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Record of Decision

Tonto National Forest

Revised Land Management Plan

Coconino, Gila, Maricopa, Pinal, and Yavapai Counties, Arizona

Cover Photo: Mogollon Rim and ponderosa pine in the fall, credit: Kenna Belsky

Record of Decision for the Tonto National Forest Land Management Plan

Coconino, Gila, Maricopa, Pinal, and Yavapai Counties, Arizona

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Introduction

This Draft Record of Decision (Draft ROD) documents my decision and rationale for approving the Tonto National Forest Land Management Plan (herein referred to as the land management plan). The decision implements the National Forest System Land Management Planning at Title 36 Code of Federal Regulations Part 219 (Planning Rule) and fosters productive and sustainable use of our National Forest System lands and advances the U.S. Department of Agriculture Strategic Goals (2018), including:

- Ensuring programs are delivered efficiently, effectively, and with integrity and a focus on customer service;
- Facilitating rural prosperity and economic development; and
- Ensure productive and sustainable uses of our National Forest System lands

The Tonto National Forest plays a unique role in supporting communities in Arizona, as well as throughout the southwestern United States and was designed consistent with the mission of the Forest Service to "sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the Nation's forests and grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations."

The previous Tonto National Forest plan (1985 forest plan) was originally approved in 1985 and has been amended 31 times to accommodate situations in specific projects or to reflect changes in social, economic, or ecological conditions. Since the release of the 1985 forest plan, the Tonto National Forest and surrounding communities have experienced considerable social, economic, and ecological changes and there have been significant improvements in science and technology. To account for these dynamic conditions, in looking towards the future of the Tonto National Forest, the land management plan has been designed to be a flexible and adaptable document.

Ecosystems on the Tonto National Forest provide many benefits to people; due in part to the features and landscapes found on the forest. The forest is home to six large reservoirs that serve as a significant water supply for the Phoenix metropolitan area, numerous ecotonal zones, innumerable historic and cultural features, riparian communities, important rivers, and beautiful geologic features and mountain ranges.

During the assessment process, the Tonto National Forest identified five key ecosystem services provided by resources within the Tonto National Forest. Key ecosystem services on the Tonto National Forest include:

1. water for consumption;
2. water for recreation;
3. habitat for hunting, fishing, and watchable wildlife;

4. sustainable and productive rangelands; and
5. cultural heritage.

The key ecosystem services identified and evaluated were chosen because they: (1) Were characterized as important to the public as a resource that they either valued or were concerned with; and/or (2) Have been identified as important by forest leadership. These key ecosystem services are important in the broader landscape outside of the forest plan area and are influenced by the land management plan.

The Tonto National Forest contributes to rural prosperity, providing economic opportunities for abundant developed and non-developed recreation, motorized and non-motorized trail access, wilderness access, commercial and personal fuelwood harvesting, mineral withdrawal, and livestock grazing. Many local communities draw from the forest's fuelwood that is used as the primary and sometimes only fuel source for cooking and heating in homes. Indian communities and citizens that live around the Tonto National Forest continue to look to forest resources for economic opportunity and vitality and to sustain their cultural practices. The land management plan recognizes adaptive, active forest management as a primary tool to meet Tonto National Forest desired conditions.

Water quality and aquatic health are persistent overarching concerns, as are the risk to life, property, and ecosystems that uncharacteristic wildfire represent. The land management plan incorporates new fire management approaches that will help reduce the risk of uncharacteristic wildfire, thereby benefitting municipal water suppliers as well as downstream water users, while moving fire-adapted ecosystems toward resiliency and improved health. It focuses on collaborative efforts within important watersheds for the benefit of sensitive species and municipal water systems and improves wildlife habitat and reduces risk to cultural resources.

Access to traditional forest uses and resources, as well as a variety of recreation opportunities, is highly valued by communities in and around the forest. The land management plan emphasizes working in partnership with local communities and Tribes, to ensure access to sacred sites, ceremonies, and forest products (e.g., medicinal plants, fuelwood, etc.).

Forest Setting

The Tonto National Forest covers approximately 2,965,716 acres in central Arizona and is the fifth largest national forest in the National Forest System. The Tonto National Forest spans a range of ecosystems from the Sonoran Desert through a variety of chaparral and pinyon pine/juniper up to the ponderosa pine and mixed conifer of the Mogollon Rim. The Tonto National Forest is divided into six ranger districts: Cave Creek, Globe, Mesa, Payson, Pleasant Valley, and Tonto Basin.

The Tonto National Forest overlaps five counties: 23 percent in Maricopa County, 59 percent in Gila County, 11 percent in Yavapai County, seven percent in Pinal County, and 0.01 percent in Coconino County. The Tonto abuts the Prescott National Forest to the northwest, the Coconino National Forest to the north, and Apache Sitgreaves National Forest to the northeast (figure 1). This land management

plan covers all the National Forest System lands within the Tonto National Forest boundary, excluding the Sierra Ancha Experimental Forest which is managed by the Rocky Mountain Research Station.

The diversity of vegetation, from Saguaro-cactus-studded deserts to pine forested mountains, reflects the change in altitude across the Tonto National Forest from 1,300 up to 7,900 feet elevation (figure 1). This allows for outstanding recreational opportunities throughout the year, whether on lake beaches or in the cool pine forests. The social and economic environment surrounding the Tonto National Forest is as diverse as the natural environment. It includes large urban areas and many rural communities that rely on the goods and services provided by the Forest such as forage for livestock production, water for consumption, recreation opportunities, and forest products.

Of primary and increasing importance are the watersheds and the ability to capture the precipitation that recharges aquifers, supplying domestic water sources to the cities and towns surrounding the Tonto National Forest. The forest contributes to the supply of water used by households, industry, power suppliers, and agriculture, helping to sustain human populations in and around several rural communities, towns, and cities in central Arizona – in addition to the greater Phoenix area, the 10th largest metropolitan area in the country. The Salt and Verde Rivers are major sources of surface water supplying the Phoenix metropolitan area.

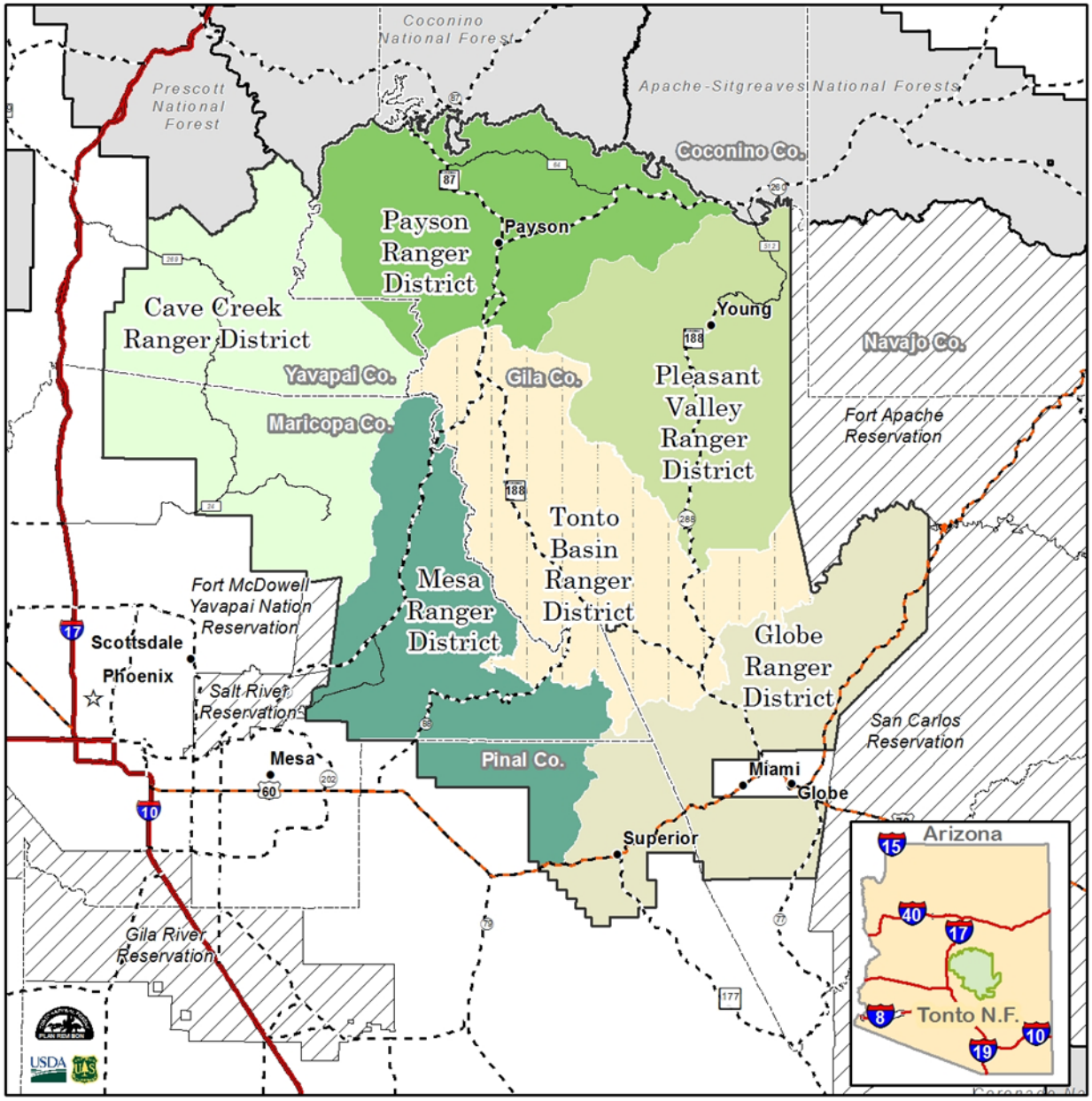

Figure 1. Tonto National Forest vicinity map

Firewood from the Tonto National Forest is how many people heat their homes at a large economic savings over propane, natural gas, and electricity. Other wood products that come off the forest, such as manzanita, novelty wood, and plant materials, are also important cultural and social products gathered. Although the forest is not heavily timbered, about four million board feet of saw logs, fuel wood, and other forest wood products are selectively harvested each year. The forest has increased the number of treatments it implements to improve forest health, reduce the undesirable effects of wildland fire, and make forest products more available by intending to treat 10 to 20 million board feet annually.

The lands within what is now the Tonto National Forest continue to provide the opportunity for collecting plants and other natural resources for subsistence and medicinal use and for conducting ceremonial activities important to Native American Tribes. Native American Tribes may also have an interest in natural, historical, cultural, and other resources of the Tonto National Forest, with an emphasis on restoration to pre-reservation conditions. The Tonto National Forest regularly consults with the Ak Chin Indian Community, Fort McDowell Yavapai Nation, Gila River Indian Community, Hopi Tribe, Mescalero Apache Tribe, Pueblo of Zuni, Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community, San Carlos Apache Tribe, Tohono O'odham Nation, Tonto Apache Tribe, White Mountain Apache Tribe, Yavapai-Apache Nation, and Yavapai-Prescott Tribe.

Most visitors come to know the Tonto National Forest through their direct recreation experiences. The Tonto National Forest is one of the most-visited "urban" forests in the United States, with approximately three million visitors annually (National Visitor Use Monitoring 2016). These visitors come to enjoy the array of year-round recreation opportunities. In the winter, national and international visitors flock to Arizona to share the multi-hued stone canyons and Sonoran Desert environments of the Tonto's lower elevations with Arizona residents. In the summer, visitors and residents seek refuge from the heat at the Salt and Verde Rivers and their chain of six man-made lakes. Visitors also head to the high country to camp amidst the cool shade of tall pines and fish the meandering trout streams under the Mogollon Rim. Visitation of cultural sites on the Tonto has long been, and continues to be, one of the primary sources for cultural services available to visitors, particularly when those resources have been enhanced by interpretive developments and outreach activities. Outfitting and guiding services on the Tonto provide an important link between visitors and the ecological treasures of the Tonto.

There are eight existing designated wilderness areas encompassing 588,575 acres on the Tonto National Forest, that are managed to protect the unique natural character of the land and to ensure that primitive recreational opportunities exist for the public. Designated wilderness areas on the Tonto National Forest contribute to ecological sustainability by providing large expanses of natural landscapes that reflect ecological conditions that would normally be associated with the area without human intervention. In addition, portions of the Verde River and Fossil Creek have been designated as wild and scenic rivers to preserve outstandingly remarkable values in a free-flowing condition for the enjoyment of present and future generations. Both designated wilderness and wild and scenic rivers contribute to the economic sustainability of the surrounding communities by drawing visitors interested in experiences provided through these designations and through the potential to access funding from individuals and groups with an interest in preserving these resources.

Wildlife, fish, and plant species are a key part of the unique character inherent to the Tonto National Forest. The Tonto National Forest contributes to the recovery of 19 federally-listed threatened and endangered species, as well as designated critical habitat, and is a signatory on conservation agreements1 for Arizona bugbane and Sonoran Desert tortoise. Additionally, the regional forester has identified 52 species of conservation concern in the planning area. Maintaining quality habitat to

support and improve wildlife diversity is a primary management consideration. Fish and wildlife are enjoyed by the many visitors who come to the forest to hunt, fish, and view wildlife in the dramatic landscapes of the southwest. The Forest provides diverse opportunities for the public to enjoy fish and wildlife by managing habitats that support healthy populations of animals, and by providing access to these wild areas. While hunting, fishing, and wildlife viewing are well recognized as recreational activities, they also contribute to social, cultural, and economic components of the neighboring communities.

Many areas of the Tonto National Forest are highly mineralized, and the Tonto National Forest has an important role in administering mineral exploration and extraction while minimizing surface resource impacts, consistent with mining regulations and policy. The forest has a rich history of producing copper, gold, silver, lead, zinc, uranium, molybdenum, manganese, asbestos, mercury, and many other metals and minerals. This history spans over 150 years and includes 38 mineral districts with recorded production. The Forest Service recognizes minerals are fundamental to the Nation's well-being and, as policy, encourages the development of economically sound and stable mineral resource industries on National Forest System lands (Mining and Minerals Policy Act of 1970). The Agency's role in managing mineral resources is to provide reasonable protection of surface resources while allowing use of the land for operations authorized by U.S. mining laws.

Approximately 26,000 head of cattle are permitted to graze on the Tonto National Forest. Because of its year-round availability, permitted use is extremely high, and land allotments must be carefully managed to avoid over-utilization and declining productivity of the range. Rangelands on the forest are valued for ecosystem services beyond their traditional value as a forage production system. Additional ecosystem services include the potential to store carbon in the soil and plant biomass, and food production. Further, the process of herding and managing the forage-consuming livestock has high cultural and social value for many Arizonans and often helps contribute to local economies.

With some of Arizona's more prominent peaks located on the Tonto National Forest, the national forest supports an important communication link for the state. Radio, television, and telephone networks use the electronic sites on these mountains to facilitate state and national communications. Many of the high-capacity transmission lines that bring Phoenix its power also crisscross the Tonto National Forest.

Need for Change

Over 30 years have passed since the regional forester approved the original land management plan in 1985. These years have yielded new scientific information and understanding, and changes in economic, social, and ecological conditions, resulting in a shift in management emphasis from outputs to outcomes. A complete revision of the 1985 forest plan is needed to: (1) meet the legal requirements of National Forest Management Act and the provisions of the 2012 Planning Rule[1]; (2)

[1] 36 CFR 219

guide natural resource management activities on the forest for the next 10 to 15 years; and (3) address the needs for change in management direction.

In preparing for forest plan revision, the Tonto National Forest identified guidance in the 1985 forest plan that is working, new conditions that need to be addressed, and ongoing challenges that could be better addressed. To accurately revise the 1985 forest plan, there needed to be a good understanding about which direction to move towards, or the need to change.

The conditions, trends, and sustainability of the ecological, social, and economic resources on the Tonto National Forest were published in March 2017 as part of the assessment required by the 2012 Planning Rule (36 CFR 219). These documents are available on the Tonto National Forest land management planning website https://www.fs.usda.gov/main/tonto/landmanagement/planning (see Final Assessment Report of Conditions, Trends, and Risks to Sustainability Volume I and Volume II). The assessment helped identify portions of the 1985 forest plan that were working well and meeting desired management conditions, and those that were not and needed to be changed through the forest plan revision process.

Using the results and trends from the assessment report, the Tonto National Forest developed themes describing overarching needs and concepts to be considered and addressed through the forest plan revision process to create sustainable resources, goods, and services. These themes were:

- maintain, improve, or restore ecosystems on the Tonto National Forest;
- provide for plant and animal habitat diversity, including at-risk species;
- increase resiliency of ecosystems and incorporate adaptive management;
- sustainably manage water resources;
- facilitate accessible, sustainable, and diverse recreation opportunities to a growing public,
- preserve the unique cultural and historic character of the land while providing opportunities to engage with local heritage;
- ensure the sustainability of key ecosystem services and forest attributes that contribute to values associated with the Tonto;
- recognize and enhance the Tonto's role in contributing to local economies;
- emphasize on-going collaborative efforts and partnerships while striving to develop new and long-lasting relationships;
- develop a monitoring strategy that provides information for rapid responses to changing conditions; and
- allow for adapting to fluctuations in forest budgets over the life of the land management plan when planning towards desired conditions.

The Tonto National Forest utilized the results of the assessment and discussions with resource specialists and members of the public on the themes above to develop needs to change statements. These statements paint a picture of the strategic changes necessary to address issues identified by the assessment and present a vision for future management of the Tonto National Forest. The public commented on these needs to change and the initial plan components based on them after the Notice of Intent to Revise the 1985 Forest Plan was published in the Federal Register on April 6, 2017. We used these issue categories to develop the draft plan and the alternatives in the environmental impact statement. Public comments on the draft plan and draft environmental impact statement were then used to further refine the preferred alternative. The land management plan has been developed with due consideration given to the input received during the public involvement process.

Engagement with Federal Agencies, State and Local Governments, and the Public

Public involvement, a point of strong emphasis in the 2012 Planning Rule (36 CFR 219), has been invaluable to the development of the land management plan. In revising the land management plan, we sought to build on existing engagement with its many public stakeholders through conservation education, working agreements, partnerships, and volunteers. Throughout plan revision, we collaborated with the general public and our cooperating agencies, as well as Federal, State, and local governments; federally recognized Tribes; non-profit organizations; private landowners; youth; and the public. Cooperating agencies and various Federal, State, local, and Tribal governmental entities contributed their knowledge and understanding of the concerns and needs of local communities to the plan revision process.

Additionally, in preparing the land management plan, the planning team reviewed the objectives expressed, and evaluated the interrelationships between, relevant planning and land use policies and the land management plan. For the most part, the land management plan complements these other planning efforts. We considered these plans, assessments, and strategies in the development of plan components to ensure as much alignment as was practicable. Management approach sections of the land management plan articulate identified issues and opportunities for coordinating with various partners across administrative boundaries, particularly State, local, Tribal, and Federal agencies. Cross-boundary issues include managing for wide-ranging species and wildfire across agency boundaries and working together to improve efficiency. While there were some differences related to the differing missions, no conflicts requiring alternative development were identified.

Federal Agencies, State and Local Governments

Federal Agencies

Management concerns across boundaries were considered when working with other Federal agencies. Federal management plans were reviewed for compatibility with the revised land management plan. In addition, the Forest coordinated information with the regional office of the Environmental

Protection Agency during all phases of the process. The Tonto regular coordinates with the multiple Federal agencies including but not limited to: Bureau of Land Management, Bureau of Reclamation, Fish and Wildlife Service, Park Service, and Army Corps of Engineers. The agencies below have management connections with the Tonto National Forest and have engaged closely throughout the plan revision process.

National Forests: Land management plans for National Forest System lands adjacent to the Tonto National Forest that were considered during the analysis include: Apache-Sitgreaves National Forest, Coconino National Forest, and Prescott National Forest. Consideration of management concerns across boundaries (e.g., national scenic trails, utility corridors, designated wilderness, designated wild and scenic rivers, and landscape scale projects) were discussed to ensure consistency. Regionally consistent (national forests of Arizona and New Mexico) desired conditions were also incorporated for many of the common resources (e.g., ecological response units, wildlife, fish, and plants, air quality) and includes similar management for the recreation opportunity spectrum and scenery management system.

Bureau of Reclamation: The Bureau of Reclamation's mission is to manage, develop, and protect water and related resources in an environmentally and economically sound manner. They manage much of the surface water on the Tonto National Forest. Of interest during the development of the land management plan was the management related to the Lakes and Rivers Management Area, watersheds and water resources, and eligible wild and scenic rivers. They were also very engaged during the wild and scenic rivers eligibility process and the wilderness recommended process and ensured future water management and management of the Forest were consistent. In addition to the events listed in the public engagement section above the Forest meets annually with the Bureau of Reclamation, with Salt River Project included, to discuss future management concerns and work together to ensure open communication and understanding about future management needs and concerns. These meetings have helped to shape the language in the revised land management plan to be consistent with best management practices where our management might overlap.

