would also be more consistent with Urban ROS class. All new facilities would follow project design features (Chapter 2) to ensure facilities utilize naturally established form, line, color, and texture of the characteristic landscape. These features would include using the Built Environment Image Guide (BEIG, USDA Forest Service 2001 and 2007); retaining as much natural vegetation as feasible; and installing new landscaping when needed so facilities appear as a natural occurrence when viewed from foreground or middle ground.

The Land Proposed for Sale, which has minimal man-made alterations, would be transferred out of federal ownership and would be developed. Because this parcel would no longer be a part of the National Forest System or administered by the Tonto National Forest, current Forest Plan direction for this parcel would no longer apply, including that related to visual quality.

Five acres of the 31-acre Land Proposed for Helitack Facilities, which currently has no man-made alterations, would be developed. The new facilities would not be visible from SR 260 or from residential areas due to distance and topography. With implementation of project design features (Chapter 2); this development would be consistent with the Partial Retention VQO by ensuring the facilities, including the storage tank, are subordinate to the characteristic landscape and consistent with the BEIG.

Implementing the proposed action would result in some short-term, minor impacts during the construction period (e.g., heavy equipment and construction workers on site, ground disturbance and vegetation removal). These effects would be minimized by the implementation of project design features (Chapter 2).

Implementing the proposed action combined with other past, present and foreseeable future actions (appendix B) would have short-term impacts on scenery during the construction period if

other planned projects were implemented at the same time. Cumulatively, the trend of community and residential development at the expense of the natural appearing landscape in the Payson area would continue. As noted, the current Payson Ranger District facilities have man-made alterations so the transition would not be as drastic as it would be with a site that was not altered. The Land Proposed for Retention would have additional man-made alterations and the Land Proposed for Sale, which has minimal man-made alterations, would be developed. Therefore, there would be short- and long-term, minor to moderate adverse impacts to visual resources due to implementing the proposed action but these impacts would be minimized by the implementation of project design features (Chapter 2).

Conclusion

Current Forest Plan direction is to "manage for VQOs ranging from Preservation to Maximum Modification as defined for each prescription and delineated in the Visual Resource Inventory." The Land Proposed for Helitack Facilities would comply with the assigned Partial Retention VQO. The Land Proposed for Retention would not be consistent with the assigned Retention VQO. The Visual Resource Inventory would be revised, changing the VQO of Land Proposed for Retention two classification levels below Retention, to Modification, which would be more typical of administrative sites and developed areas and more consistent with Urban ROS class. The new development that would occur on the Land Proposed for Sale would not meet the assigned Retention and Partial Retention VQOs; however, since they would no longer be under FS ownership or management there would be no requirement to meet the VQOs. It is anticipated that development would comply with the Town of Payson Unified Development Code and Design Principles (Design Review Manual).

Management and Operational Efficiency

The existing Payson administrative site was designated as the Payson Ranger District in early 1970. Existing facilities are described in chapter 1 and in appendix B. There are also overhead and buried telephone and electric lines, and buried water and sewer lines on the site. The remainder of the site is open space with no development. Mud Springs Road crosses approximately one-quarter mile of the Land Proposed for Sale on the southwestern boundary. National Forest Road (NFR) 435, also known as Granite Dells Road, also crosses the southern portion of parcel proposed for conveyance. SR 260 is adjacent to both the Land Proposed for Sale and the Land Proposed for Retention it is authorized under an easement granted by the Forest Service with a 100-foot wide right-of-way.

The existing administrative site is surrounded by county, city, and private property. A large portion of the site is open space that is not being utilized as part of the administrative site. This makes it difficult to manage efficiently as NFS land. Trespass, user created trails, and unauthorized use occurs on the site. Sale of a portion of this land is desirable to consolidate land ownership patterns around the Town of Payson.

There are several special-use permits currently authorized on NFS lands in this area. These include two power distribution lines owned by Arizona Public Service (APS), an overhead utility line jointly owned by APS and Century Link and a buried electric utility owned by APS. These are all located on the Land Proposed for Sale.