Bureau of Land Management: The purpose of a Bureau of Land Management resource management plan is to provide a single, comprehensive land use plan to guide management of public lands administered by each field office. This type of plan is very similar to the forest plan with plan direction focusing on goals and desired conditions. The Phoenix and Gila district offices of the Bureau of Land Management have the closest ties to the Tonto National Forest. The Hassayampa and Lower Sonoran field offices have participated in various public and partner meetings for the plan revision process. This participation has allowed collaboration between the agencies to develop land management plans with consistent language to support the broader landscape.

Fish and Wildlife Service: Throughout the plan revision process the Fish and Wildlife Service has been a partner in the development of the materials related to wildlife, fish, and plants. The mission of the Fish and Wildlife Service is to work with others to conserve, protect and enhance fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. Recovery plans for

threatened, endangered, and candidate species were considered in the development of habitat desired conditions and specific standards and guidelines needed for protection of species.

State Agencies

Several State of Arizona agencies are affected by, or affect, Forest Service management. Each of these agencies have their own management goals and plans in place. The Tonto National Forest has coordinated regularly with various state agencies throughout the plan revision process. These include but are not limited to: Arizona Department of Agriculture, Arizona Department of Environmental Quality, Arizona Department of Transportation, Arizona Department of Water Resources, Arizona Game and Fish Department, and Arizona State Parks.

As such, Arizona Department of Agriculture and Arizona Game and Fish Department are formal cooperating agencies and have participated in the development of the Tonto National Forest land management plan. More specifically they helped to develop the land management plan direction and associated analysis for wildlife-related recreation and the Salt River Horse management area. They were active members of the plan revision interdisciplinary team and helped to provide resource management ideas where their agency is one of the subject matter experts.

County Governments

Beginning with the initiation of the plan revision process, local government officials from the counties that have lands within the Tonto National Forest boundaries (Gila, Maricopa, Pinal, and Yavapai Counties) were invited to participate in the process. Both Gila and Maricopa counties were active participants in the technical partner meetings and other engagement opportunities held throughout the process. Gila County Board of Supervisors, Yavapai County District 2 supervisor, and Maricopa County Air Quality Department submitted formal comments on the draft land management plan and draft environmental impact statement.

The related and equivalent county plans were considered and evaluated for consistency with the land management plan during the planning process. There are a number of similarities between the goals and objectives of the county plans and the desired conditions and management approaches of the land management plan. The Forest has determined that the land management plan is generally compatible with the associated county plans including the growth policies and future management planning.

Public Involvement

Since kicking off the forest plan revision process in January 2014, the Tonto National Forest plan revision team has been working to involve, and collaborate with, the public during the various phases of the planning process. The Tonto National Forest recognizes that our partners and the public have valuable ideas, knowledge, opinions, and needs that can inform and improve management of the forest. To provide meaningful dialogue and collaboration, the Tonto National Forest has offered a variety of public engagement opportunities throughout the plan revision process.

Public participation for the assessment phase included listening sessions, workshops, and a series of public meetings to gather local knowledge to understand how the public values the forest. In addition, the Tonto National Forest plan revision team has interacted with others through presentations and meetings with county planners, Tribes, stakeholders, and other government entities. The Notice of Intent for the proposed action to prepare an environmental impact statement was published in the Federal Register on April 6, 2017, with a comment period from April 6, 2017 – May 22. 2017. The Notice of Intent asked for public comment on the needs to change statement developed from the assessment.

A preliminary proposed plan was released in November 2017 and offered an additional 45-day comment period. This allowed the Tonto National Forest, as well as the public and partners, to better understand how the assessment and needs to change work together to develop plan direction to feed into the draft land management plan. Additional meetings and discussions were held following the release of the preliminary proposed plan. The draft land management plan (proposed action) was a modified version of that document. Public participation for the development of the draft land management plan and analysis of alternatives has included a variety of opportunities (e.g., a series of open house public meetings, field trips, and stakeholder workshops) to engage. The Tonto National Forest also used internet-based collaboration techniques to gather public input and engaging communities at a local level through presentations at meetings hosted by organizations, government groups, and Tribes; informational booths at fairs and local community events; and presentations and field trips for local schools. Information has been provided on a dedicated forest plan revision web page and through mailings, flyers, news releases, YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, and radio interviews.

The Notice of Availability for the draft land and resource management plan (draft land management plan) and draft environmental impact statement was published in the Federal Register on December 13, 2019, for a 90-day comment period ending March 12, 2020. Additional meetings and discussion (e.g., a series of open houses public meetings, two technical partner meetings, and district office working days) were held during the comment period. Information was also widely available online, hard copies at all Tonto National Forest offices, and hard copies at many of the local libraries in and around the Forest.

A full list of public engagement activities can be found in Appendix C: Public Engagement and Coordination with other Planning Efforts in volume 4 of the final environmental impact statement.

Tribal Consultation

Eleven federally recognized Tribes who have ties to the Tonto National Forest and were consulted during the plan revision process. They are listed as follows: The Fort McDowell Yavapai Nation, Gila River Indian Community, Hopi Tribe, Mescalero Apache Tribe, Pueblo of Zuni, Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community, San Carlos Apache Tribe, Tonto Apache Tribe, White Mountain Apache Tribe, Yavapai-Apache Nation, and Yavapai-Prescott Tribe. The Tonto National Forest first notified the Tribes of forest plan revision in December 2013 with a letter announcing the start of the revision

process and the dates for the first round of public meetings. Information sharing and consultation efforts have continued throughout the plan revision process, in written correspondence, face-to-face meetings, emails and phone calls. The plan revision team has sent written communications to the Tribes and has held several plan revision sessions and meetings specifically for Tribal government and Tribal members. Engagement with various Tribes included at least two face-to-face meeting with each Tribe and numerous invitations for involvement in the forest plan revision process. The Tonto National Forest held meetings with Tribal elders, government representatives, and community members.

Many of the consulted Tribes consider the Tonto National Forest an important place, both spiritually and culturally and have a strong interest in the management of the Tonto National Forest's natural and cultural resources[2]. Tribal comments included concerns related to access sacred sites, traditional cultural properties, and forest lands for individual and group prayer and traditional ceremonies and rituals; activities that have the potential to adversely impact archeological sites or change traditional landscapes; management of springs, seeps, riparian areas and other water; monitoring and restoration of traditional use resources (e.g., Emory oak); and Tribal involvement early and often through the project planning process.

Consultation with affiliated Tribes ensured the revised plan components addressed the identified Tribal concerns and needs with respect to the Tonto National Forest. Additional details on Tribal consultation throughout can be found in the Tribal Consultation section of Appendix C: Public Engagement and Coordination with Other Planning Efforts in volume 4 of the final environmental impact statement.

Decision and Rationale for the Decision

Decision

I select a modified alternative B as described in the final environmental impact statement and the accompanying Tonto National Forest Land Management Plan (land management plan).

I have considered how the land management plan responds to the concerns of State, local, and Tribal governments, public comments, internal management concerns, and national direction and policy. My decision is based on the management direction in the revised plan, the analysis of effects disclosed in the final environmental impact statement, and the administrative record in its entirety. The decision components are fully supported by the environmental analysis documented in the final environmental impact statement and administrative record, as required by law and regulation. This

[2] Chapter 2360.5 of the Forest Service Manual defines cultural resource as: "An object or definite location of human activity, occupation, or use identifiable through field survey, historical documentation, or oral evidence. Cultural resources are prehistoric, historic, archaeological, or architectural sites, structures, places, or objects and traditional cultural properties. In this Record of Decision, cultural resources include the entire spectrum of resources for which the Heritage Program is responsible from artifacts to cultural landscapes without regard to eligibility for listing on the National Register of Historic Places."

decision applies only to National Forest System lands on the Tonto National Forest. It does not apply to any other State, municipal, private, or Federal lands, although the effects of these lands and the effects of my decision on lands surrounding the Tonto National Forest were considered.

The land management plan will:

- Establish forestwide (chapter 2) and management area (chapter 3) plan components, including desired conditions, objectives, standards, and guidelines that meet the social, economic, and ecological sustainability requirements of the Planning Rule.
- Support collaborative relationships with state, county, and local governments.
- Maintain access to and availability of resources important to Tribes, as well as ensure early collaboration in project planning and resource management.
- Provide comprehensive direction for recreation management that balances between developed and primitive/dispersed recreation opportunities and motorized and nonmotorized access and provides more consistent recreation management across the forest.
- Address sustainable recreation by incorporating plan components for current and future recreation opportunities, including fishing, hunting, off highway vehicle use, and recreational shooting.
- Maintains access on the existing over 2,200 miles of public roads and over 2,600 miles of motorized system trails.
- Provide for sustainable uses that support vibrant communities and honor the Tonto National Forest's history by providing for forest conditions that protect communities, infrastructure, and watersheds; air quality; traditional and cultural forest uses; sustainable recreation opportunities; scenery; and forest-based economic activities such as annual timber (up to 15.4 million board feet) and fuelwood (83,344 tons) industries, grazing (191,369 animal unit months), and mining.
- Increase total calculated annual labor income from $171.5 million to $174.1 million.
- Use a combination of mechanical and prescribed and naturally-ignited wildland fire treatments to restore fire-adapted ecosystems with a focus on treating priority watersheds, areas identified in community wildfire protection plans, and lands in the wildland-urban interface. This will result in improved watershed conditions and reduced threats to local communities from uncharacteristic wildfire.
- Improve the health and function of forested lands, watersheds, and riparian areas.
- Protect and restore rare and unique resources and habitats that support high levels of biodiversity and provide refugia for species that are narrow endemics or have restricted distributions and/or declining populations.

- Protect and improve soil and water resources that support terrestrial and aquatic habitat and contribute to high levels of biodiversity.
- Provide for the viability of all species, including at-risk terrestrial and aquatic insect, animal, and plant species. Through habitat desired conditions needed by those species, where known, and standards, guidelines, and objectives that address species- identified needs, maintain, or improve the inherent ecological conditions and minimize disturbance in the areas where species occur.
- Provide for the control, treatment, and eradication of non-native plant and animal invasive species. This will result in lowering risks to native species, ecosystem function, and the production of goods and services.
- Incorporate specific management direction for the following management areas: Designated Wilderness, Recommended Wilderness, Designated Wild and Scenic Rivers, Eligible Wild and Scenic Rivers, Designated and Recommended Research Natural Areas and Botanical Areas, Inventoried Roadless Areas, National Trails, Significant Caves, Lakes and Rivers Management Area, Saguaro Wild Burro Management Area, Salt River Horse Management Area, and the Apache Leap Special Management Area.
- Recommend five Recommended Wilderness Areas (106,204 acres) for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System: (1) Gun Creek Recommended Wilderness; (2) Boulder Recommended Wilderness (3) Coronado Mesa Recommended Wilderness; (4) Red Creek Recommended Wilderness; and (5) Mullen Mesa Recommended Wilderness.

  This recommendation is a preliminary administrative recommendation that will receive further review and possible modification by the Chief of the Forest Service, the Secretary of Agriculture, and the President of the United States. The Congress has reserved the authority to make final decisions on wilderness designation. Plan implementation is not dependent upon subsequent action related to recommendations for wilderness designation. Plan direction for Recommended Wilderness Areas will be applied to recommended wilderness areas until such time as the area is designated as wilderness by Congress.
- Identify 19 river segments (188 miles) eligible for inclusion in the Wild and Scenic Rivers System and plan components associated with their management.
- Incorporate other plan content, such as management approaches and the description of the distinctive roles and contributions of the Tonto National Forest.
- Establish monitoring questions (chapter 4) that provide a framework for the collaborative development of a monitoring plan with other agencies, organizations, and individuals, and in consultation with Indian Tribes, while also coordinating with Forest Service Research and State and Private Forestry.

Nature of the Decision

The purpose of the land management plan is to guide future projects, activities, practices, uses, and protection measures to assure sustainable multiple-use management on the Tonto National Forest for the next ten to 15 years. The land management plan is strategic in nature. It does not authorize projects or activities, commit the Forest Service to act, or dictate the day-to-day administrative activities needed to carry out the Forest Service's internal operations (such as personnel matters, law enforcement, or organizational changes). The land management plan's programmatic management direction will be implemented through the design, execution, and monitoring of site-specific activities such as, but not limited to, relocating a trail, conducting a prescribed burn, or harvesting timber. The decisions for these project-level activities must be consistent with the with the applicable plan components set forth in the land management plan (36 CFR 219.15). Site-specific analysis in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), and other Federal laws and regulations, will need to be conducted in order for prohibitions or activities to be implemented, in compliance with the broader direction of the land management plan.

The land management plan establishes plan components in the form of desired conditions, objectives, standards, and guidelines to promote the ecological integrity and contribute to social and economic sustainability, including through provision of ecosystem services and multiple uses of the Tonto National Forest. Through development of plan components and forest-level monitoring, we incorporated best available scientific information and established a framework for increased adaptive management in implementation. The components and other content of the land management plan are intended to enable us to adapt to new social and economic opportunities that arise as well as new information that comes to us through science and monitoring.

Rationale for the Decision

My decision to select alternative B (modified) as the revised Tonto National Forest Land Management Plan is based on a careful and reasoned comparison of the environmental consequences of and responses to issues and concerns for each alternative[3]. I selected this alternative because it represents the best mix and balance of management strategies that: 1) are responsive to the issues, concerns, and opportunities expressed by State, local and Tribal governments, the public, and other Federal agencies; 2) meet the purpose of and need for action by addressing the priority needs for change and major themes that drove plan revision; 3) provide the direction necessary for moving the forest's resources toward desired conditions while including measures to protect sensitive ecological and cultural elements of the forest; 4) manage land uses in ways that are socially and economically sustainable; and 5) establish ambitious but achievable objectives for ecosystem restoration and sustainable recreation opportunities .

[3] All changes made to the FEIS between the release of the draft record of decision and this signed decision are all within the range of alternatives analyzed in the FEIS per 40 CFR 1500-1508.

The land management plan will seek to improve customer service to the American people by simplifying management of the Tonto National Forest. As a result of public input, we reduced the number of management areas. The public will benefit from a land management plan that is easier to read and understand. The land management plan is less prone to future conflict over different interpretations of language and overly complex management areas.

The broad framework for the interconnected management of resources provides for sustainable uses that support vibrant communities and honor the Tonto National Forest's traditional communities, while also adapting to current demands, by providing for: forest conditions that protect communities, infrastructure, and watersheds; air quality; traditional and cultural forest uses; sustainable recreation opportunities; scenery; and forest-based economic activities such as wood products industries and grazing.

Balancing conflicting resource needs and providing for comprehensive multi-use management, consistent with the conservation ethic, is a continuous objective in administering the resources of the Tonto National Forest.

When compared to the other considered alternatives, the selected alternative will:

- Incorporate components to address climate change vulnerabilities and to increase ecosystem resilience across the Forest.
- Provide public benefits by supporting 3,298 jobs in the local and regional economies, a projected increase of over 61 jobs from the 1985 forest plan and provides an estimated $174.1 million in labor income across local and regional economies.
- Provide key ecosystem services identified by forest communities, including water for consumption, water for recreation, sustainable and productive rangelands, cultural heritage, and habitat for hunting, fishing, and watchable wildlife.
- Increase focus on improving infrastructure and increasing the level of ecological restoration, such as more timber volume than the current plan, and objectives that emphasize returning vegetation to reference conditions using silvicultural and fire treatments.
- Allow for greater options in managing unplanned naturally ignited wildfires as a tool to help restore ecosystems and reduce the risk of future uncharacteristic fire.
- Improve project-level planning and implementation efficiency, by updating outdated management direction that does not address landscape level restoration needs.
- Support shared stewardship through increased partnerships, leveraging volunteer opportunities, and management flexibility.
- Recognize unique places for their contributions to watershed function, wildlife habitat, outdoor recreation, grazing, and other multiple uses and economic benefits.

The decision represents a mix of recommended wilderness areas and lands identified as suitable for timber production and includes provisions for unique ecological conditions, active management of vegetation including fuel reduction, and eligible wild and scenic rivers. Plan components to guide management of the forest's resources, including water, fish, wildlife, minerals, and rangelands are also included. The mix of opportunities available for primitive recreation and nonmotorized recreation experiences versus more motorized recreation and accessible experiences is generally consistent with current travel plans.

The land management plan reflects recommendations from State and local governments, Indian Tribes, Federal and State agencies, forest partners, and the public. My decision to develop and select a modified version of the preferred alternative, alternative B, was based on discussions and comments from these stakeholders. The land management plan is generally consistent with the interests of many of these stakeholders. My decision includes recommended wilderness areas with the most support and includes some changes to recommended wilderness boundaries to accommodate for restoration objectives, existing motorized routes, and wildland fire suppression efforts. I realize my decision does not reflect the interests of all stakeholders. For example, I acknowledge there are differing viewpoints about management direction around grazing in riparian areas and the final number and locations of recommended wilderness areas and uses within them. In other cases, public input recommendations are preempted by existing law, regulation, and policy that cannot be changed in a land management plan revision process. Where possible, the land management plan was modified to be responsive; otherwise, I have determined that the plan components were sufficient to meet our obligations under the 2012 Planning Rule.

The land management plan includes plan components (desired conditions, objectives, standards, guidelines) and other plan content (e.g., management approaches and monitoring questions) that reflect the key roles and contributions of the national forest and address needs for change from the 1985 plan. These include recreation opportunities, natural resource management, economic contributions (including grazing), partnerships, and designated and recommended management areas.

Recreation Opportunities - Alternative B highlights balance of recreation opportunities across the Tonto National Forest. Recreation and its importance to people and the economy, as well as continued access to the forest, was addressed throughout the land management plan in the Recreation section, the Designated and Management Areas section, and the Roads section. Plan direction supports sustainable recreation management to provide high-quality recreational experiences, while also balancing changing trends in services. The land management plan aims to ensure sustainable use of recreation infrastructure and facilities, including roads. Impacts from recreation activity are managed to reduce user conflict and resource damage, especially at dispersed campsites. Objectives help maintain developed recreation areas, a sustainable road and trail system, and promote visitor safety and natural resource protection.

Travel management was not identified as an area needing change because it was recently decided (2019) through a thorough public engagement process[4]. Therefore, travel management decisions were outside the scope of this plan revision effort at its onset.

Natural Resource Management - Alternative B provides the Tonto National Forest the ability to conduct vegetation management actions (e.g., prescribed fire and mechanical thinning) to move vegetation toward desired conditions and protect resources. Many commenters were supportive of using prescribed fire and wildfire to achieve or maintain desired conditions, and specifically noted desires to mitigate uncharacteristic or catastrophic wildfire and protect the wildland urban interface and essential water resources. These comments were taken into consideration along with those that were not supportive of active vegetation management or use of fire on the forest.

Plan direction for vegetation management supports the return of natural disturbance processes (fire) that maintain or restore appropriate vegetation and structure, thereby improving wildlife habitat and reducing uncharacteristic wildland fire. The land management plan emphasizes returning vegetation to reference conditions in frequent-fire adapted forested and non-forested types using silvicultural treatments and fire (prescribed and natural) to protect life and property, as well as cultural and ecological resources. While active vegetation management may have potential for environmental effects and social conflicts, there is broad public support for actively managing the forest for improved ecosystem health and resilience in the face of a changing climate and the lasting impacts of past fire suppression. Vegetation treatments will reduce fire risk and protect quality of life for communities, including underserved communities, in and adjacent to the Tonto National Forest. I am confident that the plan components in alternative B will strike the right balance to ensure long-term productivity and sustainability.

Other plan components that address vulnerabilities from climate change are distributed across resource sections in the plan. The strategy is not only to protect areas through special designations such as Wild and Scenic River or Recommended Wilderness, but to increase the ability of forest resources to be resilient to changing conditions while considering each resource's natural potential to change. For example, improved watershed function would help sustain resilience to changing climatic conditions and help sustain vegetation that serves as a foundation of good quality forest habitat for a variety of species, including those having special status. Additionally, desired conditions and other plan components are included for each Ecological Response Unit (ERU), including mean fire return intervals and site potentials, to make vegetation management projects easier to design for and adapt to changing conditions. We have also incorporated monitoring topics and indicators to assess our progress.

The land management plan provides for a diversity of plant and animal communities, commensurate with the suitability and capability of the Tonto National Forest, by restoring and maintaining

[4] More information can be found in the 2019 Record of Decision for the Tonto National Forest Travel Management Project.

ecological integrity. Consistent with the 2012 Planning Rule, the land management plan adopts a complementary ecosystem- and species-specific approach to maintaining species diversity (36 CFR 219.9). The regional forester identified species of conservation concern for the Tonto National Forest. These species of conservation concern were determined to be at risk due to small or endemic populations, limited habitat, current degraded habitat or specific ecological conditions, or current Forest Service management activities or other threats that may result in negative impacts to the species. In addition, federally listed threatened or endangered species are found in the Tonto National Forest and rely on the forest for most or all of their natural life-cycle requirements[5]. These listed species will be managed according to recovery plans developed by the Fish and Wildlife Service that outline critical habitat and ecological conditions necessary to facilitate their protection and recovery. Fine-filter components have been included in the final plan when additional management direction is necessary. The Planning Rule requires species-specific plan components (36 CFR 219(b)). In cases where coarse-filter, habitat related plan direction is insufficient to provide necessary ecological conditions, then additional, species-specific (or fine-filter) plan components, including standards or guidelines, have been included in the plan to provide such ecological conditions. On the Tonto National Forest, such plan components are rarely relevant to only a single species, but threats to species persistence and their accompanying plan components generally apply to groups of species. Therefore, though individual species names are not often found in plan components, the plan does contain species-specific plan components.

The land management plan will facilitate and guide habitat conditions to support native aquatic, terrestrial, and at-risk species, while providing protections from management activities that impact breeding, nesting, and critical habitat. Terrestrial and aquatic habitat improvement and restoration in forested and non-forested vegetation types and riparian areas would also improve habitat conditions. Additionally, plan components guide management of invasive species on the forest through treatment that protects native fish from nonnative fish and that either suppresses or eradicates invasive plants.

Economic Contributions - Economic prosperity is often inseparable from subsistence uses tied to natural resources and the land on the Tonto National Forest, such as timber, including fuelwood; livestock forage; and water for surrounding communities. The land management plan recognizes the Tonto National Forest's continued contribution to social and economic benefits desired by local communities, families, and visitors. It is grounded in the economic and subsistence uses and values of unique local cultures. With my decision, I incorporated socioeconomic and cultural values throughout the land management plan, including in the Tribal Relations and Areas of Tribal Importance section,

[5] A Final Rule listing the cactus ferruginous pygmy owl under the Endangered Species Act as threatened was published in the Federal Register on August 21, 2023, after the forest had completed formal consultation on the land management plan and after official public comment periods had concluded. The listing identified a small portion of the Tonto National Forest as part of the northern edge of the species' range. However, previous surveys and monitoring efforts have not observed this species near the forest or Phoenix area for over 50 years. Therefore, the owl will not be affected by this planning effort, and it is not necessary to reinitiate consultation with Fish and Wildlife Service at this time. More information is available in the administrative record.

the Forestry and Forest Products section, the Rangelands, Forage, and Grazing section, and the Recreation section.

The land management plan provides opportunities for economic growth while sustaining ecosystems for future generations. It focuses on restoration and diverse ecosystem services that contribute to the long-term socioeconomic diversity and stability of local communities. The land management plan boosts prosperity for communities within and surrounding the Tonto National Forest by contributing 3,298 forest management-related annual jobs $174.1 million and labor income. Plan direction supports sustainable levels of timber products for local industries and subsistence and traditional uses.

Sustainable rangeland forage and livestock grazing contributes to the long-term socioeconomic diversity and stability and cultural identity of local communities. My decision supports the continuation of these practices through forested and non-forested vegetation treatments that will increase grass and forb abundance, thereby providing increased forage for livestock grazing. The land management plan also incorporates an objective to evaluate vacant allotments for the best future use including conversion to forage reserves to improve resource management flexibility; grant to current or new permitted livestock producer; or close to permitted grazing, in whole or in part.

Partnerships - The land management plan recognizes the interdependence of resources and supports an "all-lands" approach to working with neighboring land managers to implement projects that improve landscape connectivity across mixed ownerships where natural systems span multiple administrative boundaries. In the land management plan, direction for partnerships provides the vision of a collaborative network, open communication, and landscape-scale management across administrative boundaries. There is an emphasis on the need to build stronger relationships with elected officials, cities and counties, Federal and State agencies, Tribal governments, traditional and rural communities, recreational and forest user groups, environmental groups, youth, and vendors.

Designated Areas and Management Areas - The land management plan includes five recommended wilderness areas (Gun Creek, Boulder, Coronado Mesa, Red Creek, and Mullen Mesa) for a total of 106,204 acres, selected from areas analyzed in alternative B and alternative C. I selected these five areas based on a formal analysis and public comments received on the draft environmental impact statement. To address concerns about recommended wilderness areas in the draft land management plan, recommended wilderness area boundaries were adjusted to provide a larger buffer along roads[6] and private land to allow for management flexibility including utility maintenance and fuels treatments[7]. Additionally, boundary adjustments occurred because of anticipated restoration activities as part of the Four Forest Restoration Initiative. Also, my decision restricts motorized and

[6] A recommended wilderness management area boundary, where defined by a designated motorized route, is defined by the 300-foot buffer around the physical centerline of the open motorized route. Corrections may be made to the map administratively to reflect the 300-foot buffer around motorized routes described in the motor vehicle use map.
[7] For more information on the rationale for the recommended wilderness areas as well as the other areas evaluated for wilderness potential, please see the preliminary administrative recommendations section.

mechanized means of transportation in recommended wilderness areas, unless specifically authorized for emergency use, resource protection, maintenance of authorized improvements, or for the motorized retrieval of legally harvested big game.

The land management plan includes 19 eligible wild and scenic rivers as identified through the wild and scenic river eligibility process, for a total of 188 miles. Based on review from resource specialists and consideration of public comments, including those from Federal, Tribal, State, county, and local governments, I have determined these segments meet the basic eligibility criteria for inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System. They are free-flowing and possess at least one value that is outstandingly remarkable[8]

In summary, I believe the land management plan, a modified alternative B, sets the framework for future decisions more effectively than the other alternatives because it best addresses the themes that emerged from the needs for change to the 1985 plan; it is overall best in achieving desired conditions and, therefore, in providing for social, economic, and ecological sustainability on the Tonto National Forest.

My conclusion is based on a review of the administrative record that shows thorough incorporation of relevant scientific information, a consideration of opposing views, and the acknowledgment of incomplete or unavailable information, scientific uncertainty, and risk.

Requirements of the Planning Rule

The land management plan has been prepared in compliance with the Forest Service's 2012 Planning Rule at 36 CFR Part 219. The land management plan meets the specific Rule requirements at sections 219.8 through 219.12 as follows.

219.8 Sustainability

The land management plan has been prepared in compliance with the Forest Service's 2012 Planning Rule at 36 CFR Part 219. The land management plan meets the specific Rule requirements at sections 219.8 through 219.12 as follows.

The final plan provides for ecological sustainability by including plan components that collectively ensure the maintenance or restoration of the coarse- and fine-filter habitat needs of all native species, while also maintaining or restoring the natural processes and functions on the landscape. Specifically, the land management plan includes the following plan direction for ecological sustainability:

1. Maintaining and restoring the ecological integrity—including structure, function, composition, and connectivity—of terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems and watersheds in the plan area (2022 Land Management Plan, Vegetation and Ecological Response Units, Watersheds and Water Resources, Riparian Areas, and Wildlife, Fish, and Plants sections and subsections). These

[8]For more information on the rationale for the eligible wild and scenic rivers, see the preliminary administrative recommendations section.

ecosystem- and species-specific plan components provide suitable habitat for aquatic, plant, and wildlife at-risk species. Collectively, these plan components incorporate a landscape approach to species persistence and recovery.

2. Maintaining and restoring air quality (2023 Land Management Plan, Air Quality).
3. Maintaining and restoring soils and soil productivity including guidance to reduce soil erosion and sedimentation (2023 Land Management Plan, Soils).
4. Maintaining and restoring water resources and water quality (2023 Land Management Plan, Watersheds and Water Resources).
5. Maintaining and restoring the ecological integrity of riparian areas in part by establishing riparian management zones around all lakes, streams, and open water wetlands (2023 Land Management Plan, Riparian Areas, Springs, Seeps, and Wetlands)
6. Ensuring implementation of best management practices for water quality (2023 Land Management Plan, Watersheds and Water Resources).

The land management plan provides for social and economic sustainability by:

1. Recognizing and valuing traditional communities and uses (2023 Land Management Plan, Tribal Resources and Areas of Tribal Importance, Cultural and Historic Resources, Rangelands, Forage, and Grazing, Mining, Minerals, and Abandoned Mines, and Forestry and Forest Products).
2. Facilitating opportunities for local employment and economic development associated with restoration, grazing, recreation, mineral development, and other multiple uses and ecosystem services (2023 Land Management Plan, Tribal Resources and Areas of Tribal Importance, Rangelands, Forage, and Grazing, Mining, Minerals, and Abandoned Mines, and Forestry and Forest Products, Recreation, and Special Uses).
3. Providing surface and groundwater for many uses throughout the State, including those that contribute to economic growth and ecosystem integrity (2023 Land Management Plan, Watersheds and Water Resources).
4. Supporting a variety of high-quality developed and dispersed recreation opportunities for a diverse group of forest users that are responsive, sustainable, and contribute to the economic, cultural, and social vitality and well-being of surrounding communities (2023 Land Management Plan, Recreation and Special Uses).
5. Providing safe and reasonable access via sustainably designed, well-marked, and well-maintained roads, bridges, and trails (2023 Land Management Plan, Roads, Lands and Access, and Recreation).
6. Preserving and protecting cultural and historic resources (2023 Land Management Plan, Cultural and Historic Resources, and Tribal Relations and Areas of Tribal Importance).

7. Sustaining scenic character in ways that contribute to visitors' sense of place and connection with nature (2023 Land Management Plan, Scenery).
8. Protecting communities and ecological resources from wildland fire (2023 Land Management Plan, Fire and Fuels).
9. Advancing partnerships and collaboration to manage forest resources, assist in communicating with and educating the public, and achieve short- and long-term mutually shared goals (2023 Land Management Plan, Partnerships and Volunteers and Tribal Relations and Areas of Tribal Importance).

219.9 Diversity of Plant and Animal Communities

The land management plan manages for plant and animal species that are healthy, well-distributed, genetically diverse, and connected, enabling species to adapt to changing environmental and climatic conditions. It also protects and restores rare and unique resources that support high levels of biodiversity such as springs, wetlands, aspen forests, and habitats and refugia for species that are narrow endemics or have restricted distributions or declining populations. The final plan adopts a complementary ecosystem (coarse-filter) and species-specific (fine-filter) approach to maintaining the diversity of plant and animal communities and the persistence of native species in the plan area by:

1. Maintaining and restoring ecosystem integrity and diversity as described above, including rare plant and animal communities and diverse native tree species (2023 Land Management Plan, Wildlife, Fish, and Plants, Ecological Response Units, Watersheds and Water Resources, Riparian Areas, Springs, Seeps, and Wetlands).
2. Including additional species-specific plan components where ecosystem components do not adequately contribute to the recovery of federally listed threatened and endangered species, conserve proposed and candidate species, and maintain a viable population of each species of conservation concern within the plan area (2023 Land Management Plan, Wildlife, Fish, and Plants and appendix G of the final environmental impact statement).
3. Promoting habitat connectivity and availability to allow wildlife populations to adjust their movements in response to major disturbances and minimizing barriers to movement with new or reconstructed fencing and infrastructure to improve habitat connectivity (2023 Land Management Plan, Wildlife, Fish, and Plants, Ecological Response Units, Watersheds and Water Resources, Riparian Areas, Springs, Seeps, and Wetlands, Rangelands, Forage, and Grazing, Roads, and appendix G of the final environmental impact statement).

219.10 Multiple Uses

The land management plan provides integrated resource management for multiple uses (219.10(a)) by including plan components at the forestwide and the management area scales that establish suitability for a variety of compatible uses. Each management area has unique characteristics and plan components are specific for providing and managing multiple uses within that area. The land management plan provides for multiple uses by:

1. Supporting a variety of multiple uses and ecosystem services across the forest through an array of plan components that guide uses to be compatible with each other as well as ecosystem integrity and social and economic sustainability (2023 Land Management Plan, chapter 2).
2. Providing a supply of forest products in a sustainable manner, which in turn supports local economies and communities, through plan components that establish suitability and guide the extraction of timber from national forest system lands (2023 Land Management Plan, Forestry and Forest Products).
3. Providing clean water and water quantity, as well as improving watershed conditions where needed, through plan components that support aquatic ecosystem integrity and limit potential negative impacts to these resources by placing sideboards on management. Plan direction also supports important ecological and social services such as productive rangelands, biological diversity, wildlife habitat, water supplies, and recreational opportunities (2023 Land Management Plan, Watersheds and Water Resources, Riparian Areas, Recreation and Rangelands, Forage, and Grazing).
4. Providing economically, socially, and ecologically sustainable recreation opportunities though an array of plan components that support a variety of recreation uses. Recreation opportunities also considered tourism, ecosystem integrity and capacity, recreation access, and changes in local demographics (2023 Land Management Plan, Recreation and Lakes and Rivers Management Area).
5. Including plan components that guide the management of infrastructure and reduce the backlog of accrued facility deferred maintenance, particularly those items associated with health and safety accessibility (2023 Land Management Plan, Roads, and Facilities).
6. Supporting wildlife, fish, and plant habitat management conducted cooperatively with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Arizona Game and Fish Department to enhance habitat for wildlife viewing, restoration, and conservation (2023 Land Management Plan, Wildlife, Fish, and Plants, Wildlife Related Recreation).
7. Including plan components that promote consistency with scenic integrity objectives as established in the scenery management system (2023 Land Management Plan, Scenery).
8. Including plan components that consider land acquisitions where they may enhance multiple resource values such as recreation, open space, scenery, clean air and water, riparian habitat, wetland ecosystems, and wildlife habitat (2023 Land Management Plan, chapter 2).
9. Maintaining the wilderness character of the 6 existing designated wilderness areas and the wilderness characteristics identified in the 5 recommended wilderness areas. The plan components for designated wilderness and recommended wilderness support the regulations found in the Wilderness Act of 1964 (2023 Land Management Plan, chapter 3).

10. Protecting the free-flowing nature and outstandingly remarkable values of the 19 eligible wild and scenic rivers through plan components that support interim protection measures for these river segments (2023 Land Management Plan, chapter 3).
11. Providing the public with learning and engagement opportunities of natural, cultural, and historic properties where appropriate and possible; as well as providing for maintenance, conservation, and protection of important cultural resources and historical assets (2023 Land Management Plan, and Cultural Resources and Tribal Relations and Areas of Tribal Importance).
12. Providing rangeland for livestock grazing to support livelihoods while also supporting ecological integrity of rangelands and riparian areas (2023 Land Management Plan, Rangelands, Forage, and Grazing).
13. Providing opportunities for the development of mineral resources, where appropriate (2023 Land Management Plan, Mining, Minerals, and Abandoned Mines).
14. Providing opportunities for hunting and fishing, with their associated cultural and socioeconomic benefits (2023 Land Management Plan, Wildlife Related Recreation).

219.11 Timber requirements based on the National Forest Management Act

Based on National Forest Management Act requirements, the land management plan identifies 188,851 acres as suitable for timber production. The purpose of timber production activities supported by this plan is to restore native forests to desired conditions and provide wood products to local communities. Lands suitable for timber production were determined following 36 CFR 219.11(a) and Forest Service Handbook direction (1909.12 chap. 61). Under the land management plan, approximately 188,851 acres are suitable for timber production, while the remaining approximately 2,675,229 acres are not suitable for timber production.

Group-selection harvesting combined with periodic selection or variable density thinning will help achieve restoration objective, maintain habitat connectivity, and contribute to a dependable flow of forest products to existing and prospective local industry.

The land management plan provides guidance for timber management by:

1. Identifying 356,716 acres in the plan area that are suited for timber production (2023 Land Management Plan, Forestry and Forest Products and appendix B of the final environmental impact statement).
2. Prohibiting timber harvest for the purpose of timber production on lands not suited for timber production (2023 Land Management Plan, Forestry and Forest Products).
3. Limiting timber harvest to only those lands where soil, slope, and/or other watershed conditions would not be irreversibly damaged (2023 Land Management Plan, Forestry and Forest Products).

4. Requiring that timber harvest be carried out in a manner consistent with the protection of soil, watershed, fish, wildlife, recreation, and aesthetic resources (2023 Land Management Plan, Forestry and Forest Products).
5. Limiting the size of openings that may be cut during one harvest operation with standards describing conditions under which exceptions for larger openings may be allowed (2023 Land Management Plan, Forestry and Forest Products).
6. Limiting the quantity of timber that may be sold from the national forest (2023 Land Management Plan, Forestry and Forest Products
7. Limiting regeneration harvest of even-aged stands of trees to stands that have reached or surpassed the culmination of mean annual increment of growth (2023 Land Management Plan, Forestry and Forest Products).

219.12 Monitoring

I recognize the importance of applying adaptive management to plan implementation and tracking our progress over time. Therefore, the land management plan includes a monitoring plan (36 CFR 219.7 (c)(2)(x) and 219.12) that is designed to test our assumptions, track relevant conditions over time, measure our management effectiveness, and evaluate the effects of our management practices. The land management plan monitoring program (chapter 4 of the land management plan) addresses what I believe to be the most critical components of informed management of the Tonto National Forest's resources that are within the financial and technical capability of the agency. Every monitoring question links to one or more desired conditions, objectives, standards, or guidelines. However, not every plan component has a corresponding monitoring question.

This monitoring program is not intended to depict all monitoring, inventorying, and data-gathering activities undertaken on the forest, nor is it intended to limit monitoring to just the questions and indicators listed in Chapter 4 of the land management plan. Consideration and coordination with broader-scale monitoring strategies adopted by the regional forester, multi-party monitoring collaboration, and cooperation with state and private forestry as well as research and development, as required by 36 CFR 219.12(a), will increase efficiencies, and help track changing conditions beyond national forest boundaries to improve the effectiveness of the land management plan monitoring program. In addition, project and activity monitoring may be used to gather information for the land management plan monitoring program where it provides relevant information to inform adaptive management.

The monitoring questions in chapter 4 of the land management plan address each of the eight required monitoring categories (36 CFR 219.12(a)(4)). Within these categories, key ecological characteristics in the plan area and objectives from the final plan focus available monitoring resources. These include improving watershed function and wildlife habitat, particularly aquatic and riparian habitats, as well as fire and fuels management and the restoration of frequent fire forests. In addition, the monitoring program addresses key socio-economic metrics, such as visitor use.

Monitoring elements also address key ecosystems services for the Tonto National Forest. Key ecosystem services on the Tonto National Forest include water for consumption; water for recreation; habitat for hunting, fishing, and watchable wildlife; sustainable and productive rangelands; and cultural heritage. These key ecosystem services are important in the broader landscape outside of the plan area and are influenced by the land management plan.

A plan monitoring implementation guide may be developed after the revised plan goes into effect to describe the "how" in terms of specific approaches or strategies for measuring and analyzing plan monitoring indicator variables, models to be used, and appropriate target thresholds/benchmarks to be met to address the land management plan monitoring questions.

A biennial monitoring evaluation report will be prepared to indicate whether a change to the land management plan, management activities, or monitoring program may be needed—or whether a new assessment may be warranted, based on new information. This report will be made available to inform the public and to encourage feedback on the methods and how we are doing in meeting our plan goals. It is important to note that while monitoring results are expected to be reported biennially, not all monitoring questions are expected to be evaluated that frequently. The monitoring plan implementation guide described above would help in the development of the biennial monitoring report, the first report being anticipated two years after the revised plan goes into effect.

Components of the Decision

Preliminary Administrative Recommendations

Recommended Wilderness

This recommendation is a preliminary administrative recommendation that will receive further review and possible modification by the Chief of the Forest Service, the Secretary of Agriculture, and the President of the United States. Congress has reserved the authority to make final decisions on wilderness designation. Plan implementation is not dependent upon subsequent action-related recommendations for wilderness designation.

The 2012 Planning Rule directs the responsible official to "inventory and evaluate lands that may be suitable for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System" (36 CFR 219.7(2)(v)). There is no obligation to recommend acres for wilderness to Congress. The information considered in making this preliminary administrative recommendation for each area recommended for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System is available in appendix D of the final environmental impact statement. The inventory, evaluation, and recommendation process followed direction in Chapter 70 of Forest Service Handbook 1909.12.

The overall wilderness inventory process considered an estimated 1,618,850 acres. In the environmental impact statement alternative A recommended zero acres, alternative B recommended 43,204 acres, alternative C recommended 399,029 acres, and alternative D recommended 0 acres. I am recommending 106,204 acres of the Tonto National Forest for inclusion in the National Wilderness

Preservation System. The areas being recommended for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System include:

- Gun Creek Recommended Wilderness Area (Analysis Polygon 101a) – Pleasant Valley Ranger District – 23,296 acres;
- Boulder Recommended Wilderness Area (Analysis Polygon 76) – Tonto Basin Ranger District – 61,590 acres;
- Coronado Mesa Recommended Wilderness Area (Analysis Polygon 32) – Mesa Ranger District – 6,419 acres;
- Red Creek Recommended Wilderness Area (Analysis Polygon 119d) – Cave Creek Ranger District - 11,340 acres; and
- Mullen Mesa Recommended Wilderness Area (Analysis Polygon 119b) – Cave Creek Ranger District - 3,559 acres.

I arrived at my decision on recommended wilderness after extensive engagement with my staff, local governments, Indian Tribes, and many other interested stakeholders. The recommended areas are a mix of alternatives B and C, and I understand the concerns from all sides of the issue. Some would prefer additional recommended areas because they value specific places on the national forest or because they believe recommended wilderness management is the best strategy to protect wildlife and aquatic resources. There are others who prefer I do not recommend any additional areas because they believe recommended wilderness management restricts access and use of the Tonto National Forest and its resources. I considered the current designated wilderness areas and the benefit in recommending contiguous areas, specifically the small ones that were likely a product of previous mapping errors upon establishment. Upon a closer look, those nine areas are small in scale and will be difficult to manage differently than the surrounding area. These areas will likely continue to retain the existing wilderness characteristics without the recommendation to be included. I also considered the current allowable uses, protections afforded by other management areas, and activities occurring within and around these areas. In some cases, this resulted in boundary adjustments to remove these uses to increase the manageability. These changes included:

- Increasing the buffer distance around roads and linear features from 100 to 300 feet in all the recommended wilderness areas;
- Removing multiple cherry-stemmed roads along the eastern boundary of Boulder Recommended Wilderness Area; and
- Redrawing the boundary of Gun Creek Recommended Wilderness Area where active restoration activities are planned as part of the Four Forest Restoration Initiative.