The Land Proposed for Helitack Facilities consists of 31 acres of NFS and is surrounded by NFS land on the north, east, and west sides. Private property is in proximity on the eastern and north eastern side. The southern border consists of a county maintenance yard and National Forest with SR 260 less than 500 feet away. There are several special-use permits currently authorized on

NFS lands. These include a power distribution line owned by APS, an easement for SR 260 that also includes a 100-foot wide right-of-way, and fall and winter elk and deer hunting outfitter/guides, that have a permit to operate in game management units located on the Tonto National Forest.

The project area occurs within the combined Payson, Cross V, Start Valley, Green Valley and Indian Gardens livestock allotments known as the Little Green Valley Complex (LGVC). The LGVC has been grazed as one large unit since 2005 and the current term grazing permit is for 380 adult cattle yearlong. The Land Proposed for Sale and Land Proposed for Retention are located within the Catholic Peak pasture that is currently closed to grazing and the Land Proposed for Helitack Facilities is located with the Star Valley winter pasture.

No Action

There would be no change in special use permits or overall land status or management with implementation of the no action alternative. The current administrative site would remain 296 acres in size. Existing Payson Ranger District facilities would remain in their current location and condition. The helitack operation would continue to be located at the Payson Airport. Existing facilities would not meet current standards and overall management and operational efficiency would continue to be less than desired, as described in chapter 1. The purpose and need for action would not be met.

Proposed Action

Implementing the proposed action would result in direct/indirect effects to land status, special use permits and overall management and operational efficiency. The size of the administrative site in Payson would change in size from 296 acres to 43 acres, 253 acres would be sold and transferred out of federal ownership, and 31 acres in Star Valley would be designated as a new administrative site.

Implementing the proposed action would promote overall implementation of the Forest Plan by consolidating land ownership patterns and minimizing isolated NFS parcels surrounded by private land. By reducing the size of the Payson administrative site, we would be better able to cost-effectively and efficiently manage this land. Constructing new facilities would be enable us to provide quality administrative facilities that better serve the public and meet administrative service needs. Implementing the proposed action would respond to the goals and objectives outlined in the Forest Plan, the 2002 Tonto National Forest Facilities Master Plan and the 2011 and 2012 Payson Ranger District Facilities Preliminary Project Analyses and help move the Tonto National Forest toward desired conditions described in these plans for improved facilities that better serve employees and the public.

Establishing a new administrative site for the helitack operation would provide improved fire operations efficiency; this facility would provide helitack personnel with upgraded and adequate facilities for functions such as training, exercise, storage, workshop space and possible bunkhouses. We would save approximately $40,000 a year by providing this facility on NFS land compared to renting space at the Payson Airport.

While the majority of the current Payson Ranger Station facilities are located on Land Proposed for Retention, there are several facilities, structures and utility lines located on Land Proposed for Sale that would be left in place, as described in chapter 2. All existing special use authorizations would be transferred to the new owners of the land to ensure continued use of these facilities by the permit holders. There would be negligible direct/indirect effects to special use permit holders

because their permits would be transferred to the new owners and would remain in place. There would be negligible to minor adverse effect to outfitter/guides due to the designation of the new administrative site in Star Valley since this area would no longer be accessible for this use. However, this is not a prime hunting area and only currently receives occasional, if any, use. No other special use permits near the Land Proposed for Helitack Facilities would be affected because they do not occur on the land.

Approximately 31 acres would be removed from the Star Valley winter pasture on the LCVC allotment. Because there are no water sources in this area, it is not prime grazing land and this is a very small percentage of this large pasture, this would not result in more than a negligible effect to this livestock permittee. The Land Proposed for Sale is currently within a pasture that is closed to grazing, so there would be no effects.

Conclusion

Implementing the proposed action would respond to the goals and objectives outlined in the Forest Plan, the 2002 Tonto National Forest Facilities Master Plan and the 2011 and 2012 Payson Ranger District Facilities Preliminary Project Analyses and helps move the Tonto National Forest toward desired conditions described in these plans for more efficient management operations and improved facilities that better serve employees and the public.