The areas I decided on as recommended wilderness are manageable, currently have few to no uses inconsistent with wilderness designation and would truly add value if they were designated wilderness through a congressional decision in the future. I believe the acres being recommended

represent high-quality areas that can maintain the unique social and ecological characteristics that make them eligible for wilderness designation while minimizing the effects to those concerned with the inherent tradeoffs that come with managing these areas to maintain their wilderness characteristics.

This plan includes management direction to maintain and protect the social and ecological characteristics that provide the basis for each area's suitability for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System. I have decided to include a plan component that motorized vehicle access should not occur in a recommended wilderness area unless specifically authorized for emergency use, resource management, maintenance of authorized improvements, or for the motorized retrieval of legally harvested big game (RWMA-G-01). This decision preserves the wilderness characteristics, including the undeveloped nature, and opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation in recommended wilderness, while recognizing the current authorized uses within these areas. There are currently limited inconsistent land uses and mechanized and motorized uses that will be excluded within the recommended wilderness area boundaries. Management direction in the land management plan is specifically designed to best protect wilderness characteristics by constraining motorized and mechanized uses, to maintain the potential of these areas for consideration and possible designation to the National Wilderness Preservation System.

Although several commenters expressed concern that the management of recommended wilderness creates "de facto wilderness areas" in lieu of action by Congress, the land management plan does not create or designate wilderness. The Forest Service has an affirmative obligation to manage recommended wilderness areas for the social and ecological characteristics that provide the basis for their recommendation until Congress acts. The land management plan does not allow for uses that would permanently degrade the wilderness characteristics of these areas and possibly jeopardize their designation as wilderness in the future. It is important to note that this decision is programmatic and does not authorize any activities or prohibit public uses. Rather, it will guide the future site-specific decisions needed to maintain or make progress toward the desired conditions for recommended wilderness.

The information considered in making this administrative recommendation for each area recommended for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System is available in the final environmental impact statement volume 3, Appendix A. Response to Comments; and volume 4, Appendix D. Wilderness Recommendation Process.

Wild and Scenic Rivers

The Wild and Scenic Rivers Act (PL 90-542), created by Congress in 1968, was developed to preserve rivers with outstanding natural, cultural, and recreational values in a free-flowing condition for the enjoyment of present and future generations. This Act was amended in 1975 (PL 93-621). The land management plan includes 19 eligible wild and scenic rivers totaling about 188 miles based on an eligibility study (appendix E of the environmental impact statement).

Selected river segments are managed to protect outstandingly remarkable values, which include scenic, recreational, geologic, fish and wildlife, historic, cultural, and other similar values. Eligible rivers or river segments are managed to maintain their free-flowing condition and are not dammed or otherwise impeded. Eligibility, or subsequent suitability or designation, as a wild, scenic, or recreational river does not confer the same type of protection as a wilderness area designation. However, future designation of a wild, scenic, and recreational river protects the water quality and free-flowing nature of rivers in non-Federal areas, something the Wilderness Act and other Federal designations cannot do.

Eligible wild, scenic, and recreational rivers, or river segments, are assigned one or more preliminary classifications: wild, scenic, or recreational. Preliminary classifications are based on the developmental character of the river on the date of eligibility determination. The most remote and undeveloped classification is wild, and all of the eligible wild river segments occur within already designated wilderness areas. Rivers classified as scenic are free of impoundments, with shorelines or watersheds still largely primitive and shorelines largely undeveloped, but accessible in places by roads. Rivers classified as recreational may have many access points and nearby bridges, railroads, and roads. Recreational rivers also may have some impoundment or diversion in place. The classification of a river is not necessarily related to the outstandingly remarkable value but is used to dictate the level of interim protection measures to apply.

I have determined that the following 19 rivers (table 1) are free-flowing and have outstandingly remarkable values, therefore, are eligible wild and scenic rivers or river segments (see volume 4, appendix E in the final environmental impact statement for maps of individual eligible rivers).

Table 1. Eligible wild and scenic rivers with their classifications and outstandingly remarkable values

Stream Name	Ranger District	Segment Length (miles)	Classification	Outstandingly Remarkable Values
Arnett Creek/ Telegraph Canyon	Globe	3.5	Recreational	Scenery, Ecological
Canyon Creek	Pleasant Valley	7.2	Recreational	Wildlife
Christopher Creek	Payson	2.3	Recreational	Recreation
Cold Spring Canyon	Pleasant Valley	1.7	Wild	Natural
Devil's Chasm	Pleasant Valley	2.5	Wild	Historic
East Verde River	Payson	32.7	Scenic, Recreational	Scenery
Fish Creek	Mesa	5.7	Wild, Scenic	Natural
Greenback Creek	Pleasant Valley, Tonto Basin	5.1	Scenic	Historic
Lower Tonto Creek	Tonto Basin	3.2	Scenic	Recreation
Pine Creek	Payson	2.0	Recreational	Geologic
Pueblo Canyon	Pleasant Valley	1.7	Wild	Scenery, Historic

Stream Name	Ranger District	Segment Length (miles)	Classification	Outstandingly Remarkable Values
Reno Creek	Tonto Basin	3.6	Scenic	Historic
Salome Creek	Pleasant Valley, Tonto Basin	8.5	Wild	Recreation, Scenery
Squaw Creek	Cave Creek	5.2	Scenic	Historic
Tangle Creek	Cave Creek	9.5	Scenic, Recreational	Natural, Scenery
Upper Salt River	Tonto Basin, Globe	59.4	Wild, Scenic	Geologic, Recreation, Historic, Scenery
Upper Tonto Creek	Payson	21.7	Scenic	Recreation, Scenery, Wildlife, Historic
Verde River	Cave Creek	10.0	Wild, Scenic	Fisheries, Wildlife, Recreation, Historic
Workman Creek	Pleasant Valley	2.3	Recreational	Natural, Scenery

It is important to note that the Tonto National Forest was included in the 1993 Resource Information Report of Potential Wild, Scenic, and Recreational River Designation for the Arizona National Forests, which identified 14 potentially eligible rivers on the Tonto National Forest. When starting this process, the Tonto National Forest staff thought the potentially eligible segments from 1993 had been evaluated within a region of comparison, but after digging into the study further, we realized this was not the case and the study could not be used to fulfill requirements outlined in Chapter 80 of the 2012 Planning Rule Final Directives. Therefore, the potentially eligible segments from the 1993 study were evaluated along with all other named streams during the wild and scenic river eligibility process. In this evaluation, some of the potentially eligible segments in the 1993 study were not found to have outstandingly remarkable values in the region of comparison, or they had changed circumstances and are not considered eligible.

Response to Public Comments

The Tonto National Forest published the notice of availability for the draft environmental impact statement in the Federal Register on December 13, 2019. The 90-day comment period closed on March 12, 2020. The draft environmental impact statement evaluated four alternatives, including no action, the draft plan, an alternative focused on natural processes, and an alternative focused on human uses. The Tonto National Forest received over 4,000 comment letters, including form and form plus letters, of which about 181 were unique.

In considering the comments, input received was not treated as if it were a vote. Instead, the content analysis process documented in appendix A of the environmental impact statement focuses on the content of the comments and ensures that every comment is considered in the decision process. In addition, non-substantive comments can include those that are: unrelated to the decision being made; already decided by law, regulation, or policy; beyond the scope of the proposal; conjectural in nature or not supported by scientific evidence; or general in nature or position.

The Tonto National Forest responded to public comments by:

- Modifying the land management plan and the alternatives in the environmental impact statement, where appropriate;
- Developing or analyzing alternatives not given detailed consideration in the draft environmental impact statement;
- Supplementing, improving, or modifying the analysis in the final environmental impact statement;
- Making factual corrections; and/or
- Explaining why the comments needed no response.

Key Concerns from Comments

Wilderness Recommendations: Some comments expressed a preference for no new recommended wilderness management areas. Others expressed concern that the forest was not doing enough to expand recommended wilderness. The draft environmental impact statement analyzed three alternatives with a range of recommended wilderness, from no additional acres of recommended wilderness in alternative D to over 399,000 acres of recommended wilderness in alternative C. Those opposed to recommended wilderness site concerns with loss of access for both recreational opportunities, management of forest resources, and economic uses of the forest such as livestock grazing.

Mining and Minerals: The Forest received comments that expressed concerns with previous and ongoing mining activities on the forest and the impacts to natural resources while others expressed concerns that plan direction would further inhibit the operation of mining activities. The Tonto National Forest explained in the response to comments that the forest is managed under the Multiple Use and Sustained Yield Act. As such, we are required to manage for many uses including mining.

Wildlife: Comments expressed strong support for wildlife and asked for more protections and improved connectivity in the land management plan. Forestwide, each of the four alternatives in the draft environmental impact statement provides for varying amounts of connectivity, primarily as a result of vegetation plan components that improved wildlife habitat. Commentors also expressed concerns about specific at-risk species such as the Mexican spotted owl, Mexican gray wolf, and Sonoran desert tortoise.

Livestock Grazing: Some conservation groups want the elimination or reduction of livestock grazing and want additional standards and guidelines to ensure that management moves livestock grazing toward desired conditions. There is strong support for continued grazing from traditional communities, permittees, and grazing associations. Supporting comments expressed concern that the land management plan does not sustainably protect on-forest grazing and requests stronger protective language.

Vegetation Restoration: Partnering agencies and the majority of the public agree on the importance of restoring departed vegetation conditions in fire-adapted forest systems and that a mix of thinning and burning is the best method to accomplish that. However, a collection of comments expressed concern that the draft plan's vegetative desired conditions and objectives for thinning and burning are not ecologically appropriate. These comments include assertions that the science used to develop the vegetation plan components, including regionally-developed desired conditions for vegetation, is outdated or inappropriate. They also question cutting any trees and the efficacy of prescribed burns. Additionally, many comments expressed that the way climate change was addressed in both the land management plan and draft environmental impact statement was inadequate. A couple of comments claimed that the role of national forests should be to optimize carbon storage through maximizing the number of trees and asked for a new alternative with this focus.

Eligible Wild and Scenic Rivers: Commentors expressed concerns with the eligibility of segments identified in the land management plan and appendix E of the environmental impact statement. Some commentors did not agree with eligibility determination while other groups commented on additional segments that should be considered eligible. Some groups of people would like to see all potentially eligible segments identified in the 1993 study should be carried over as eligible through plan revision.

Salt River Horses: Commentors expressed concern with the management of the Salt River Horses on the Mesa Ranger District. Concerns ranged from the protection of the Salt River Horses to the user conflicts in the areas the Salt River Horses occur. A few comments suggest changes to resource plan components and descriptions to help provide clarity, aid in management, and add supporting information to the forest plan.

Changes from Draft to Final Environmental Impact Statement

In response to comments on the draft environmental impact statement and further internal review, the following is a summary of the changes to the final environmental impact statement and the Tonto National Forest land management plan.

Changes to Elements Common to All Alternatives

- Visual management system was replaced by the scenery management system which incorporates the use of scenic integrity objectives in future forest management. The scenic integrity objectives are adjusted to fit the desired management for each alternative.
- Recreation opportunity spectrum was included in the recreation analysis. The existing recreation opportunity spectrum reflects current conditions as amended with the Tonto National Forest's Travel Management Record of Decision. Recreation opportunity spectrum changes by alternative to reflect the desired conditions management seeks to attain in each alternative.

- Desired conditions were updated based on comments received, updates in best available scientific information, and internal review. Most of these updates were to clarify intent, update language, or add missing information but did not change the purpose or analysis related to the desired conditions.
- The list of species of conservation concern was updated based on best available scientific information or changed resource conditions resulting in threats to species persistence. This update included adding five species to and removing four species from the previously concurred upon list, for a net change from 51 species to 52 recommended species of conservation concern.
- Corridor boundaries for eligible wild and scenic rivers were updated, the lower Salt River, Lime Creek, and Dude Creek were removed from eligibility, and East Verde River and Christopher Creek were determined eligible.

Changes to Elements Common to Alternatives B, C, and D

- The Salt River Horse Management Area has been developed to address comments and concerns related to forest management. Public comments express a desire to incorporate the land management plan direction for the Salt River Horses only within the specific area where the Salt River Horses are known to exist. This is consistent with management responsibilities where the Forest Service is responsible for managing the land and not the Salt River Horses themselves, which are the responsibility of Arizona Department of Agriculture;
- Analysis of the Sierra Ancha Experimental Forest has been removed from alternatives B, C, and D because it is managed by the Rocky Mountain Research Station and is not within the scope of the plan revision process. This area no longer has management direction included within the Tonto National Forest land management plan. Removing this information does not change the designation rather the land management plan does not overlay additional guidance outside of the experimental forest establishment plan;
- Plan components (objectives, standards, and guidelines) and plan content (distinctive roles and contributions, management approaches, and descriptions) have been updated based on comments received, updates in best available scientific information, and internal review. Most of these updates are to clarify intent, update language, or add missing information without changing the purpose or analysis; and
- Updates have been made to the monitoring plan based on information gathered during the technical partner meeting and public comments. These updates, including additional questions and indicators, better address the effectiveness of plan components in achieving desired conditions.

Changes to Alternative B

- Objectives for the resources related to issues (e.g., recreation and riparian areas) have been updated based on comments received, updates in best available scientific information, and internal review. Most of these updates clarify intent, update language, or add missing

information but do not change the purpose or analysis. In a few instances, the analysis has been updated because of these changes; and

- The Lakes and Rivers Management Area boundary was adjusted based on public comments related to livestock grazing and recreation opportunities. It is now a 0.25-mile buffer around Roosevelt Lake, Apache Lake, Canyon Lake, Saguaro Lake, Horseshoe Lake, Bartlett Lake, the Verde River, and the Lower Salt River (designated wilderness and proposed research natural areas are not included in the management area). Historic grazing is permitted only where existing infrastructure or natural boundaries prevent livestock from accessing the rivers and lakes (LRMA-G-05). There is also now language about livestock occasionally crossing the Verde River if permitted in the allotment management plan (LRMA-G-06).

Changes to Alternative C

- As a response to public comment an additional recommended wilderness area has been incorporated and analyzed as part of this alternative. This area, named Bumblebee Recommended Wilderness Area adds about 31,000 acres of recommended wilderness near Roosevelt Lake. This did not change the effects of recommended wilderness documented in the analysis of alternative C.

Changes to Alternative D

- The Lakes and Rivers Management Area boundary was adjusted based on public comments relating to livestock grazing and recreation opportunities. It is now a 0.25-mile buffer around Roosevelt Lake, Apache Lake, Canyon Lake, Saguaro Lake, Horseshoe Lake, Bartlett Lake, the Verde River, and the Lower Salt River (designated wilderness and proposed research natural areas are not included in the management area). Historic grazing is permitted only where existing infrastructure or natural boundaries prevent livestock from accessing the rivers and lakes (LRMA-G-05). There is also now language about livestock occasionally crossing the Verde River if permitted in the allotment management plan (LRMA-G-06).

Alternatives Considered

In addition to the selected alternative, I considered three other alternatives analyzed in detail, which are discussed below. All reasonable alternatives to the proposed action must meet the purpose and need for change and address one or more significant issues. I identified those alternatives that met both the purpose and need for change and created a reasonable range of outputs, costs, management requirements, and effects from which to choose. A more detailed comparison of these alternatives can be found in chapter 2 of the final environmental impact statement.

Additionally, I considered seven other alternatives but eliminated them from detailed study in the final environmental impact statement.

Alternatives Analyzed in Detail

The interdisciplinary team developed four alternatives: alternative A, the no action or 1985 Forest Plan; alternative B, proposed action, or land management plan; alternative C, where natural processes would be emphasized; and alternative D, where human uses would be emphasized.

Elements Common to All Alternatives

All four alternatives share a number of features. Specifically, they all:

- comply with applicable laws, regulations, and policies;
- contain plan components: desired conditions, standards, guidelines, timber suitability, and monitoring (desired conditions are common across all alternatives and are described in detail in the land management plan);
- include mechanical treatments (thinning and commercial harvests), while offering opportunities for fuelwood collection when projects allow;
- conserve soil and water resources and do not allow significant or permanent impairment of the productivity of the land;
- provide protection for riparian areas;
- provide necessary ecological conditions to support at-risk species in the plan area;
- use a common list of species of conservation concern selected based on regional guidance and recommendations from forest, and state agency specialists;
- protect cultural resources;
- provide sustained multiple uses, products, and services in an environmentally acceptable manner (including timber, livestock forage, recreation opportunities, and leasable and locatable minerals);
- incorporate the scenery management system and recreation opportunity spectrum;
- manage for special qualities of existing designated areas; and
- include 19 eligible wild and scenic rivers with desired conditions to maintain their outstanding remarkable values.

Elements Common to Alternatives B, C, and D

Management of most forest resources are the same for alternative B, C, and D except for a few resources that change. Some of the features shared by these alternatives include, but are not limited to:

- Incorporating objectives, which are measurable actions within a period of time, to achieve or move resources towards desired conditions.

- Emphasizing vegetation treatments in frequent-fire forested systems (ponderosa pine and mixed conifer-frequent fire) that are highly departed from the vegetative desired conditions and historic fire regimes. Also emphasizing restoration of highly departed non-forested vegetation types (Juniper Grass, Pinyon Juniper Grass, Colorado Plateau Great Basin Grassland, Sagebrush Shrubland, and Montane Subalpine Grassland) with treatments such as mechanical treatments, prescribed or naturally ignited wildfires, seeding, or other techniques;
- Including an emphasis on restoration treatments in riparian areas and those benefitting water resources; including treatments such as stream channel and habitat restoration, watershed restoration, and invasive species removal;
- Providing direction on invasive species management in multiple ecological response units for the benefit of native and at-risk species;
- Increasing direction on soil protection, maintenance, and restoration, e.g., after vegetation treatment projects or human activity;
- Increasing guidance on fostering relationships, developing opportunities to leverage partnerships and collaboration, and enhancing communication;
- Recognizing and supporting traditional uses by Federally recognized Tribes;
- Emphasizing sustainable recreation and increasing guidance on implementing a sustainable recreation program;
- Providing additional management direction for eligible wild and scenic rivers; and
- Providing management direction for the Salt River Horse Management Area.

Alternative A

Alternative A is the current 1985 forest plan and is referred to as the no-action alternative or 1985 forest plan. The current 1985 forest plan has no articulated desired conditions for the range of resources on the forest. Therefore, it will be analyzed using desired conditions from the revised land management plan (modified version of the preliminary proposed plan released in November 2017). The 1985 forest plan does not reflect changes in economic, social, and ecological conditions, new policies and priorities, and new information based on monitoring and scientific research, therefore plan direction likely will not achieve, or not achieve as quickly, the desired conditions. This alternative provides a baseline for estimating the effects of the other alternatives.

Alternative B

Alternative B is the proposed action and is a balance of natural forces and human influences. This alternative was developed to respond to key issues identified in the assessment, needs to change, and public engagement. Alternative B includes plan direction that emphasizes the use of adaptive management to address sustainable recreation and ecological changes that have the potential to alter the provision of ecosystem services of the Tonto National Forest.

Alternative C

Alternative C is the alternative where natural forces are most predominant. This alternative was developed in response to public comments that expressed a desire to reduce human impacts on the forest. Based on feedback to the notice of intent, preliminary proposed plan, and public engagement, this alternative emphasizes primitive recreation opportunities, increased protections to natural resources including the highest number of recommended wilderness acres, use of natural processes for restoration, limiting some aspects of grazing, restricting use in impaired riparian systems, and prioritizing natural resources over some economic development opportunities.

Alternative D

Alternative D is the alternative where human influences are most predominant. This alternative was developed to address public comments that expressed a desire for easier access and multiple use opportunities on the Tonto National Forest. Related comments received on the notice of intent, preliminary proposed plan, and public engagement focused on providing more accessible recreation opportunities and having fewer restrictions on land uses including no additional recommended wilderness acres. Alternative D also emphasizes active restoration techniques to achieve desired conditions and provides for more economic opportunities on the forest, including grazing and mining.

Alternatives Considered but Eliminated from Detailed Study

Federal agencies are required by the National Environmental Policy Act to rigorously explore and objectively evaluate all reasonable alternatives and to briefly discuss the reasons for eliminating any alternatives that were not developed in detail (40 CFR 1502.14). Public comments received in response to the notice of intent (April 2017), preliminary proposed plan (November 2017), initial alternative themes (April 2018), and draft environmental impact statement (March 2020), provided suggestions for alternative methods for achieving the purpose and need. Some of these alternatives are outside the scope of the purpose and need, duplicative of the alternatives considered in detail, or include components that would cause unnecessary environmental harm. Therefore, several alternatives were considered, but dismissed from detailed consideration for the reasons summarized below.

Alternative that analyzes all recommended wilderness areas with moderate and high evaluation rankings

The Tonto National Forest received comment letters on the draft environmental impact statement asking the Forest to analyze an alternative that includes all areas from the recommended wilderness evaluation that received a moderate wilderness characteristic ranking or above. This request for an additional alternative was considered but eliminated from detailed study. Per agency policy in the Forest Service Handbook, not all lands included in the inventory and subsequent evaluations are required to be carried forward in an alternative. Based on the evaluation and input from public participation opportunities, the responsible official shall identify which specific areas, or portions thereof, from the evaluation to analyze as recommended wilderness in one or more alternatives in the land management plan environmental impact statement.

Additionally, the Multiple Use Sustained Yield Act mandates national forests be managed for multiple uses which includes recreation, motorized access, wilderness area management, and ecosystems management to protect wildlife habitat. The alternative, which would have included 643,923 acres of recommended wilderness, was not analyzed in detail because it would inhibit the Tonto National Forest in achieving multiple use desired conditions outlined in the revised land management plan. Management of recommended wilderness is for the protection of the wilderness characteristics, which could restrict some uses of National Forest System lands. For example, many of the areas with moderate ranked characteristics would benefit from restoration and weed treatments that would be more efficient and effective using mechanical tools, moving those areas closer to desired conditions. Based on the above, an alternative with over 643,000 acres of recommended wilderness would not meet the purpose and need.

Alternative that focuses on increasing the opportunities for mountain biking

The Tonto National Forest received form letters requesting an alternative that would enhance and increase recreational opportunities for mountain biking. Based on the National Visitor Use Monitoring Survey, mountain biking is only a subset of the recreational uses on the forest and an alternative focused specifically on that use alone does not meet the desired conditions for recreation. In addition, alternative D was developed to address public comments that expressed a desire for easier access and multiple use opportunities on the forest which would include increased accessible recreation opportunities such as mountain biking. None of the action alternatives decrease or preclude the use of mountain bikes where legally permitted. Based on the above, an alternative focused solely on mountain biking would not meet the purpose and need.

Alternative that directs only extractive uses of the forest (such as mining, logging, and grazing) to increase economic contribution

The Tonto National Forest received comments requesting an alternative that would direct only extractive uses of the forest (e.g., mining, logging, and grazing) to increase economic contribution. An alternative which would direct forest management on specific resources at the exclusion of others would be contrary to law, and therefore, would not be a selectable alternative. Specifically, the Multiple-Use Sustained-Yield Act of 1960 says that “national forests are established and shall be administered for outdoor recreation, range, timber, watershed, and wildlife and fish purposes” (16 U.S.C. 528).

Further, this alternative would not meet the desired conditions for the multiple uses in the land management plan (e.g., recreation, special uses, and wildlife). Alternative D considers fewer restrictions on land uses including mining, logging, and range and is designed to increase economic contribution. Based on the above, an alternative focused solely on extractive uses of the forest would not meet the purpose and need, is unnecessary, and is not legally compliant.

Alternative that removes grazing from the entire forest

The Tonto National Forest received comments requesting an alternative that would remove grazing from the entire forest[9]. A no-grazing alternative would not meet legal direction that forests will be managed using multiple use and sustained yield principles per the National Forest Management Act and Multiple-Use Sustained Yield Act of 1960. This alternative also would not allow the attainment of the desired condition for livestock grazing to contribute to the long-term socioeconomic diversity, stability, and cultural identity of local communities. Therefore, a no grazing alternative is inconsistent with existing laws, Forest Service policy and direction, as well as the purpose and need of revising the land management plan.

Under all alternatives the rangelands management and livestock grazing program has multiple mechanisms to evaluate, review, and adapt management as needed to effectively protect resources and respond to changing conditions. Stocking decisions regarding the amount of livestock grazing authorized for each grazing allotment are considered as part of project-level analysis and is beyond the scope of this programmatic analysis for the land management plan. Project-level analysis would cover changes to authorized grazing through term grazing permits (subject to Forestwide standards and guidelines); allotment management plans; and annual operating instructions. In addition, the alternatives include a range of options on how to deal with vacant and understocked allotments that could increase or decrease grazing numbers. Based on the above, an alternative that removes grazing on the forest is not considered necessary and is not legally compliant.

Alternative that removes mining from the entire forest

The Tonto National Forest received comments requesting an alternative that would remove mining from the entire forest. An alternative which would direct forest management of some resources at the exclusion of others would be contrary to law, and therefore, would not be a selectable alternative. Specifically, the Multiple-Use Sustained-Yield Act of 1960 says that “national forests are established and shall be administered for outdoor recreation, range, timber, watershed, and wildlife and fish purposes” (16 U.S.C. 528). This alternative also would not allow the attainment of the desired conditions for mining, minerals, and abandoned mines to contribute to the long-term socioeconomic diversity, stability, and cultural diversity of local communities. Therefore, a no mining alternative is inconsistent with existing laws, Forest Service policy and direction, as well as the purpose and need of revising the land management plan.

[9] A plan component was proposed in the 2017 Preliminary Proposed Plan (PPP) as a standard that read, "Allotments comprised of large percentages of Desert Ecological Response Units (Sonora-Mojave Mixed Salt Desert Scrub, Sonoran Paloverde-Mixed Cactus Desert Scrub, and Sonoran Mid Elevation Desert Scrub) should be closed, in whole or in part, as they become vacant." Based on public comments related to logistics and physical issues like fences or other barriers, to the PPP, this standard was dropped. Most allotments on the forest are comprised of multiple Ecological Response Units (ERUs). It would not be feasible to remove just desert ERUs from allotments. Additionally, grazing in desert and other ERUs would be considered at the site-specific level in future allotment planning.

Under all alternatives the mining and minerals management program has multiple mechanisms to evaluate activities on the forest as part of project-level analysis and is beyond the scope of this programmatic analysis for the land management plan. Alternative C also emphasizes increased protections to natural resources, limiting some aspects of grazing, and prioritizes natural resources over some economic development opportunities. Based on the above, an alternative that removes mining on the forest is not considered necessary and is not legally compliant.

Alternative that removes designation of currently designated areas on the forest (e.g., wilderness areas and research natural areas)

The Tonto National Forest received comments requesting an alternative that would remove designation of some currently designated areas (e.g., wilderness areas and research natural areas) on the forest. It is not a requirement under the 2012 Planning Rule to explore the un-designation of currently designated areas. In addition, the removing the designation of currently designated areas could not be fully accomplished through plan revision, as it requires a separate National Environmental Policy Act process. The 2012 Planning Rule directives states "once established, the designation continues until a subsequent decision by the appropriate authority removes the designation. Changes in actual designations do not occur as part of the land management plan decision" (FSH 1909.12).

Land management plans can recommend the removal of designations, but it was determined the plan revision process was not the appropriate venue for such an action. If, in the future, the Tonto National Forest explores removing the designation of an area, of which it has the authority to do so, it would be completed through project level National Environmental Policy Act analysis specific to that area.

Alternative that includes a mineral exploration management area and a wildlife emphasis management area

The Tonto National Forest received comments requesting an alternative that would include a mineral exploration management area and a wildlife emphasis management area. The planning team developed language for these requested management areas in an attempt to address issues brought up during scoping and public meetings.

The Mineral Exploration Management Area would have consisted of an area generally located on Globe Ranger District, within what is known as the Copper Triangle and was proposed throughout the public involvement process. Mining and related activities on National Forest System lands are governed by specific laws that identify procedures and conditions under which prospecting, exploration, and development of minerals can be carried out. The search for mineral deposits is possible throughout the Forest in lands that are open to mineral entry under the mining laws. However, the Globe and Mesa Ranger Districts receive proposed plans of operations for mineral exploration activity more often than any other district on the Forest. Resource issues and conflicts for mineral activity on the Globe and Mesa Ranger Districts primarily consist of effects to cultural resources, wildlife, and riparian areas. For mineral exploration proposals, site specific mitigation

measures are applied to each project, addressing specific concerns for cultural resources, wildlife, and riparian areas to minimize adverse environmental impacts on National Forest System surface resources.

The Wildlife Emphasis Management Area was developed in response to a proposal from local stakeholders to maintain wildlife connectivity and preserve landscape integrity between the Mazatzal and Four Peaks Wilderness Areas. Movement across the landscape is a crucial part of life for many species, contributing to gene flow, dispersal, and colonization important in meta-population dynamics. Thus, the primary purpose of this management area was to promote connectivity that will benefit species, in particular between wilderness areas. While significant infrastructure is present in the area (SR 87 and transmission lines), plan content should seek to protect the existing values and encourage projects that make these barriers more permeable.

After consideration and attempting to develop these two management areas, it was found that both were redundant with proposed management forestwide within the developed alternatives. For example, alternative C has a recommended wilderness area that overlaps with over half of the proposed Wildlife Emphasis Management Area and provides the publicly identified protection measures. This area also overlaps with several inventoried roadless areas which already provide for nonmotorized protections. Additionally, the proposed wildlife area is not an area that has a concentration of species at risk and does not take into account existing highways that are not under Forest Service authority. Alternative D considers fewer restrictions on land uses, including mining and minerals. Any programmatic level direction that would be included in a Mineral Exploration Management Area is redundant with direction already described in the alternatives, particularly alternative D, or would be considered site-specifically at a project level. For these reasons, these management areas were eliminated from detailed study in this environmental impact statement.

Environmentally Preferable Alternative

The environmentally preferable alternative is that which causes the least harm to the biological and physical environment and best protects, preserves historic, cultural, and natural resources. Alternative C is the environmentally preferred alternative. When compared to the other alternatives it best contributes to ecological sustainability of the Tonto National Forest through the emphasis on primitive recreation opportunities, increased protections to natural resources including the highest number of recommended wilderness acres, use of natural processes for restoration, limiting some aspects of grazing, restricting use in impaired riparian systems, and prioritizing natural resources over some economic development opportunities. While alternative C is the environmentally preferred alternative, the selected alternative (alternative B) allows us to better meet our multiple use mission by balancing ecological, social, and economic sustainability.

Best Available Scientific Information

The 2012 Planning Rule (36 CFR 219.6(a)(3) and 219.14(a)(4)) requires the responsible official use the best available scientific information to inform the development of the land management plan, including plan components, the monitoring plan, and plan decisions. The 2012 Planning Rule does not require that scientific information be developed, but that it should be based on scientific information that is already available. New studies or the development of new information is only by other laws or regulation. In the context of the best available scientific information, the word available means that the information currently exists in a form useful for the planning process, without further data collection, modification, or validation. Analysis or interpretation of the best available scientific information may be needed to place it in the appropriate context for planning.

The foundation from which the plan components were developed for the land management plan was provided by the assessment of the Tonto National Forest and best available scientific information and analysis therein. From this foundation, the interdisciplinary team used the best available scientific information to develop the proposed action and the alternatives and analysis in the environmental impact statement. Development of this revised plan, under the 2012 Planning Rule and directives, was an iterative process utilizing best available scientific information, regional guidance, internal feedback, and collaboration with a wide variety of government agencies, federally recognized Tribes, non-governmental organizations, and the public. Where science was provided through comments on the draft environmental impact statement, the Tonto National Forest reviewed and considered the best available science.

For all these reasons, based on my review of the final environmental impact statement and the planning record, I have determined that the most accurate and reliable scientific information available that is relevant to the issues considered in this land management plan revision has been used to inform the planning process and has been applied to the issues considered in the revision, as required by 36 CFR 219.3.

Research Station Director Concurrence

The Sierra Ancha Experimental Forest is surrounded by Tonto National Forest lands. It is an administratively designated area managed by the Rocky Mountain Research Station and is not included in this plan. The Tonto National Forest had open communication regarding the plan with the station director of the Rocky Mountain Research Station. Through these discussions it was determined that there are no concerns related to the implementation of the management plan on the Tonto National Forest lands surrounding the Sierra Ancha Experimental Forest and for resources by which the Tonto National Forest retained administration through the designation of the Sierra Ancha Experimental Forest.

Findings Required by Other Laws

The Forest Service manages the Tonto National Forest in conformance with many laws and regulations. I have considered the statutes specific to individual resources as described in the final environmental impact statement, and I find that this decision meets our obligations to the current statutory duties of the Forest Service. Following are summaries of how the revised land management plan addresses the relevant laws and regulations.

American Indian Religious Freedom Act

Federal Agencies must make a good faith effort to understand how Indian religious practices may come into conflict with other forest uses and consider any adverse impacts on these practices in their decision making. The Tonto National Forest is within the territory of the Ak Chin Indian Community, Fort McDowell Yavapai Nation, Gila River Indian Community, Hopi Tribe, Mescalero Apache Tribe, Pueblo of Zuni, Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community, San Carlos Apache Tribe, Tohono O'odham Nation, Tonto Apache Tribe, White Mountain Apache Tribe, Yavapai-Apache Nation, and Yavapai-Prescott Tribe.

No effects on American Indian social, economic, or subsistence rights are anticipated as a result of the plan revision. Regardless of which alternative is chosen, the Forest Service is required to consult with Tribes when management activities may impact treaty rights and/or cultural sites and cultural use. Desired conditions for areas of Tribal importance for all action alternatives of the land management plan include:

1. Locations identified as important by American Indian Tribes are acknowledged and there is an emphasis on the resilience and protection of natural and cultural resources and to preserve the character and use of these places.
2. Tribal members have open access to forest land for traditional activities, including access to traditional resource gathering areas and to places having religious, cultural, and/or historical significance (e.g., traditional cultural properties, sacred sites, shrines, and clan origin places).
3. Restoration is performed in consideration of Tribal values and traditional resources are recognized and acknowledged by the Forest. Tribal and forest landscape restoration activities complement one another to meet common goals.
4. Forest products (e.g., pinon nuts, Emory oak, and acorns) important for traditional needs, subsistence practices, and economic support of Tribal communities are available and sustainable. Traditional products are preserved sustainably in place wherever feasible and plant populations of Tribally important species are available for traditional uses.
5. Social, cultural, and economic resources on the forest provide a setting for educating Tribal youth in culture, history, and land stewardship, and for exchanging information between Tribal elders and youth.

Therefore, I find the land management plan is compliant with this Act.

Archaeological Resources Protection Act

This act provides protection to archaeological resources found on public lands and Indian lands of the United States. The legislation provides civil and criminal penalties for those who remove or damage archaeological resources in violation of the prohibitions contained in the Act. The Act prohibits the removal of archaeological resources on public lands or Indian lands without first obtaining a permit from the affected Federal land manager or Tribe and requires Federal agencies to develop plans to survey lands under their management to determine the nature and extent of archaeological and cultural resources.

The land management plan is strategic and programmatic in nature, providing guidance and direction to future site-specific projects and activities. Compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act and 36 CFR 800 regulations requires assessments to document the presence of historic properties within the area of potential effect for any site-specific activities and to meet the intent of this act. The Forest will also continue to consult with Tribes during site-specific management activities that may impact cultural sites and cultural use. The plan components in the land management plan include provisions that take into consideration American Indian rights and interests and cultural resources. Therefore, I find the land management plan is compliant with this Act.

Clean Air Act

In accordance with the Clean Air Act of 1990 and the Organic Administration Act of 1897, the Forest Service has the responsibility to protect the air, land, and water resources from the impacts of air pollutants produced within the boundaries of National Forest System lands and to work with states to protect air resources from degradation associated with the impacts of air pollution emitted outside of National Forest System lands. The final environmental impact statement chapter 3, Air Quality addresses and discloses potential impacts from program activities that are approved by the land management plan, including the use of prescribed fire.

The land management plan includes desired conditions and strategies for maintaining air quality and monitoring questions for gathering information. It includes standards and guidelines that prescribed fire (e.g., pile, broadcast, and jackpot burning) will occur in accordance with Arizona Department of Environmental Quality requirements and that coordination with Arizona Department of Environmental Quality should occur before and during prescribed burns to comply with State and Federal requirements for emissions and impacts to Class I areas. Conformity determinations and more detailed air quality impact analyses will be made at subsequent levels of planning and analysis where emissions can be more accurately quantified, reasonably forecasted, and local impacts can be assessed. Therefore, I find the land management plan to comply with the Clean Air Act.

Clean Water Act

The Clean Water Act (33 U. S. C. § 1251 et seq.) establishes the basic structure for regulating discharges of pollutants into the waters of the United States and regulating quality standards for surface waters.

Implementing this land management plan is expected to maintain and improve water quality and satisfy all State water quality requirements. This finding is based on direction contained in the land management plan, application of "best management practices" specifically designed to protect water quality, and the discussions of water quality and beneficial uses addressed in chapter 3 of the final environmental impact statement. Management direction protecting water quality can be found in many locations throughout the land management plan, including Watersheds and Water Resources and Riparian Areas, Springs, Seeps, and Wetlands. Project-level analysis required for land management plan implementation will be required to demonstrate compliance with the Clean Water Act. I find that the land management plan is compliant with this Act.

Endangered Species Act

The purpose of the Endangered Species Act (16 U.S.C. Sec. 1531-1544) is to protect and recover imperiled species and the ecosystems upon which they depend. Section 7(a)(1) of the act requires Federal agencies to carry out programs for the conservation of listed species. In addition, the Endangered Species Act requires Federal agencies to ensure that any agency action does not jeopardize the continued existence of the species or result in the destruction or adverse modification of critical habitat (Endangered Species Act, section 7(a)(2)). The act also requires the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Forest Service to base their biological opinion and subsequent agency action, respectively, on the use of the best scientific and commercially available information 916 U.S.C. 1536(a)(2))[10].

In October of 2019 the forest notified the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (hereafter referred to as the Fish and Wildlife Service) of its intent to revise the Tonto National Forest land and resource management plan. The agencies met to discuss potential federally-listed threatened and endangered species and critical habitats to be considered during plan revision. In April 2021 the forest requested and received the finalized list of proposed, threatened, endangered, and candidate species that would be addressed in the biological assessment. In accordance with Section 7(c) of the Act, a biological assessment was prepared to assess the effects of implementing the Tonto National Forest land management plan on 19 federally-listed threatened and endangered species and 11 designated critical habitats known or likely to occur on the forest in Coconino, Gila, Maricopa, Pinal, and Yavapai Counties, Arizona. The final biological assessment was submitted on May 18, 2021, and the Fish and Wildlife Service subsequently requested a 60-day extension on the biological opinion in August 2021.

[10] Additional information on how best scientific and commercially available information was used to make determinations for species can be found in the Final EIS, Volume 4, Appendix G.

The Forest received a biological opinion following Section 7 consultation with the Fish and Wildlife Service on Feb. 2, 2022, which included Federally-listed threatened and endangered species and designated critical habitats addressed in the biological opinion (Table 2).

After reviewing the current status of the species and their critical habitat, the environmental baseline for the action area, the effects of the proposed action, and the cumulative effects, it is the Fish and Wildlife Service biological opinion that implementation of the Tonto National Forest land management plan, as proposed, is not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of the endangered Arizona cliffrose, Arizona hedgehog cactus, ocelot, desert pupfish, Gila chub, Gila topminnow, razorback sucker, loach minnow, spikedace, southwestern willow flycatcher, and Yuma Ridgway's rail; and the threatened Mexican spotted owl, Chiricahua leopard frog, narrow-headed gartersnake, northern Mexican gartersnake, Gila trout, western yellow-billed cuckoo and, in conference, the Mexican wolf and Colorado pikeminnow non-essential experimental 10j populations. The proposed action is also not likely to destroy or adversely modify designated critical habitat for the Mexican spotted owl, Chiricahua leopard frog, narrow-headed gartersnake, northern Mexican gartersnake, desert pupfish, Gila chub, razorback sucker, loach minnow, spikedace, southwestern willow flycatcher, or the western yellow-billed cuckoo. There is no designated critical habitat for the Arizona cliffrose, Arizona hedgehog cactus, ocelot, Gila topminnow, Gila trout or the Yuma Ridgway's rail, therefore none will be affected[11].

Table 2. Listed species and habitats addressed from the biological opinion.

Common Name	Scientific name	Status	Species Effect Determination	Critical Habitat Determination
Arizona cliffrose	*Purshia subintegra*	endangered	not likely to jeopardize	NA
Arizona hedgehog cactus	*Echinocereus triglochidiatus var. arizonicus*	endangered	not likely to jeopardize	NA
Chiricahua leopard frog	*Lithobates chiricahuensis*	threatened	not likely to jeopardize	not likely to destroy or adversely modify
Colorado pikeminnow	*Ptychocheilus lucius*	endangered, experimental population, non-essential	not likely to Jeopardize	NA
desert pupfish	*Cyprindon macularius*	endangered	not likely to jeopardize	not likely to destroy or adversely modify

[11] A Final Rule listing the cactus ferruginous pygmy owl under the Endangered Species Act as threatened was published in the Federal Register on August 21, 2023, after the forest had completed formal consultation on the land management plan and after official public comment periods had concluded. The listing identified a small portion of the Tonto National Forest as part of the northern edge of the species' range. However, previous surveys and monitoring efforts have not observed this species near the forest or Phoenix area for over 50 years. Therefore, the owl will not be affected by this planning effort and it is not necessary to reinitiate consultation with Fish and Wildlife Service at this time. More information is available in the administrative record.