Air Quality

The Federal Clean Air Act (CAA) of 1970 directed the EPA to establish National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) for six pollutants considered harmful to public health and the environment. These pollutants, referred to as the criteria pollutants, include carbon monoxide, nitrogen dioxide, ozone, particulate matter, sulfur dioxide, and lead. The CAA of 1970 established two types of national air quality standards for most of the criteria pollutants. Primary standards set limits to protect public health, including the health of "sensitive" populations such as asthmatics, children, and the elderly. Secondary standards set limits to protect public welfare, including protection against decreased visibility, damage to animals, crops, vegetation, and buildings. The promulgation of these standards, however, does not prohibit any state from establishing air quality standards that are more stringent. The NAAQS for the six criteria pollutants are presented in table 6.

The EPA designates those areas that have not met the NAAQS as nonattainment and to classify them according to their degree of severity. States that fail to attain the NAAQS for any of the criteria pollutants are required to submit State Implementation Plans (SIPs), which outline those actions that will be taken to attain compliance. The Town of Payson is not located in a federally mandated nonattainment area. Payson was re-designated an attainment area with a maintenance plan for particulate matter smaller than 10 microns in diameter (PM10) on August 26, 2002 (EPA 2008).

The Arizona Department of Environmental Quality (ADEQ) conducts air quality monitoring in Payson; however, the Tonto National Forest does not conduct air quality monitoring in the project vicinity. Since 1989, Payson has reduced maximum 24-hour PM_{10} concentrations significantly from over 250 μg/m3 in 1989 to 39 μg/m3 in 2011 (EPA 2011, ADEQ 2002) through various measures including paving roads to decrease the amount of dust and PM_{10} pollution..

The CAA also provides for additional measures "to preserve, protect, and enhance the air quality" in larger national parks, national wilderness areas, and areas of special national significance; these

areas are designated Class 1 airsheds. The nearest Class 1 airsheds are the Mazatzal Wilderness (approximately 10 miles west) and the Hellsgate Wilderness (approximately five miles south).

Table 6. National ambient air quality standards

Pollutant	Averaging time	Primary standard	Secondary standard
Carbon monoxide (CO)	1-hour	35 ppm[a]	NS[b]
	8-hour	9 ppm	NS
Nitrogen dioxide (NO_2)	Annual	0.053 ppm	0.053 ppm
Ozone (O_3)	8-hour (1997 standard)	0.08 ppm	0.08 ppm
	8-hour (2008 standard)	0.075 ppm[c]	0.075 ppm
Particulate matter (PM_{10})	24-hour	150 µg/m^3 [d]	150 µg/m^3
Fine particulate matter ($PM_{2.5}$)	24-hour	35 µg/m^3	35 µg/m^3
	Annual	15 µg/m^3	15 µg/m^3
Sulfur dioxide (SO_2)	3-hour	NS	0.5 ppm
	24-hour	0.14 ppm	NS
	Annual	0.03 ppm	NS
Lead	Rolling 3-month average (2008 standard)	0.15 µg/m^3	0.15 µg/m^3

Source: 40 CFR 50

[a] parts per million

[b] no standard

[c] based on a 3 year average of the 4th-highest concentration

[d] micrograms per cubic meter

No Action

Under the no-action alternative, no construction activities would take place, and there would be no change in fugitive dust emissions or current NAAQS conditions in terms of air quality. There would be no additional air pollutant emissions as a result of the no-action alternative. Therefore, no direct or indirect effects on air quality are expected under this alternative.

Because there would be no direct/indirect effects, there would be no cumulative effects.

Proposed Action

Constructing new facilities on the Land Proposed for Sale, Land Proposed for Retention, or Land Proposed for Helitack Facilities has the potential to result in short-term increases in fugitive dust and particulate matter within the project area from ground-disturbing activities and construction vehicle traffic. All construction activities would be required to comply with any Town and County rules and ordinances to limit fugitive dust and particulate matter. No other direct or indirect effects are anticipated. There would be no impact to Class 1 airsheds because the construction impacts would be localized.

Combining the implementation of the proposed action with other past, present, and future actions could cumulatively increase fugitive dust and particulate matter. These roads are used by fire fighter crew accessing various parts of national forest lands and residents accessing nearby residential areas. In addition, ADOT has two projects planned on SR 260 east of the Payson

administration site. Thus, cumulatively, minor adverse effects on local air quality could occur. However, these air quality impacts would be insignificant and would not result in measurable changes over the current condition. Other factors such as the emissions from prescribed burning may also contribute to local impacts to air quality. Each prescribed burn though is addressed separately in coordination with responsible state agencies.

Conclusion

The proposed action is likely to cause direct and indirect effects to air quality within the project area. However, the effects are minor and short-term in nature, would occur during the construction period only and would be minimized by implementation of project design features (chapter 2).

Climate Change

The temperature of the Earth's atmosphere is regulated by a balance between amount of radiation received from the sun that is reflected by the Earth's surface and clouds, and the amount of radiation absorbed by the earth and atmosphere. Greenhouse gases, which include carbon dioxide, methane, nitrous oxide and other gases, keep the Earth's surface warmer than it would be otherwise because they absorb infrared radiation from the Earth and, in turn, radiate this energy back down to the surface. This insulating effect, known as the greenhouse effect, moderates atmospheric temperatures, keeps the Earth warm enough to support life (GAO 2007). While these gases occur naturally in the atmosphere, there has been a rapid increase in concentrations of greenhouse gases in the Earth's atmosphere from human causes since the start of industrialization, which has caused concerns over potential changes in the global climate. For over the past 200 years, the burning of fossil fuels, such as coal and oil, and deforestation has caused the concentrations of heat-trapping greenhouse gases to increase significantly in our atmosphere. These gases prevent heat from escaping to space, somewhat like the glass panels of a greenhouse (EPA 2009).

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), a leading source for international climate expertise, noted in April 2007 that "observational evidence from all continents and most oceans shows that many natural systems are being affected by regional climate changes, particularly temperature increases" (IPCC 2007). In the Southwest, we are experiencing a drying trend. Modeling indicates that this slight warming trend observed over the past 100 years is anticipated to continue, with the greatest warming expected during winter (U.S. Forest Service 2010).

The primary greenhouse gas emitted by human activities in the U.S. in 2006 was carbon dioxide (CO_2), representing approximately 85 percent of total greenhouse gas emissions. The largest source of CO_2, and of overall greenhouse gas emissions, was fossil fuel combustion. (Brown et al 2008).

Forests play a major role in the carbon cycle. The carbon stored in live biomass, dead plant material, and soil represents the balance between CO_2 absorbed from the atmosphere and its release through respiration, decomposition, and burning. Over longer periods, indeed as long as forests exist, they will continue to absorb carbon (U.S. Forest Service 2009).

The methods used to assess how the success of the alternatives could be affected by climate change and the predicted impacts of the alternatives on climate change came from guidance in the Climate Change Considerations in Project Level NEPA Analysis (U.S. Forest Service 2009) and information provided by the Climate Change Resource Center

Changing undeveloped land to developed land and removing vegetation for new facility construction can result in (1) the release of greenhouse gases through operation of heavy equipment and vehicles and (2) a reduction in the storage of carbon in live biomass (trees) through removal of vegetation for new facility development. The effect of climate change on the proposed project could include changes in rainfall and temperature patterns over time that can influence re-vegetation efforts.

No Action

Implementing the no-action alternative would not result in direct greenhouse gas emissions or direct changes in climate or overall vegetation patterns. Carbon would remain sequestered in the forested portions of the project area. Because there would be no greenhouse gas emissions produced as a direct result of taking no action, implementing the no-action alternative would not contribute to the cumulative impacts of past, present and future projects (appendix B).

Proposed Action

It is not currently feasible to quantify indirect effects of individual or multiple projects on global climate change (U.S. Forest Service 2009). At this time there are no regulations to limit greenhouse gas emissions. The current state of science does not allow for site specific analysis of greenhouse gas emissions at local or regional levels. Likewise, global climate change models are not yet able to determine specific impacts of greenhouse gases on local climate patterns.

Implementing the proposed action would result in release of greenhouse gases through release of carbon dioxide from vehicle and equipment emissions during construction. However, these emissions would be localized and temporary. This production is extremely small when compared to that of the nation, or in global context. This project-level contribution to greenhouse gas emissions would not be significant enough to measure.