Common Name	Scientific name	Status	Species Effect Determination	Critical Habitat Determination
Gila chub	*Gila intermedia*	endangered	not likely to jeopardize	not likely to destroy or adversely modify
Gila topminnow	*Poeciliopsis occidentalis*	endangered	not likely to jeopardize	NA
Gila trout	*Oncorhynchus gilae*	threatened	not likely to jeopardize	NA
southwestern willow flycatcher	*Empidonax traillii extimus*	endangered	not likely to jeopardize	not likely to destroy or adversely modify
spikedace	*Meda fulgida*	endangered	not likely to jeopardize	not likely to destroy or adversely modify
yellow-billed cuckoo	*Coccyzus americanus occidentalis*	threatened	not likely to jeopardize	not likely to destroy or adversely modify
Yuma Ridgeway's rail	*Rallus obsoletus yumanensis*	endangered	not likely to jeopardize	NA
loach minnow	*Tiaroga cobitis*	endangered	not likely to jeopardize	not likely to destroy or adversely modify
Mexican spotted owl	*Strix occidentalis lucida*	threatened	not likely to jeopardize	not likely to destroy or adversely modify
Mexican wolf	*Canus lupus baileyi*	endangered, experimental population, non-essential	not likely to Jeopardize	NA
narrow-headed gartersnake	*Thamnophis rufipunctatus*	threatened	not likely to jeopardize	not likely to destroy or adversely modify
northern Mexican gartersnake	*Thamnophis eques megalops*	threatened	not likely to jeopardize	not likely to destroy or adversely modify
ocelot	*Leopardus pardalis*	endangered	not likely to jeopardize	NA
razorback sucker	*Xyrauuchen texanus*	endangered	not likely to jeopardize	not likely to destroy or adversely modify

The biological opinion concluded that implementation of the land management plan is likely to result in net beneficial effects to federally-listed species on the Tonto National Forest, in part because the plan calls for the maintaining and managing of wildlife habitat important to these species. However, it noted that future implementation of site-specific projects under the land management plan may have adverse effects. Due to the programmatic nature of the consultation, the Fish and Wildlife Service determined that it was not possible to assess the potential effects (adverse or beneficial) of the action in detail (e.g., spatial extent, location, timing, frequency, duration), recognizing that the land management plan does not authorize any projects, but simply provides objectives that are the parameters or guidance that may lead to future projects. Projects that implement land management plan objectives will be addressed in future project-specific section 7 consultations. Potential adverse effects of these future Federal actions may be minimized through implementing conservation

measures, but because these measures will be developed through consultation and at the project level, the degree to which adverse effects may be avoided or minimized is difficult to estimate.

The biological opinion recognizes the Tonto National Forest land management plan as a, "framework programmatic action" as defined in 50 CFR 402.02. In accordance with 50 CFR 402.14(i)(6), an incidental take statement is not required at the programmatic level for a framework that does not authorize future actions; incidental take resulting from any action subsequently authorized, funded, or carried out under the program will be addressed in subsequent section 7 consultation, as appropriate. Instead, the biological opinion provides a broad-scale examination of the proposed action's potential effects on federally listed species and critical habitats. However, due to a lack of reasonable certainty of where, when, and how much incidental take may occur, the Fish and Wildlife Service cannot quantify the amount and extent of incidental take that may result from the proposed action and have not exempted such take in the biological opinion.

Additionally, in *Wild Fish Conservancy v. Salazar*, 628 F.3d 513 (9th Cir.2010), the Ninth Circuit held that the Fish and Wildlife Service must identify when a species will likely pass the tipping point for recovery and determine whether the proposed action will cause the species to reach that tipping point. However, because the Tonto National Forest land management plan is considered a programmatic plan that does not result in "take" of threatened or endangered species or adverse effects on designated critical habitat, the biological opinion finds that the Tonto National Forest land management plan will not cause listed species to reach their tipping point for recovery.

The revised land management plan includes desired conditions, standards, guidelines, and objectives that provide broad management direction that meets our responsibilities under the Endangered Species Act Section 7(a)(1). These plan components comply with the requirements of the Endangered Species Act and the associated recovery plan for each federally listed species. For these reasons, I find this land management plan to comply with the requirements of the Endangered Species Act of 1973.

Climate Change

Published to the Federal Register on January 25, 2021 was Executive Order 13990 (Protecting Public Health and the Environment and Restoring Science To Tackle the Climate Crisis), which states "...the policy of my Administration to listen to the science; to improve public health and protect our environment; to ensure access to clean air and water; to limit exposure to dangerous chemicals and pesticides; to hold polluters accountable, including those who disproportionately harm communities of color and low-income communities; to reduce greenhouse gas emissions; to bolster resilience to the impacts of climate change; to restore and expand our national treasures and monuments; and to prioritize both environmental justice and the creation of the well-paying union jobs necessary to deliver on these goals" (p. 7037).

On February 1, 2021, Executive Order 14008 (Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad) was published to the Federal Register and states, "It is the policy of my Administration to organize and deploy the full capacity of its agencies to combat the climate crisis to implement a Governmentwide

approach that reduces climate pollution in every sector of the economy; increases resilience to the impacts of climate change; protects public health; conserves our lands, waters, and biodiversity; delivers environmental justice; and spurs well-paying union jobs and economic growth, especially through innovation, commercialization, and deployment of clean energy technologies and infrastructure" (p. 7622).

Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad (a.k.a. 30 x 30) recognizes the opportunities that America's lands and waters offer and outlines a historic and ambitious challenge to the nation and directs the administration to develop and pursue strategies that reflect our nation's perspectives and intent toward the President's challenge to conserve and restore the health, productivity, and connectedness of the lands and waters upon which every community depends.

The 2012 Planning Rule directs the land use planning process for national forests and grasslands. It incorporates the concepts of adaptive management, best available scientific information, collaboration, working with partners, Tribal engagement, and public participation into forest planning. Additionally, the planning rule directs specific area-based processes for identifying and recommending wilderness, eligible wild and scenic river segments, and research natural areas that conserve areas contributing to biodiversity, promote habitat connectivity, and protect and enhance unique and important values of the forest. These process and principles align with the intent and eight key principles outlined by Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad:

1. Collaborative and Inclusive Approach to Conservation;
2. Conserve America's Lands and Waters for the Benefit of All People;
3. Support Locally Led and Locally Designed Conservation Efforts;
4. Honor Tribal Sovereignty and Support the Priorities of Tribal Nations;
5. Pursue Conservation and Restoration Approaches that Create Jobs and Support Healthy Communities;
6. Honor Private Property Rights and Support the Voluntary Stewardship Efforts of Private Landowners and Fishers;
7. Use Science as a Guide; and
8. Build on Existing Tools and Strategies with an Emphasis on Flexibility and Adaptive Approaches

Currently, the analysis in the final environmental impact statement and my consideration in this decision demonstrate compliance with these Executive Orders.

Environmental Justice

In 1994, President Clinton signed Executive Order 12898 (Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations). The on January 25, 2021, Executive

Order 13985 (Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government) was published in the Federal Register and states "...Federal Government should pursue a comprehensive approach to advancing equity for all, including people of color and others who have been historically underserved, marginalized, and adversely affected by persistent poverty and inequality. Affirmatively advancing equity, civil rights, racial justice, and equal opportunity is the responsibility of the whole of our government" (p. 7009).

Environmental justice, minority, and low-income populations are present in the areas within and adjacent to the forest. Chapter 3 of the final environmental impact statement includes a Socioeconomic analysis including an Environmental Justice analysis. As described in table 3, the primary environmental justice communities identified in the plan area are the Native American communities, persons with disabilities, and low-income communities of all races and ethnicities.

Table 3. Breakdown of potential environmental justice communities

Community	Why they might qualify as an environmental justice community	County(ies) likely to have populations that might qualify as an environmental justice community
Native American	Minority demographic group with high populations and high instances of poverty compared to the analysis area as a whole and Arizona.	Gila and Pinal Counties
Persons with Disabilities (all races and ethnicities)	Minority population with high populations compared to Arizona as a whole.	Gila, Pinal, and Yavapai Counties
Low-income (all races and ethnicities)	Communities where the percent of individuals or families living below the poverty line is greater than that of the analysis area and Arizona as a whole.	Gila County

All alternatives considered in the final environmental impact statement would contribute to social and economic sustainability by providing benefits to environmental justice communities, improving the quality of life, and providing opportunities for income and jobs. The forest would continue to provide for traditional, cultural, and spiritual values that are of particular interest to Native American Tribes. No populations in the plan area would experience significant adverse human health impacts or environmental effects due to management actions proposed under any of the alternatives considered. Therefore, I find that the land management plan complies with both these Executive Orders.

Federal Land Policy and Management Act

The Federal Land Policy and Management Act allows for the granting of easements across National Forest System lands. The land management plan is strategic and programmatic in nature. It provides guidance and direction to future site-specific projects and activities. The land management plan does not create, authorize, or execute any site-specific activity, although it does provide for the consideration of granting easements and rights-of-way. Therefore, I find that the land management plan is consistent with this Act.

Invasive Species

Executive Order 13751, which amends Executive Order 13112, directs Federal agencies to prevent the introduction of invasive species; to detect and respond rapidly to and control populations of such species in a cost-effective and environmentally sound manner, to monitor invasive species populations accurately and reliably; to provide for restoration of native species and habitat conditions in ecosystems that have been invaded; to conduct research on invasive species and develop technologies to prevent introduction; to provide for environmentally sound control of invasive species; and to promote public education on invasive species and the means to address them. All of these actions are subject to the availability of appropriations to support this work. Forest Service Manual 2900, Invasive Species Management, sets forth Forest Service policy, responsibilities, and direction for the prevention, detection, control, and restoration of effects from aquatic and terrestrial invasive species (including vertebrates, invertebrates, plants, and pathogens).

The land management plan is strategic and programmatic in nature, providing program-level guidance and direction for future site-specific projects and activities. The land management plan does not create, authorize, or execute any ground-disturbing activity, although it does provide for the consideration of certain types of activities that may have the potential to affect the dispersal of invasive species. The land management plan includes forestwide desired conditions, objectives, and management approaches that stress the use of best management practices to limit the introduction of new species and limit the spread of existing populations due to management activities. Additionally, other direction provides protection of watershed, soil, riparian, and aquatic conditions in ways that will reduce management-related disturbances that might introduce new populations or increase existing ones. Land management plan monitoring also includes indicators associated with invasive species, and the effectiveness of treatments. Therefore, I find that the land management plan is compliant with this Executive Order.

Migratory Bird Treaty Act

Executive Order 13186, Responsibilities of Federal Agencies to Protect Migratory Birds, was issued in furtherance of the purposes of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Acts, the Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act, the Endangered Species Act, and the National Environmental Policy Act. This order requires including the effects of Federal actions on migratory birds as a part of the environmental analysis process. On December 8, 2008, the Forest Service signed a memorandum of understanding with the Fish and Wildlife Service to complement the Executive order (USDI-USFWS, 2008), and the Forest Service agreed to incorporate migratory bird habitat and population objectives and recommendations into the agency planning process, in cooperation with other governments, State and Federal agencies, and non-Federal partners, and strive to protect, restore, enhance, and manage the habitat of migratory birds, and prevent the further loss or degradation of remaining habitats on National Forest System lands. The Council for the Conservation of Migratory Birds was established in 2009 by the Secretary of the Interior to oversee Executive Order

13186. More than 20 Federal agencies, including the Forest Service, currently participate in and have representation on the Council for the Conservation of Migratory Birds.

The land management plan includes forestwide direction related to key stressors for migratory birds and their habitats, including direction to maintain or improve forest resilience, composition, and structure. Future site-specific activities or projects with the potential to impact migratory bird habitat will be analyzed with site-specific analysis under the National Environmental Policy Act process and will comply with land management plan direction. Therefore, I find that the land management plan is compliant with the Migratory Bird Treaty Act and Executive Order 13186.

Multiple-Use Sustained Yield Act

The Forest Service manages National Forest System lands to sustain the multiple use of its renewable resources in perpetuity while maintaining the long-term health and productivity of the land. Resources are managed through a combination of approaches and concepts for the benefit of human communities and natural resources. As demonstrated in the final environmental impact statement and as required by the Multiple-Use Sustained-Yield Act of 1960 (16 U.S.C. 528-531), the land management plan guides sustainable and integrated management of forest resources in the context of the broader landscape, giving due consideration to the relative values of the various resources in particular areas. Therefore, I find that the land management plan is compliant with the Act.

National Environmental Policy Act

The National Environmental Policy Act [12] requires that Federal agencies prepare detailed statements on proposed actions that may significantly affect the quality of the human environment. The Act's requirement is designed to serve two major functions:

- to provide decision makers with a detailed accounting of the likely environmental effects of proposed actions prior to adoption
- to inform the public of, and allow comment on, such efforts

The Forest Service has developed, gathered, and reviewed an extensive amount of information regarding the potential effects of each of the alternatives considered in the final environmental impact statement. This information expands and refines the data, analyses, and public input described in the National Environmental Policy Act documents associated with the draft plan and draft environmental impact statement. My decision also considers the large amount of public input,

[12] On July 16, 2020, the Council on Environmental Quality published a final rule to amend its regulations implementing the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (Council on Environmental Quality 2020). The final rule went into effect on September 14, 2020. In accordance with 40 CFR 1506.13, the amended regulations apply to any National Environmental Policy Act review process begun after September 14, 2020; however, an agency may apply the amended regulations to ongoing activities and environmental documents begun before September 14, 2020. For this project, the Council on Environmental Quality 1978 regulations, as amended, are the guiding regulations for this NEPA process.

including public meetings, comments on the Internet website, and comments received during the 120-day comment period for the draft environmental impact statement.

All substantive comments, written and oral, made in response to the draft environmental impact statement have been summarized and responded to in appendix A of the final environmental impact statement. During the course of this effort, the public involvement has led to changes in the analysis and the alternatives. I find that the environmental analysis and public involvement process the final environmental impact statement is based on complies with each of the major elements of the requirements set forth by the Council on Environmental Quality regulations for implementing the National Environmental Policy Act (40 CFR 1500-1508). My conclusion is supported by the following findings.

The final environmental impact statement considered a broad range of reasonable alternatives that were developed and revised based on robust public involvement, including public input and comment. The four alternatives considered in detail in the final environmental impact statement cover a broad range of possible management allocations based on revision topics identified through public involvement and scoping.

- The final environmental impact statement reflects consideration of cumulative effects of the alternatives by evaluating past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions in the plan area, including Federal, State, Tribal, and private lands. The environmental effects analysis estimates the potential effects of timber activities and timber-associated activities. The analysis of effects to wildlife assumed that these activities would take place with management constraints to ensure habitat availability at certain thresholds. Moreover, although non-federal lands are outside the scope of this decision, effects from their management have been thoroughly considered and coordinated, to the extent practicable, in the final environmental impact statement.
- The land management plan includes a monitoring program and adaptive management to ensure needed adjustments are made over time.
- The final environmental impact statement uses scientific integrity to support the conclusions made. The decision here does not authorize timber sales or any other specific activity on the forest. Site-specific decisions will be made on projects in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act, the Endangered Species Act, and other environmental laws following applicable public involvement and appeal procedures.

Based on the above, the land management plan is fully compliant with the Act and Council on Environmental Quality implementing regulations.

National Forest Management Act

The National Forest Management Act requires the development, maintenance, amendment, and revision of land management plans for each unit of the National Forest System. These land

management plans help create a dynamic management system, so an interdisciplinary approach to achieve integrated consideration of physical, biological, economic, and other sciences will be applied to all future actions on the unit. Under the Act, the Forest Service is to ensure coordination of the multiple uses and sustained yield of products and services of the National Forest System.

The National Forest Management Act requires the Secretary of Agriculture to promulgate regulations for developing and maintaining land management plans. On April 9, 2012, the Department of Agriculture issued a Final Planning Rule for National Forest System land management planning (36 CFR Part 219; refer to the Federal Register at 77 FR 68, pp. 21162-21276).

As discussed in detail in the requirements of the planning rule section of this document, my review of the planning process, the final environmental impact statement, and the information provided in the record of decision indicate the final plan and its preparation meet requirements for revising plans under the provisions of the 2012 Planning Rule and is compliant with the Act.

National Historic Preservation Act

Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act requires each Federal agency to take into account the effects of its actions on historic properties, prior to approving expenditure of Federal funds on an undertaking or prior to issuing any license; while Section 110 of the Act outlines the Federal agency responsibility to establish and maintain a preservation program for the identification, evaluation, and nomination to the National Register of Historic Places, and protection of historic properties.

The land management plan is a programmatic level planning effort that will not directly authorize any ground disturbing activities or projects. The land management plan includes desired conditions, goals, objectives, standards, guidelines, management strategies, and monitoring requirements for managing and protecting cultural resources listed or eligible for the National Register of Historic Places.

Site-specific projects that are undertaken as a result of the direction in the land management plan will comply with laws and regulations that ensure protection of heritage resources. Significant cultural resources will be identified, protected, and monitored in compliance with the Act. Any consultation that will occur for proposed activities will be coordinated with the Arizona State Historic Preservation Office. Therefore, I find that the land management plan complies with this Act.

Roadless Area Conservation Rule

Management direction for inventoried roadless areas is compliant with the 2001 Roadless Area Conservation Rule (36 CFR 294 Subpart B, published at 66 FR 3244-3273). The 2001 Roadless Conservation Rule includes a prohibition on road construction and road reconstruction in inventoried roadless areas and prohibitions on timber cutting, sale, or removal except in certain circumstances. The land management plan is a programmatic-level planning effort and does not directly authorize

any road construction, reconstruction, or timber removal. Therefore, I find that the land management plan is compliant with the Roadless Area Conservation Rule.

Travel Management Rule

The final rule for Travel Management; Designated Routes and Areas for Motor Vehicle Use (commonly referred to as the 2005 Travel Management Rule), implements provisions of Executive Orders 11644 and 11989, to address the use of off-road motor vehicles on Federal lands. Regulations implementing this rule are found at 36 CFR Part 212. The Executive Order's "minimization criteria" specify:

In designating National Forest System motorized trails and areas on National Forest System lands, the responsible official shall consider effects on the following with the objective of minimizing:

1. Damage to soil, watershed, vegetation, and other forest resources.
2. Harassment of wildlife and significant disruption of wildlife habitats.
3. Conflicts between motor vehicle use and existing or proposed recreation uses of National Forest System lands or neighboring Federal lands.
4. Conflicts among different classes of motor vehicle uses of National Forest System lands or neighboring Federal lands.
5. Compatibility of motor vehicle use with existing conditions in populated areas, taking into account sound, emissions, and other factors (36 CFR 212.55(b), Specific criteria for designation of trails and areas).

Prior to this plan revision, the Forest designated specific roads, trails, and areas for the use of motor vehicles (which includes off-road vehicles). This designated motorized system is displayed on the motorized vehicle use maps, required by 36 CFR 212 subpart B. This programmatic plan decision does not authorize additional motor vehicle use, or prohibit existing motor vehicles uses; therefore, those maps remain unchanged. Therefore, I find that this land management plan complies with the Travel Management Rule.

Wetlands and Floodplains

Executive orders 11988 Floodplain Management and 11990 Protection of Wetlands require Federal agencies to avoid, to the extent possible, short- and long-term effects resulting from the modification or destruction of wetlands and the occupancy and modification of floodplains. Forestwide standards and guidelines are provided for soil, water, wetlands, and riparian areas to minimize effects to wetlands and floodplains. They incorporate the best management practices of the Forest Service Soil and Water Conservation Handbook. Therefore, I find that the land management plan is compliant with these Executive Orders.

Wild and Scenic Rivers Act

This Act establishes a National Wild and Scenic Rivers System with three classifications of rivers: wild, scenic, and recreational. The purpose of the act is to protect the designated rivers "for the benefit and enjoyment of present and future generations" and to preserve the rivers' free-flowing condition, water quality, and outstandingly remarkable values.

Analysis of the designated wild and scenic rivers was included in the final environmental impact statement. Management area direction in the land management plan provides protection for the water quality, free-flowing conditions, and outstandingly remarkable values identified for those rivers. In addition, the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act requires an evaluation of eligible wild, scenic, or recreational rivers in land management planning. This was completed, and the 19 eligible rivers, totaling 188 miles, identified through the eligible wild and scenic river study process were analyzed in the final environmental impact statement. Management direction in the land management plan provides protection of free-flowing conditions and the outstandingly remarkable values identified for the eligible segments of rivers on the forest. Therefore, I find that the land management plan is compliant with Act.

Wilderness Act

The Wilderness Act of 1964 established a National Wilderness Preservation System to be administered in such a manner as to leave these areas unimpaired for future use and enjoyment as wilderness. It provides the statutory definition of wilderness, how areas are assessed for addition to the wilderness preservation system, and management requirements for congressionally designated areas.

Evaluation of existing wilderness and areas recommended for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System was included in the environmental analysis for the land management plan. The land management plan provides direction for designated wilderness through goals, desired conditions, standards, guidelines, and suitability that preserves the wilderness character of designated wilderness. Therefore, I find that this land management plan is compliant with this Act.