Carbon would remain sequestered in the forested portions of the project area but would be reduced due to tree removal necessary for changing undeveloped land to developed land. It is reasonable to assume that this vegetation removal (although at a small and local scale) could reducing the risk of high intensity, stand-replacing wildfire in the project area, which reduces the risk of subsequent substantial release of carbon dioxide during a large wildfire. Live stands of trees would retain higher capacity to sequester carbon dioxide compared to stands killed by uncharacteristically severe wildfires. Removing some vegetation but retaining clumps of trees and native vegetation in a suburban, park-like setting (which would be typical of the development planned under the proposed action), would reduce wildlife potential while also providing for carbon sequestration in forest and woodland vegetation following construction.

Conclusion

At this time there are no regulations to limit greenhouse gas emissions. The current state of science does not allow for site-specific analysis of greenhouse gas emissions at local or regional levels. Likewise, global climate change models are not yet able to determine specific impacts of greenhouse gases on local climate patterns. Implementing the proposed action would contribute to greenhouse gas emissions, but this would not be measurable at larger scales. This page left blank intentionally

Chapter 4 – Consultation and Coordination & List of Preparers

The Forest Service consulted the following individuals, federal, state and local agencies, and tribes during the development of this environmental assessment:

Consultation and Coordination

Federal, State, and City Officials and Agencies

Town of Payson
United States Fish and Wildlife Service, Ecological Services
Arizona Department of Public Safety
Diamond Star Fire Department
Arizona Department of Water Resources
Arizona Department of Environmental Quality
Rim Country Regional Chamber of Commerce
Gila County
Central Arizona Association of Governments
Arizona Game and Fish Department, Region VI
Arizona State University
Eastern Arizona College
Gila Community College

Tribes

Ft. McDowell Yavapai Nation
Yavapai-Prescott Tribe
Yavapai-Apache Nation
Tonto Apache Tribe
San Carlos Apache Tribe
White Mountain Apache Tribe
Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community,
Hopi Tribe
Zuni Tribe

Others

We contacted 169 other individuals and groups during preparation of this document

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Appendix A –Formal Request for Comments Summary

Table A-1 Response to Request for Comments on Draft Environmental Analysis (EA)

Contact (letter #)	Last Name	First Name	Organization
1	Cline Martin	Patricia Tommie	Cline Family Trust
2	Arnst	Diane	Arizona Dept Environmental Quality – Air Quality Division
3	Taunt	Linda	Arizona Dept. Environmental Quality–Water Quality Division
4	Garrett	LaRon	Town of Payson
5	Giese	Judy	
6	Rambler	Terry	San Carlos Apache Tribe
7	Kuwanwisiwma	Leigh	Hopi Tribe
8	Davis, Jr.	Wally	Tonto Apache Tribe

Table A-1 Request for Comments on Draft EA content analysis and responses

Contact#	Com-ment #	Subject	Comment	Response
1, 4, 5	1	NFS land sale	Agree with any and all decisions FS makes on the Payson Administrative Site Sale and Facilities I strongly support the proposed sale of the Payson Administrative Site as planned and urge the USFS to continue to move forward in facilitating this ownership transfer. Please hurry on the process	Comments noted. We appreciate your support of this project

Contact#	Com-ment #	Subject	Comment	Response
2	1	Air Quality	Reduce Disturbance of Particulate Matter during construction. Follow DEQ's recommendations of construction measures.	Chapter 3 of the EA includes an analysis of both key and non-key issues, including air quality. During construction all federal, state and county regulations will be followed, and recommendations will be taken into account.
3	1	Water Quality	The proposed project may require coverage under various permits, such as the Arizona Discharge Eliminations System's Construction General Permit…as part of the permit a Stormwater Prevention Plan must be prepared and implemented before ground disturbance.	Chapter 3 of the EA includes an analysis of both key and non-key issues, including soil and water resources. During construction all federal, state and county regulations will be followed and recommendations will be taken into account.
3	2	Water Quality	The bunkhouse for seasonal housing may also require that ADEQ review and approve plans prior to construction. Drinking water must comply with state drinking water regulations. An applicant must submit plans for review and approval before construction begins, including well development. Wastewater treatment facilities, including on-site treatment facilities, generally must obtain an Aquifer Protection Permit.	Chapter 3 of the EA includes an analysis of both key and non-key issues, including soil and water resources. During construction all federal, state and county regulations will be followed and recommendations will be taken into account.

Contact#	Com-ment #	Subject	Comment	Response
6	1	Cultural Resources	Requesting a phone call for more detailed information on Cultural Studies. Vernelda Grant of the San Carlos Apache Tribal Cultural Preservation Office deferred consultation on this project to the Tonto Apache Tribe – Which States: The Tonto Apache Tribe can concur with this proposed activity contingent upon the following stipulations; • A qualified archaeological monitor be present during all ground disturbing activities • When possible avoid the disturbance of any and all cultural resources If and when archaeological sites are discovered during this project, Wally Davis is to be notified and invited to visit the sites of discovery for consultation purposes.	All cultural resources that are eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places would be mitigated in a manner consistent with the standards and criteria of 36 CFR 800.4 and 800.5. A MOA has be entered into with the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, the State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO), and Tribes. The MOA requires testing and data recovery plan(s) to conduct excavations that will provide information that is needed in order to make a determination of eligibility for those sites that have not yet been evaluated. Consultation with Tribes have be conducted as required by law. An ethno historic summary has also been completed for the project area. There will be a qualified Archeologist present during all ground disturbing activities conducted within the project area. Proper tribal contacts will be made if/when archaeological sites are discovered during this project.

Contact#	Com-ment #	Subject	Comment	Response
7	1	Cultural Resources	We have now reviewed the enclosed cultural resources survey report, Treatment Plan and Memorandum of Agreement. The Treatment Plan proposes eligibility testing and data recovery for 10 sites in the Land Proposed for Sale, AR-03-12-04-165, 2041, 2042-9, described as habitations and artifact scatters. It does not address the 2 sites for the proposed Helitack Facility. It appears to us that significant Tribal places have been identified within the area of potential effect for this project, and yet the Forest Service has not required that this proposal be rescheduled or redesigned in order to protect those places. In addition, data recovery at these sites is likely to disturb human remains. We reiterate that we do not support the Forest Service's destruction of prehistoric sites for its administrative offices and facilities. We reiterate our support for the No Action alternative in the draft environmental assessment. And therefore we do not support this Treatment Plan and Memorandum of Agreement, and we reiterate our request that this proposal be redesigned in order to protect these prehistoric sites.	All cultural resources that are eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places would be mitigated in a manner consistent with the standards and criteria of 36 CFR 800.4 and 800.5. A MOA has be entered into with the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, the State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO), and Tribes. The MOA requires testing and data recovery plan(s) to conduct excavations that will provide information that is needed in order to make a determination of eligibility for those sites that have not yet been evaluated. Consultation with Tribes have be conducted as required by law. An ethno historic summary has also been completed for the project area.

Contact#	Com-ment #	Subject	Comment	Response
8	1	Cultural Resources	The Tonto Apache Tribe can concur with this proposed activity contingent upon the following stipulations; • A qualified archaeological monitor be present during all ground disturbing activities • When possible avoid the disturbance of any and all cultural resources If and when archaeological sites are discovered during this project, Wally Davis is to be notified and invited to visit the sites of discovery for consultation purposes.	All cultural resources that are eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places would be mitigated in a manner consistent with the standards and criteria of 36 CFR 800.4 and 800.5. A MOA has be entered into with the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, the State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO), and Tribes. The MOA requires testing and data recovery plan(s) to conduct excavations that will provide information that is needed in order to make a determination of eligibility for those sites that have not yet been evaluated. Consultation with Tribes have be conducted as required by law. An ethno historic summary has also been completed for the project area. There will be a qualified Archeologist present during all ground disturbing activities conducted within the project area. Proper tribal contacts will be made if/when archaelogical sites are discovered during this project.

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Appendix B – Relevant Past, Present and Foreseeable Future Actions for use in Cumulative Effects Analysis

Past, current and reasonably foreseeable future actions on Federal and non-Federal land within or near the project area are described briefly below. We developed this list by reviewing the Tonto National Forest Schedule of Proposed Actions, the Forest website, input from ranger district and forest staff, and communication with adjacent land managers.

Past Actions

Fuelbreak in the area of the proposed new helitack facility – borders Highway 260 on north and south side and is approximately 66 feet in width on either side of the highway.