Changes Since the Draft Record of Decision

Changes have been made to the land management plan, final environmental impact statement, and administrative record since the draft record of decision was released in July 2022. Some of these changes were a result of instructions from the Regional Forester from the predecisional objection process[13].

Administrative Review

This decision was subject to the predecisional objection process required by Federal Regulations (36 CFR part 219, subpart B). A 60-day objection filing period on the draft record of decision, final land

[13] See the Administrative Review section and appendix A of this record of decision for information about these instructions.

management plan, and final environmental impact statement ran concurrently with an objection filing period for the Regional Forester's species of conservation concern. The objection period was initiated on July 8, 2022, with the publication of the notice of the opportunity to object in the *Arizona Capitol Times*, the newspaper of record.

The Forest Service received 14 eligible objections. Interested parties and objectors attended a series of virtual meetings February 21-22, 2023, to discuss objection issues. Michiko Martin, Southwestern Regional Forester, issued her written responses to the objection issues on May 19, 2023. These written responses outline the rationale for each response and contained instructions to the responsible official as appropriate. The written response is the final decision by the Department of Agriculture regarding the objections.

The reviewing officer found that for most issues, the final environmental impact statement, land management plan, draft record of decision, and associated planning record established that the responsible official sufficiently addressed the objection issues, and this planning effort complies with current law, regulation, and policy. For those issues that required additional clarification or modifications, the reviewing officer issued instructions to the Tonto National Forest. These instructions remedied any concerns over potential violations of law, regulation, or policy raised during the objection period and are detailed in appendix A of this document.

Other Changes

Other changes came from recommendations from the administrative review process that were not related to specific instructions and do not change the analysis or result in significant changes in plan components. These changes clarify intent or correct clerical or mapping errors.

General

- Fixed clerical errors and broken hyperlinks
- Added additional documentation, rationale, and references to the administrative record.

Recreation

- Recreation guideline (REC-G-03) was updated to address objection concern. Adjusted language links to scenic integrity objections and includes a footnote for where more information can be found. New language: "Recreation developments and improvements should be planned, designed, and managed for activities and capacities that minimize resource damage (e.g., soil erosion and vegetation trampling) and are consistent with or move the area toward desired scenic integrity objectives minimize adverse impacts to scenic character."
- Recreation guideline (REC-DIS-NMO-G-04) has been updated from "Permanent fixed anchors or bolts for rock climbing and rappelling should be allowed where resource conflicts do not exist (e.g., at-risk species, scenic integrity, cultural resources) and removable protection is not

practicable for safe ascent or descent for approved routes" to "Permanent fixed anchors or bolts for rock climbing and rappelling should be allowed where resource conflicts do not exist (e.g., at-risk species, scenic integrity, cultural resources) and removable protection is not practicable for safe ascent or descent".

- The Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) Process Paper has been updated to further describe the process for determining desired ROS classes.

- The Recreation description in the final Land Management Plan was updated to include reference to Forest Service Manual 2300 Chapter 2310, section 2311 and provide the full definitions of each recreation opportunity spectrum class. This reference is also included in the FEIS in the recreation sections where ROS is mentioned. Full definitions will be incorporated into the ROS Process Paper to better clarify what the recreation opportunity spectrum is and how it is used[14].

- Designated Wilderness desired condition (DWMA-DC-11) was updated to be clearer and more specific to allow measurable progress. It now reads, "Cultural, historical, and geological features of value that are unique or inherent to qualities for which the wilderness was established wilderness character are recognized as features of value to and part of its wilderness character."

- Added footnote to the plan referring reader to where the Wild and Scenic River eligibility study information can be found.

- A management approach to work with the Arizona Game and Fish Department to address habitat and other conservation needs of state priority species was added to the designated and eligible wild and scenic rivers sections to be responsive to the issue of coordinating with the State.

Range

- Clarified which direction will be used when determining when it may be appropriate to adjust allotment operating instructions in response to drought conditions or after a fire. The forest uses direction found in the Region 3 Supplement to the Forest Service Handbook 2209.13 Chapter 10. This direction specifies that when the Standardized Precipitation Index reaches negative one for the preceding 12-month period then allotments should be evaluated and managed accordingly. Considerations the forest uses for re-stocking Livestock post-fire was added as a white paper to the project record[15]. This is an excerpt from 19.2 of R3 supplement to Forest Service Handbook 2209.13.

[14] Similar information and links to this Forest Service Manual were incorporated on the Tonto National Forest website at https://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/tonto/landmanagement/planning/?cid=stelprdb5412121
[15] The title of this document in the project record is “20230000_ConsiderationsForPostFireGrazing”.

- The final environmental impact statement for the 1985 plan was added to the project record. This capability and productivity analysis, which was based on many factors that do not change over time such as elevation, slope, and distance to water, was done for the 1985 plan. The 2012 Planning Rule does not require the forest to analyze or document rangeland suitability, and the capability, and productivity for grazing. However, these same factors, as well as others, were analyzed and included in the 2017 assessment of current conditions for this new plan and considered as existing conditions for the final environmental impact statement.

- Added footnote in the plan to clarify the difference between excess use and unauthorized use. Livestock owned by someone holding a grazing permit but outside the authorized allotment, season of use, or in greater numbers is excess use, not unauthorized use. Included footnote that Unauthorized livestock are livestock grazing the forest owned by someone not holding a grazing permit. Deleted references to excess use, as that is part of permit administration, covered in Forest Service Handbook 2209.13.

- Additional Information was added to the Affected Environment section of final environmental impact statement and Background section of the plan to clarify how the best available scientific information used in the analysis demonstrates managing grazing at conservative use levels. This grazing intensity (based on percent use of forage by weight at the end of the growing season) should provide for plant integrity, density, diversity, and sustainability and regeneration over time (Holechek and Galt 2000; Holechek *et al* 2011; Heady 1994)). Within the scope of the site-specific NEPA allotment grazing decisions, adjustments are made annually through the annual operating instructions to respond to changing conditions and move towards desired conditions. Authorized number of livestock, pasture season of use and timing, salt locations, and pasture rest periods may be adjusted as needed through the annual operating instructions. Information from monitoring such as frequency plots, canopy cover, pace frequency transects, photo points, and allotment inspections inform appropriate adjustments. Other factors such as weather patterns, likelihood of plant regrowth, and previous years' utilization levels, are also considered in annual operating instructions development. If repeat monitoring indicates annual adjustments are not achieving the desired effects, further adjustments may be made to the allotment management plan or term grazing permit. Permitted number of livestock as well as grazing intensity may be adjusted up or down according to the grazing decision to move towards desired conditions.

- Additional information was added as a footnote to the Affected Environment section of the Rangelands, Forage, and Grazing Section (final environmental impact statement, Vol 1) to clarify where more information about grazing permit administration can be found. The footnote reads, "A grazing permit is an authorization to occupy and use National Forest System lands, given specific terms and conditions. This permit permits occupancy, not forage purchased. Occupancy is contingent upon compliance with the terms and conditions of the

grazing permit. Permit administration is an on-going activity that is outside of the scope of plan revision, consistent with various federal laws and Forest Service regulations at 36 CFR Part 222."

Mining and Minerals

- MMAM-MA-06 was updated to read, "Encourage large-scale mine sites to convert to other productive uses (e.g., renewable energy production, agricultural, or recreational types of uses) where reclamation to the original Ecological Response Unit is impracticable." This Management Approach was broadened to make it more clear that it does not just apply to the reclamation time period but throughout the plan of operations.

Wildlife

- Additional information was added to the administrative record to clarify that objectives in the plan for restoring frequent fire regimes contribute to the recovery of the Mexican spotted owl and how habitat was identified and mapped, and what the forest is currently doing to monitor this species.

- Additional information was provided for Mexican Gray Wolf in the Crosswalk of Ecological Conditions and At-Risk Species (final environmental impact statement, Vol 4) to clarify the connection with the direction to “provide the ecological conditions necessary to contribute to the recovery of the species" (36 CFR 219.9).

Watersheds

- Added more detailed description of each category (properly functioning, functioning at risk, or impaired function) from the watershed condition framework document itself in response to comment number 2816-49 in Volume 3 of the final environmental impact statement.

- Clarified in the administrative record that the forest will generally be responsible for paying for riparian management zone delineation, but that exceptions may occur if a proponent-proposed project requires a site-specific analysis.

- Added to Riparian/watershed monitoring questions "associated indicators" column specifics regarding collecting trend data. for example, "Watershed condition indicators related to water quality, water quantity, aquatic habitat, aquatic biota, riparian/wetland vegetation, roads and trails, soils, fire regime, forest cover, rangeland vegetation, terrestrial invasive species, and forest health and where qualitative or quantitative monitoring data are collected for these indicators how they are changing over time".

Plan Implementation

Transition in the Implementation of the Plan

The plan is used as a direction source for future projects, plans, and assessments. It is not expected that this new direction be used to reevaluate or change decisions that have been made under the previous plan. A smooth and gradual transition to the new plan is anticipated, rather than one that forces an immediate reexamination or modification of all contracts, projects, permits, and other activities that are already in progress. Previously approved and ongoing projects and activities are not required to meet the direction of the land management plan and will remain consistent with the direction in the 1985 forest plan, as amended.

As new project decisions, contracts, permits, renewals, and other activities are considered, conformance with the new plan is expected. As required by the National Forest Management Act and the planning rule, subject to valid existing rights, all projects and activities authorized by the Forest Service after approval of this plan must be consistent with the applicable plan components (16 U.S.C. 1604(i)) as described at 36 CFR 219.15).

All project or activity approval documents, made after the effective date of the land management plan, will describe how the project or activity is consistent with the applicable components as described in the Consistency of Projects with the Forest Plan section of the final plan (chapter 1). When a proposed project or activity would not be consistent with the applicable plan components, the responsible official shall take one of the following steps, subject to valid existing rights:

1. Modify the proposed project or activity to make it consistent with the applicable plan components;
2. Reject the proposal or terminate the project or activity;
3. Amend the land management plan so that the project or activity will be consistent with the land management plan, as amended; and
4. Amend the land management plan contemporaneously with the approval of the project or activity so that the project or activity will be consistent with the land management plan, as amended. This amendment may be limited to apply only to the project or activity.

Resource plans (for example, travel management plans) developed by the Forest that apply to the resources or land areas within the planning area must be consistent with the plan components. Resource plans developed prior to this plan decision will be evaluated for consistency with the land management plan and updated if necessary[16].

[16] The forest does not intend to revise the travel management plan at this time. All future travel management decisions will be consistent with the land management plan, while complying with the Travel Management Rule and National Environmental Policy Act.

Authorizations for occupancy and use made before this plan approval may proceed unchanged until time of reauthorization. At time of reauthorization, all permits, contracts, and other authorizing instruments must be made consistent with the land management plan, subject to existing valid rights, as provided at §219.15(d).

Project Consistency

As required by the National Forest Management Act, all projects and activities authorized by the Forest Service, after record of the decision for the draft plan, must be consistent with the land management plan (16 U.S.C. 1604(i) as described at 36 CFR 219.15). This is accomplished by a project or activity being consistent with applicable plan components. If a proposed project or activity is not consistent with the applicable plan components, the responsible official has the following options (subject to valid existing rights):

- Modify the proposed project or activity to make it consistent with the applicable plan components;
- Reject the proposal or terminate the project or activity;
- Amend the land management plan so that the project or activity will be consistent with the land management plan as amended; or
- Amend the land management plan contemporaneously with the approval of the project or activity so that the project or activity will be consistent with the land management plan as amended. This amendment may be limited to apply only to the project or activity. (36 CFR 219.15(c)).

Any substantive changes to plan components require a plan amendment[17], with appropriate analysis as required under the National Environmental Policy Act. Administrative changes[18] can be made without documentation of environmental effects, such as updates to data and maps, management approaches, and relevant background information; fixing typographical errors; or updating other required or optional content of a plan (content other than plan components). The public will need to be notified of all administrative changes to the land management plan.

Plans may have other content, such as background, collaboration strategies, context, existing conditions, glossary, introduction, monitoring questions, other referenced information or guidance, performance history, performance measures, performance risks, program emphasis, program

[17] A plan may be amended at any time. Plan amendments may be broad or narrow, depending on the need for change, and should be used to keep plans current and help units adapt to new information or changing conditions. Except when an administrative change is appropriate, a plan amendment is required to add, modify, or remove one or more plan components, or to change how or where one or more plan components apply to all or part of the plan area (including management areas or geographic areas). (36 CFR 219.13(a))

[18] Administrative changes include corrections of clerical errors to any part of the plan, conformance of the plan to new statuary or regulatory requirements, or changes to other content in the plan (36 CFR 219.7(f))."

guidance, program priorities, possible actions, roles and contributions, management challenges, or strategies, but such other content are not matters for which project consistency is required.

Maintaining the Land Management Plan

A land management plan is an integral part of adaptive management, including assessment, plan revision or amendment, and monitoring. This adaptive management cycle enables the Tonto National Forest to identify and respond to changing conditions, changing public desires, and new information, such as that obtained through research and scientific findings. Land management plan monitoring program is an integral part of this adaptive management cycle, consisting of monitoring questions and indicators (see chapter 4 of the land management plan for additional information about the monitoring plan).

Implementation Date

This revised land management plan becomes effective 30 calendar days after publication of the notice of its approval in the Federal Register (36 CFR 219.17(a), 2012 Planning Rule). This approval will not occur until the pre-decisional review process is complete and a final record of decision is issued.

The revised land management plan provides a framework and text to guide resource management options. It is a strategic, programmatic document and does not make project-level decisions or irreversible or irretrievable commitments of resources. Those kinds of commitments would be made after more detailed, site-specific proposals are initiated and further public comment opportunities occur as part of the site-specific environmental analysis process.

Contact Person

For additional information concerning this decision, contact the Tonto National Forest

Tonto National Forest - Forest Supervisor's Office
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By phone at (602) 225-5200

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Signature and Date

12/8/23

NEIL J. BOSWORTH
Forest Supervisor
Tonto National Forest

DATE

Appendix A

Michiko Martin, Southwestern Regional Forester, issued written responses to eligible objection issues on May 19, 2023. Table 4 lists the specific instructions to the responsible official and how they were resolved. The "concern" column refers directly to the headings used in the Regional Forester's letter.

Table 4. Instructions to the Responsible Official and How They Were Resolved

Concern	Instruction	How It Was Resolved
Glossary Definitions (PLN-4)	Verify all links in footnotes in the plan are accurate and navigate to the correct website.	All of the links in the plan were checked at the time of final editing and have been found to link to the correct websites.
Amendments and Administrative Changes (PLN-7)	Update the ROD to reflect the planning rule more closely as it relates to amendments and administrative changes. Clarify that plan amendments are available to change plan components, or where plan components apply, regardless of severity. Administrative changes include corrections of clerical errors to any part of the plan, conformance of the plan to new statuary or regulatory requirements, or changes to other content in the plan (36 CFR 219.7(f)).	Definitions of amendments and administrative changes and language describing the difference according to 36 CFR 219.13, were added to the ROD in the Plan Implementation section under Project Consistency.
Adaptive Management (PLN-10)	Update the ROD on page 47 to cite chapter 4 instead of chapter 5: "Land management plan monitoring program is an integral part of this adaptive management cycle, consisting of monitoring questions and indicators (see chapter 5 of the plan for additional information about the monitoring plan)."	This clerical error was corrected in the ROD as instructed.
Adaptive Management (PLN-10)	Update the plan and ROD to use either "adaptive management principles" (e.g., p. 59) or "adaptive management strategies" (e.g., p. 102) consistently.	Language was updated in the plan and the Record of Decision by removing both "principles" and "strategies" connected to adaptive management. While this change does not change the meaning of any of these occurrences, removing them makes the references to adaptive management more active and clearer.
Adaptive Management (PLN-10)	Remove adaptive management language from alternative B in the ROD, plan, and EIS. All alternatives should allow for adaptive management, not just alternative B.	In the description of Alternative B, language was changed from, "Alternative B includes plan direction that allows for adaptive management to address sustainable recreation and ecological changes…" to "Alternative B includes plan direction that emphasizes the use of adaptive management to address sustainable recreation and ecological changes...".
New Plan Components (PLN-11)	Document the rationale for changes to RMZ-S-03, LRMA-G-05, LRMA-G-06, and SRHMA-S-03 in the planning record. Documentation should include the reason for the change (e.g., new circumstances, new information, response to public comments) and should state whether	RMZ-S-03 was updated to read "Projects within the riparian management zone that use herbicides or pesticides should ensure that chemicals are not applied or drift into water resources." This will allow, for example, weed treatments within and adjacent to Riparian Management Zones while keeping chemicals out of water resources.

Concern	Instruction	How It Was Resolved
	the changes, new circumstances, or new information relevant to environmental concerns is or is not significant.	The purpose of the Lakes and Rivers Management Area is to prioritize and manage high-use developed and dispersed recreational opportunities in and around the lakes and major rivers of the Tonto National Forest. LRMA-G-05 and LRMA-G-06 were added in response to further specialist review to generally keep livestock and additional range improvements out of these high recreational use areas while also keeping livestock away from shorelines. To make identification of the management area boundary easier, this boundary was modified between draft and final. However, after the objection period, it was brought to our attention that in modifying the boundary, we inadvertently excluded grazing from certain areas around lakes where livestock grazing can be beneficial to reduce fine fuels when lake levels are low. This use is currently occurring in these areas. Therefore, LRMA-G-05 was further modified to incorporate this flexibility. It now reads, "Permitted livestock grazing should not be authorized in the Lakes and Rivers Management Area except where existing infrastructure or natural boundaries prevent livestock from accessing the rivers and lakes or where grazing can be used to manage hazardous fuels created by fluctuating water levels around Theodore Roosevelt Lake and Apache Lake." SRHMA-S-03 reads, "Permitted livestock grazing shall not be authorized within the Salt River Horse Management Area." While livestock grazing currently does not occur in the Salt River Horse Management Area, within the Goldfield and Bulldog Allotments, this standard was added to assure that these two uses would remain separated in cooperation with the Arizona Department of Agriculture. None of these changes would be significant relevant to environmental concerns.
Cultural Resources (TRHR-2)	Update the final EIS definition to match FSM 2360.5's definition of "cultural resources", or add a reference to the manual's definition, if there is a desire to keep the definition brief.	The definition of "cultural resources" was updated in Volume 2 of the FEIS (Glossary) to match the definition found in the plan and to match the definition in FSM 2300, chapter 2360, section 2360.5.
Rock Climbing (REC-5)	Add 20201022 RockClimbingChangesforFinal LMP to the planning record.	This document was added to record and labeled "20201022RockClimbingChangesforFinalLMP".
Rock Climbing (REC-5)	Add a reference in REC-DIS-NMO-G-04 to the plan's scenery section to provide additional context.	A reference to the plan's scenery section, as well as the scenery section of the Tonto National Forest website, has been added to REC-DIS-NMO-G-04.
Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (REC-6)	Update the plan revision website references to recreation opportunity spectrum and scenery management documentation to ensure they navigate to the correct locations.	Links in the plan and the plan revision website were checked that they navigate to the correct pages and updated information is displayed.
Recreation Opportunity	Add to the record and incorporate by reference: o The National Recreation Opportunity Spectrum Mapping Protocol	This information has been added to the project record. Additionally, the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum Process Paper has been updated to

Concern	Instruction	How It Was Resolved
Spectrum (REC-6)	(Summer) to support the development of existing and desired recreation opportunity spectrum classes across the forest and provide context to the recreation opportunity spectrum paper. o Documentation of interdisciplinary discussions and other supporting information on the development and differences between alternatives	further describe the process for determining desired ROS classes and include the referenced material.
Arizona National Scenic Trail Protection (ANST-1)	Ensure mapping analysis and discussion is located within the planning record and is publicly available to support Arizona National Scenic Trail recreation opportunity spectrum settings and plan components.	ROS maps for the AZNST have been included in the project record. One map for existing and one for desired ROS that includes the AZNST. This has also been included in the ROS Process Paper which is also included in the project record. Additionally, the acres of each ROS setting that intersects the AZNST corridor has been made into a table in the project record.
Arizona National Scenic Trail Protection (ANST-1)	In the final EIS, specifically address national trails in the dispersed recreation analysis for alternative D in a same manner as alternatives B and C.	Additional information was added to the alternative D Management Areas section (FEIS, Vol 1, Recreation Resources) to address the effects to national trails in the same manner as alternatives B and C.
Arizona National Scenic Trail Advisory Council (ANST-6)	Add the 2019 memorandum terminating the Arizona National Scenic Trail Advisory Council to the planning record.	The 2019 memorandum terminating the Arizona National Scenic Trail Advisory Council was added to the planning record.
Scenery and Mining (SCE-1 and -2)	Add the National Scenery Management System Inventory Mapping Protocol to the planning record.	The 2020 National Scenery Management System Inventory Mapping Protocol was added to the planning record.
Sierra Ancha Experimental Forest (PLN-2)	Provide a rationale in the ROD on why the Sierra Ancha Experimental Forest was removed between the draft and final version of the revised land management plan. Documentation should also include the reason for the change (e.g., new circumstances, new information, response to public comments) and should state whether the changes, new circumstances, or new information relevant to environmental concerns is or is not significant.	Rationale for removing plan components for the Sierra Ancha Experimental Forest from the Land Management Plan and analysis from the associated environmental impact statement has been included in the Record of Decision. A brief statement was included in the draft ROD, but it was expanded to further clarify the reason for the change. This was not a significant change because the Tonto National Forest does not manage the experimental forest. The ROD now reads, “Analysis of the Sierra Ancha Experimental Forest has been removed from alternatives B, C, and D because it is managed by the Rocky Mountain Research Station and is not within the scope of the plan revision process. This area no longer has management direction included within the Tonto National Forest land management plan. Removing this information does not change the designation rather the land management plan does not overlay additional guidance outside of the experimental forest establishment plan.”