Existing facilities on the current Payson administrative site that occur on land proposed for sale

- Trailer used as helitack trailer/current hotshot trailer (proposed to be transferred with the land, as described in the Lands and Special Uses Report, Hoffman 2012)
- Five storage facilities (proposed to be transferred with the land, as described in the Lands and Special Uses Report, Hoffman 2012)
- Two helipads (proposed to be transferred with the land, as described in the Lands and Special Uses Report, Hoffman 2012)
- Two 15,000-gallon underground water tanks & pipeline (proposed for a short-term easement as described in the Lands and Special Uses Report, Hoffman 2012)
- Underground septic system for old helitack trailer/current hotshot trailer
- Two easements, powerline and Centurylink telephone line ((proposed to be transferred with the land, as described in the Lands and Special Uses Report, Hoffman 2012)
- Two roads (Mud Springs and Granite Dells)

Payson Administrative Site – the Payson Administrative Site, that currently houses the Payson Ranger District and associated facilities, was originally 360.22 acres. We've exchanged approximately 64 acres of this in the past through the following actions:

- We transferred 63.81 acres under land exchange for the community college on the north side of Highway 260
- We transferred 0.33 acres under land sale on the west side of this parcel

On-Going Management/Current Actions

Forestwide personal use fuel wood & small products – The proposal to designate a new administrative site for the proposed new helitack facilities would exclude this area from availability for personal use fuelwood and small products; this is an on-going, forestwide use.

Arizona Public Service (APS) powerlines and associated periodic vegetation maintenance – There is one powerline that runs across NFS land on the north side of Hwy 260 near the entrance to the Gila County maintenance yard and one powerline that runs across NFS land on the current

Payson administrative site; these lines are periodically maintained (e.g., small trees and brush under the lines removed to facilitate access and prevent fire

Diamond Point communications site – is located approximately 2 miles from the proposed new helitack facility

Gila county maintenance yard – This maintenance yard is adjacent to the proposed new helitack facility and is used for equipment and material storage and office space. This facility utilizes a well and a septic system.

Diamond Point Shadows residential subdivision – This residential area is approximately 0.5 miles to the west of the proposed new helitack facilities; it provides large lots (approximately 5 acres and is zoned for horses.

Foreseeable Future Actions

Forestwide Noxious Weed Management Plan. An environmental assessment was prepared to address the eradication, containment, and/or control of noxious weeds and invasive plant species on the Tonto National Forest. A decision notice was signed on August 24, 2012.

Tonto National Forest Travel Management Plan. Tonto National Forest staff have reviewed the comments submitted for the Travel Management draft environmental assessment and will be preparing a notice of intent for an environmental impact statement, including a proposed action and issues that have been raised thus far in the process. A decision for this project is not anticipated until the end of fiscal year 2013.

Arizona Department of Transportation Projects. ADOT plans in 2014-2016 to reconstruct Highway 260 between MP256.2 and MP 260.1 (Lion Springs Section) to a 4-lane divided highway. The NEPA analysis is complete and a decision has been made to implement this project. Check with Joel Mona to confirm this correction is accurate. This project has the potential to impact proposed access to the helitack facility from Highway 260 and would need to be considered during future design phases.

Town of Payson Project. The Town of Payson is planning to extend Mud Springs Road north from Granite Dells Road to Highway 260. This roadway extension would run just west of the Payson Administrative Site.

The Rim Country Educational Alliance, Separate Legal Entity. The alliance is in the process of purchasing a 20-acre parcel of land on the north side of Highway 260 (directly north of the current Payson Administrative Site and next to current community college) for Phase I of a University Campus.

The Cragin pipeline. The pipeline is outside of the project area and would not overlap in time or space with the proposed action. However, it is indirectly related due to its relationship to the Town of Payson's water supply source for future development. The Tonto National Forest issued a decision on this project and it is currently in construction planning phases. This should be completed by 2015.

Appendix C – Proposed Language for Amending the Forest Plan

Amendment #27 would have two parts:

1. Designate a new 31-acre Forest Service administrative site for new fire management helitack facilities on NFS land just north of the Gila County maintenance yard along Highway 260 in Star Valley.
2. Revise Visual Resource Inventory (VQO maps) to change the Land Proposed for Retention from a Retention VQO to a Modification VQO as defined in Forest Plan appendix J.

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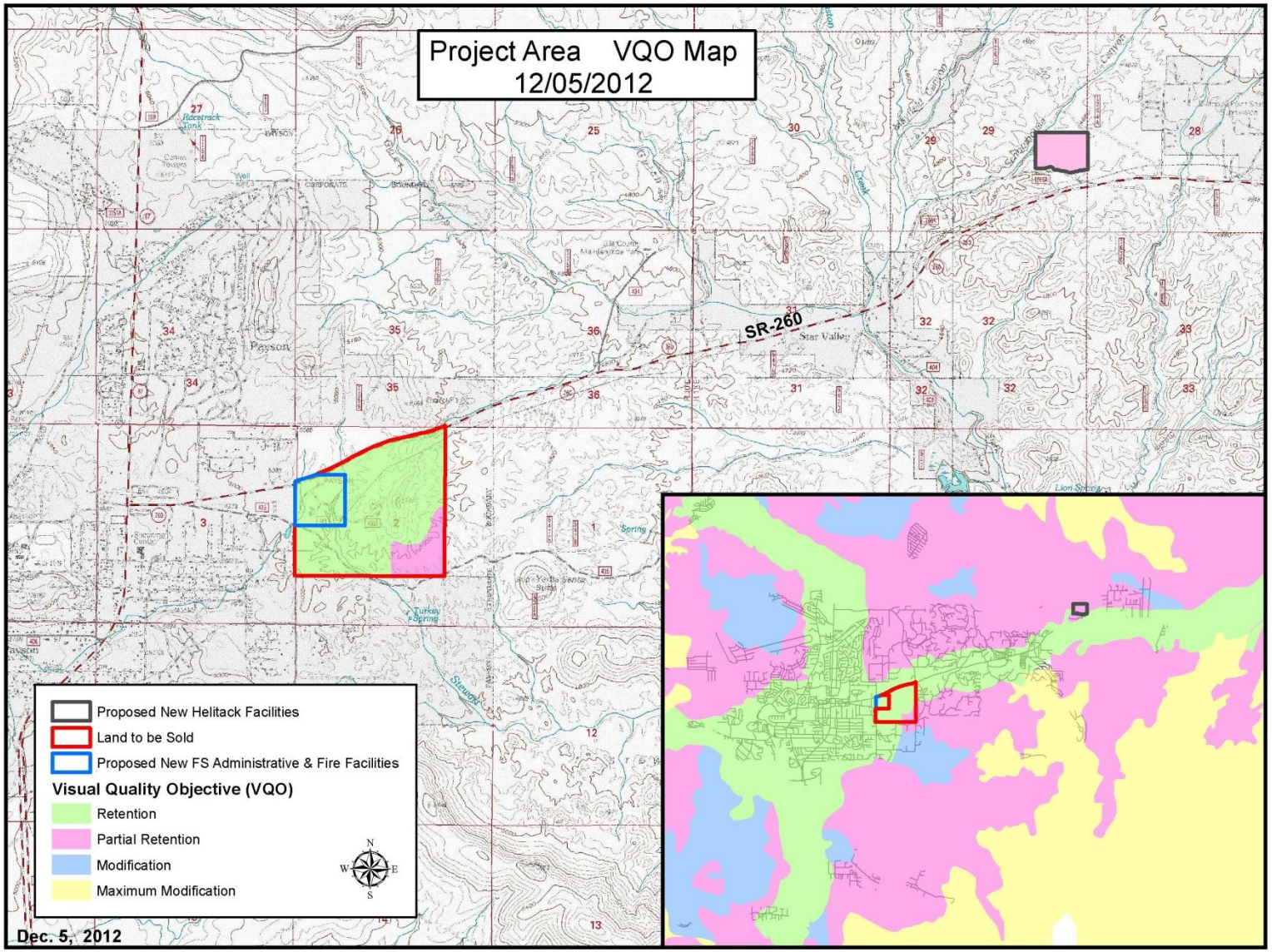
Appendix D – Site Photos and VQO Map

Photo D-1. Land proposed for helitack

Photo D-2. Land proposed for retention (view 1)

Photo D-3. Land proposed for retention (view 2)

Photo D-4. Land proposed for sale



Map D-1. Payson EA project area VQO map