Concern	Instruction	How It Was Resolved
Sierra Ancha Experimental Forest (PLN-2)	Explain where the management objectives and/or management direction for the Sierra Ancha Experimental Forest can be found since management is under the Rocky Mountain Research Station, rather than the Tonto National Forest.	The management objectives and/or management direction for the Sierra Ancha Experimental Forest can be found in the associated establishment report. The Rocky Mountain Research Station manages the experimental forest and not the Tonto National Forest. More information can be found in the project record including the Sierra Ancha Experimental Forest Establishment Report (1938SierraAnchaEFEstablishmentReport.pdf)
Recommended Wilderness Analysis and Rationale (WLD-3)	Add the meeting notes from 8/12/2020 (20200812FinalPlanDecisionMeeting) and 9/9/2020 (20200909FinalPlanDecisionMeeting) to the planning record. These notes document final adjustments to the recommended wilderness areas, including the reasons why certain wilderness areas from alternative B were not selected due to concerns about manageability.	Ensured these meeting notes are in the project record.
Recommended Wilderness Analysis and Rationale (WLD-3)	Provide supplemental information about factors that informed the decision to include a mix of recommended wilderness polygons from alternatives B and C. Specifically, highlight the factors that informed removing nine polygons from alternative B in the final decision, as well as the addition of three polygons from alternative C. This could include updating the wilderness evaluation to incorporate staff feedback regarding manageability of these polygons, as reflected in the meeting notes referenced above.	Supplemental information to inform this instruction was included in the record of decision under 'Preliminary Administrative Recommendations'.
Recommended Wilderness Restrictions (WLD-1 and WLD-4)	Add the meeting notes from 8/12/2020 (20200812FinalPlanDecisionMeeting) and 9/9/2020 (20200909FinalPlanDecisionMeeting) to the planning record. These materials document the rationale for the identification of recommended wilderness areas that were included in the draft ROD.	Ensured these meeting notes are in the project record.
Recommended Wilderness Restrictions (WLD-1 and WLD-4)	Change the word “protection” to “management” in RWMA-G-01 to facilitate the authorization of needed resource management activities that do not adversely affect the social and ecological characteristics that provided the basis for their wilderness recommendation. The reworded guideline would read: “RWMA-G-01: Motorized vehicle use should not be authorized in a recommended wilderness area unless specifically authorized for emergency use, resource management protection, maintenance of authorized improvements, or for the motorized retrieval of legally harvested big game.”	The word "protection" was changed to "management" in the final plan, as instructed.
Mining in Recommended Wilderness (WLD-6)	Include a statement in chapter 1 of the plan that nothing in the plan affects, nor does it have the authority to affect, valid existing rights established by statute or legal instruments.	A bullet was added in Chapter 1 under Forest Plan Framework and Organization that states, "A land management plan...does not affect valid existing rights established by statute or legal instruments".

Concern	Instruction	How It Was Resolved
Motorized Routes in Recommended Wilderness Areas (WLD-5 and WLD-7)	Adjust recommended wilderness management area mapped boundaries to address any known inaccuracies based on available information prior to plan decision.	The forest used the travel management planning data to draw the buffers around recommended wilderness areas. However, database information to produce the travel management decision were not completely accurate and some routes “on the ground” were not accurately depicted on maps. Recommended wilderness management area boundaries are defined by the 300-foot buffer around the physical centerline of the open motorized route and corrections may be made to the map with an administrative change to reflect the 300-foot buffer around motorized routes described in the revised plan's record of decision. However, the forest reviewed the arial imagery of areas of potential inaccuracies brought to our attention during the objection process and adjusted the recommended wilderness mapped boundaries where errors were found. This resulted in the reduction of a total of 207 acres of recommended wilderness in the final plan.
Motorized Routes in Recommended Wilderness Areas (WLD-5 and WLD-7)	Clarify in the record of decision that a recommended wilderness management area boundary is defined by the 300-foot buffer around the physical centerline of the open motorized route and that corrections may be made to the map with an administrative change to reflect the 300-foot buffer around motorized routes described in the decision.	A footnote was added to the Record of Decision specifying, "A recommended wilderness management area boundary, where defined by a designated motorized route, is defined by the 300-foot buffer around the physical centerline of the open motorized route. Corrections may be made to the map administratively to reflect the 300-foot buffer around motorized routes described in the motor vehicle use map." This was added in the Rationale for the Decision section under Designated Areas and Management Areas.
Multi-Jurisdictional Coordination in Designated and Eligible Wild and Scenic River Management Areas (WSR-1)	Edit DWSRMA-DC-05 from “maintain and enhance” to “protect and enhance” to remain consistent with terminology in the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act and FSM 2300, chapter 2350.	This language was updated in the plan as instructed.
Wild and Scenic River Designations (WSR-2)	Provide additional documentation to clarify and/or address the objectors’ concerns on the wild and scenic rivers eligibility study.	Detailed responses of how this was addressed is incorporated into the responses below.
Wild and Scenic River Designations (WSR-1)	Add more narrative around potential outstanding remarkable values for each evaluated segment. A sufficiently documented rationale for eligible and ineligible streams could include uniform, clear documentation of the sequence of considerations that was made. For example, if streams were analyzed in the order of free-flow, water quality, and outstanding	The Draft Wild & Scenic Rivers Eligibility Study and associated Eligibility Rationale Spreadsheet that contains the narrative for potentially outstandingly remarkable values was completed in October 2017. Appendix E of the Draft Environmental Impact Statement contains a more comprehensive version of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Eligibility Process. It

Concern	Instruction	How It Was Resolved
	remarkable values, the rationale would state whether each segment met the standard for those criteria and the subsequent outcome (eligible or ineligible).	was available during the formal 90-day comment period December 2019 - March 2020. Based on those comments updates to narratives, clarifications in process, and criteria for determining outstandingly remarkable values and eligible wild & scenic river classifications were updated and are reflected in the final environmental impact statement. Additional clarifications about the eligible wild and scenic rivers are incorporated into the other objection responses.
Wild and Scenic River Designations (WSR-1)	Include the eligibility analysis narratives in the record and/or add additional documentation to the narratives.	The 20171016 WSR Tonto NF Possibly Eligible Draft Rationale Spreadsheet contains the eligibility narratives for each named stream. Each sheet of this spreadsheet has been converted into a PDF and posted on the website [https://www.fs.usda.gov/detailfull/tonto/landmanagement/planning/?cid=fseprd594556&width=full] and included in the project record. The first sheet in the spreadsheet is a list of every named stream of a USGS 7.5-minute quad and the results of an initial review of free-flow and outstandingly remarkable values. Results from this are 'Reviewed Not Eligible' or 'Further Study Needed'. The stream segments that received a result of 'Further Study Needed' were included on the second sheet which includes greater discussion about free-flowing conditions and outstandingly remarkable values. Results from this process are 'Reviewed not Eligible' or 'Reviewed Eligible'. The stream segments that received a result of 'Reviewed Eligible' were included on the third sheet where location, ORVs, potential classification, and additional rationale was included. This was spreadsheet was used to inform the eligible wild and scenic river segments that were represented in the draft land management plan and associated environmental impact changes. Changes made after that time are not reflected in this spreadsheet.
Wild and Scenic River Designations (WSR-1)	Add appendix, A directly to the wild and scenic rivers eligibility study document, rather than publishing it as a separate document for ease of reference (20171016 WSR Tonto NF Possibly Eligible Draft Rational Spreadsheet).	The 20171016 WSR Tonto NF Possibly Eligible Draft Rational Spreadsheet has been made into a PDF and been posted on the Tonto National Forest website. The links to this spreadsheet in the final environmental impact statement have been updated to the PDF and not the excel file.
Wild and Scenic River Designations (WSR-1)	Provide additional information on the findings related to Cherry Creek and Pinto Creek and explain why they are not considered sister creeks to the extent that it could impact the outcome of their evaluation.	Pinto Creek: In the Resource Information Report Potential Wild, Scenic, Recreational River Designation, National Forests of Arizona (1993), scenic, riparian and ecological values were identified as being outstandingly remarkable. However, upon detailed interdisciplinary review of this river segment, using outstandingly remarkable value criteria and comparing with similar resources within the established region of comparison (state of AZ), it was determined that no outstandingly remarkable values were present. While the creek has been identified by third party organizations as being an important aquatic resource in Arizona, resource specialists noted Pinto

Concern	Instruction	How It Was Resolved
		Creek is being affected by groundwater pumping and is not unique or remarkable within the State. Scenic values did not meet criteria of being spectacular and/or not common to other rivers in the region of comparison. Cherry Creek: In the Resource Information Report Potential Wild, Scenic, Recreational River Designation, National Forests of Arizona (1993), scenic, fish and wildlife values were identified as being outstandingly remarkable. Upon detailed interdisciplinary review of this river segment, using ORV criteria and comparing with similar resources within the established region of comparison (state of AZ), it was determined that no outstandingly remarkable values were present. Since the 1993 study, a large fire has burned much of the area and the introduction of non-native species (aquatic and terrestrial) has affected the presence of key fish and wildlife species as well as scenic resource values. Cherry Creek was identified as having excellent lower Sonoran cottonwood habitat, and occupied flycatcher and cuckoo habitat in some places, however, the area is similar to Tonto Creek and the Upper Salt River, though not as exemplary, so wildlife values did not meet the criteria for being outstandingly remarkable within the state of Arizona. These two segments being considered sister creeks is not the basis for eligibility in the eligible wild and scenic rivers process (FSH 1909.12, chapter 80). Only streams that are free-flowing and contain an outstandingly remarkable value were identified as eligible for inclusion in the national wild and scenic river system. The determination that a river area did or did not contain one or more outstandingly remarkable value was a professional judgment on the part of the responsible official as informed by the interdisciplinary team, best available scientific information, and public participation. The 20171016 WSR Tonto NF Possibly Eligible Draft Rationale Spreadsheet contains the eligibility narratives, what is included above, for each named stream on a USGS 7.5-minute quad. This spreadsheet has been converted into a PDF and posted on the website [https://www.fs.usda.gov/detailfull/tonto/landmanagement/planning/?cid=fseprd594556&width=full] and included in the project record.
Wild and Scenic River Designations (WSR-1)	Provide a brief overview of the part of the evaluation process where river segments were identified and provide information on considerations that were made regarding FSH 1909.12, chapter 80, section 82.61(2).	The Tonto NF included discussion of eligible wild & scenic rivers throughout the plan revision process. The full process is outlined in Volume 4, Appendix E of the final environmental impact statement. Considerations regarding FSH 1909.12, chapter 80, section 82.61(2) are summarized in the appendix with more detailed notes included in the project record. For river segments

Concern	Instruction	How It Was Resolved
		determined eligible, interdisciplinary team discussions occurred to determine the specific location(s) of the outstandingly remarkable values and the start and end points of the segment. The "interdisciplinary team considered the area within 0.25 miles of the high-water marks on both sides of a river, as well as other features outside this corridor, such as tributaries supporting rearing and spawning habitat, if their inclusion is essential for the protection of the river's outstandingly remarkable values" (FEIS Vol. 4, p. 354). Detailed notes were taken about each eligible segment that articulate specific adjustments and are reflected in the project record. In addition, the Tonto NF also followed the national guidance outlined in the 2016 Q&A Related to Wild & Scenic Rivers Planning Under Chapter 80 of the Planning Rule and the 2018 regional guidance regarding what to include in the wild & scenic rivers eligibility process appendix (both in the project record).
Wild and Scenic River Designations (WSR-1)	Describe which of the eligibility criteria was not met for Haigler, Sycamore, and Pine creeks.	The Forest followed the directives in Forest Service Handbook 1909.12, chapter 80, sections 82.12 and 82.14 when determining eligibility for inclusion in the wild and scenic river system. While Haigler and Sycamore Creek are both free-flowing they were not identified as having an outstandingly remarkable value within the region of comparison. To be identified as outstandingly remarkable, a river-related value must be a unique, rare, or exemplary feature that is significant when compared with similar values from other rivers at a regional or national scale. Unique, rare, or exemplary features are those that are conspicuous examples of these values, among the best representatives of these features, within a region or the Nation. The Tonto National Forest recognizes that river or stream segments across the forest may have some regional importance, but it does not automatically mean the segment possesses a river-related value that is unique, rare, or exemplary when compared with similar values within the State of Arizona. Only streams with outstandingly remarkable values were identified as eligible for inclusion in the national wild and scenic river system. The determination that a river area did or did not contain one or more outstandingly remarkable value was a professional judgment on the part of the responsible official as informed by the interdisciplinary team, best available scientific information, and public participation. Pine Creek has two segments. The Payson segment of Pine Creek was determined eligible and is included in the Record of Decision with geologic as an outstandingly remarkable value and a recreational classification. The Tonto Basin segment of Pine Creek is free-flowing but was not identified as having an outstandingly remarkable value within the region of comparison. More

Concern	Instruction	How It Was Resolved
		information about the wild and scenic rivers eligibility process is available in FEIS Vol4, Appendix E.
Wild and Scenic River Designations (WSR-1)	Ensure *20171016 WSR Tonto NF Possibly Eligible Draft Rational Spreadsheet* is in the planning record and the response to comments provide the same information for the Lower Salt River's eligibility.	The 20171016 WSR Tonto NF Possibly Eligible Draft Rational Spreadsheet has been made into a PDF and been added to the project record. The spreadsheet created in 2017 was a product of this study. As the Lower Salt River was reevaluated based on comments received on the draft LMP, it was determined not eligible due to it not meeting the free-flowing requirement. Free-flowing is defined in the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act as "existing or flowing in a natural condition without impoundment, diversion, straightening, riprapping, or other modification of the waterway." (FSH 1909.2 Ch. 80 Sec 82.71). Waters flowing within the Lower Salt River are dictated by water delivery obligations as part of a federal reclamation project, and therefore do not flow in a natural condition. While the USDA-USDI Guidelines state "a river segment may flow between large impoundments will not necessarily preclude its designation," this section of the Salt River, south of Stewart Mountain Dam, does not meet the eligibility criteria because the flow rates on the Lower Salt River are artificial and intermittent dependent on water demand from the Phoenix Metropolitan area. In essence this stretch of river functions as a water delivery canal rather than a natural free-flowing river segment. More detailed information is available in the response to comments (FEIS Vol3) and in the Wild and Scenic Rivers Eligibility Process Appendix (FEIS Vol4).
Wild and Scenic River Designations (WSR-1)	Add a description of the Ellison Creek segment.	Ellison Creek includes two river segments, one in Payson and one in Pleasant Valley. Upon detailed interdisciplinary review of the river segments, using the outstandingly remarkable value (ORV) criteria and comparing with similar resources within the established region of comparison (state of AZ), it was determined that no ORV's were present. The 20171016 WSR Tonto NF Possibly Eligible Draft Rational Spreadsheet, where this information was documented, has been made into a PDF and included on the planning website [https://www.fs.usda.gov/detailfull/tonto/landmanagement/planning/?cid=fseprd594556&width=full] and also added to the project record.
Eligible Wild and Scenic River Management Area (WSR-3)	Move the information in footnote 87 to the final EIS (final EIS, volume 4, appendix E) and document the reason for the wording changes (e.g., new circumstances, new information, response to public comments). Documentation should also state whether the changes, new circumstances, or new information relevant to environmental concern does or does not require a supplemental EIS per 40 CFR 1502.9(d)(4), and provide supporting rationale.	The information in the referenced footnote, "The management corridor for eligible wild and scenic rivers includes National Forest System land generally encompassed within one-quarter mile of the river banks ordinary high water mark on either side of a river studied for eligibility or suitability that contains the river and its outstandingly remarkable values (FSM 1909.12, 80.5)" , though specified in the revised plan and elsewhere in the FEIS, has also been added to the FEIS, volume 4, appendix E to clarify how

Concern	Instruction	How It Was Resolved
		the forest defined the corridor of the segments considered in the final EIS. This change is not new information and does not change the analysis relevant to environmental concern per 40 CFR 1502.9(d)(4).
Designated and Eligible Wild and Scenic River Management Area Standards' Alignment with Other Policies (WSR-4)	Add Q&A's Relating to Wild and Scenic River Eligibility, Suitability, and Fish Passage Barrier Projects to the planning record to provide clarification on fish barrier projects.	The document Q&A's Relating to Wild and Scenic River Eligibility, Suitability, and Fish Passage Barrier Projects was added to the project record and distributed to select forest staff for reference. This is an existing white paper authored by the Forest Service's Washington Office.
Range Plan Components (RNG-1)	Cite Smith et al. 2012 in the references cited section of the final EIS.	This reference to the Guide to Rangeland Monitoring and Assessment was added to the references cited section of the final EIS.
Range Plan Components (RNG-1)	Amend GRZ-G-09 by replacing "stock and monitor" with "adaptive management", so that it states: An adaptive management approach incorporating best available science should be used when evaluating stocking rates.	GRZ-G-09 was amended to read, "An adaptive management approach incorporating best available science should be used when evaluating stocking rates." A footnote was added to specify, "One example of an appropriate form of adaptive management is what is known as "stock and monitor". The stock and monitor approach involves measuring the effects of actual stocking levels over time (either short-term or long-term) on utilization and utilization patterns, composition of vegetation, vigor, soil cover, and other factors (including wildlife) to see if changes in stocking and/or management are needed (Smith et al. 2012)."
Long-Term Impacts from Grazing (RNG-3)	Provide clarity in the final EIS about how improved grazing practices and improved resource conditions described in the final EIS on page 273 will provide for the long-term sustainability of rangelands.	Information was added to the FEIS to clarify, "In general, the Tonto provides for sustainable and productive rangelands by managing grazing at conservative use levels. This grazing intensity (based on percent use of forage by weight at the end of the growing season) should provide for plant integrity, density, diversity, and sustainability and regeneration over time (Holechek and Galt 2000; Holechek et al 2011; Heady 1994)" (FEIS, Vol 1, Rangelands, Forage, and Grazing, Affected Environment).
Long-Term Impacts from Grazing (RNG-3)	Add Term Grazing Permit Issuance Authorities Review and Guidance to the planning record.	Added Term Grazing Permit Issuance Authorities Review and Guidance to the planning record.
Grazing Suitability Analysis and	Clarify in the final EIS that when monitoring does not indicate progress toward desired future conditions, that adjustments would be made	Added statement under common to all in the Rangelands, Forage, and Grazing, Environmental Effects section which now reads, ". When monitoring does not indicate progress toward desired future conditions,

Concern	Instruction	How It Was Resolved
Consideration of Grazing Capability (RNG-5)	through permit administration to manage toward the desired conditions and align with the sustainability requirement of the planning rule.	adjustments would be made through permit administration to manage toward the desired conditions and align with the sustainability requirement of the planning rule."
Grazing Suitability Analysis and Consideration of Grazing Capability (RNG-5)	Clarify in the record how available information about capability and productivity of the plan area was considered.	The final EIS for the 1985 plan was added to the project record. This capability and productivity analysis, which was based on many factors that do not change over time such as elevation, slope, and distance to water, was done for the 1985 plan. The 2012 Planning Rule does not require the forest to analyze or document rangeland suitability, and the capability, and productivity for grazing. However, these same factors, as well as others, were analyzed and included in the 2017 assessment of current conditions for this new plan and considered as existing conditions for the final EIS.
Livestock Trespassing (RNG-7)	Update GRZ-G-08 to apply to both unauthorized livestock (livestock grazing the forest owned by someone not holding a grazing permit) and excess use (livestock owned by someone hold a grazing permit but outside the authorized allotment, season of use, or in greater numbers), as 36 CFR 222.50(h) requires documentation and billing for both situations.	GRZ-G-08 was created to address comments asking how we respond to trespass livestock. It reads, "When unauthorized livestock are found occupying National Forest lands, the owner should be promptly notified to remove them and prevent them from re-entering National Forest lands. If the owner is unknown or uncooperative, impoundment procedures should be initiated." Added footnote to refer the reader to 36 CFR 222.50(h) for more information on billing and documentation. An additional footnote was added with the definition of unauthorized livestock.
Livestock Trespassing (RNG-7)	Add a footnote that states: Unauthorized livestock are both livestock grazing the forest owned by someone not holding a grazing permit and livestock owned by someone hold a grazing permit but outside the authorized allotment, season of use, or in greater numbers.	This footnote instruction is incorrect. Livestock owned by someone holding a grazing permit but outside the authorized allotment, season of use, or in greater numbers is excess use, not unauthorized use. Included footnote that Unauthorized livestock are livestock grazing the forest owned by someone not holding a grazing permit. Deleted references to excess use, as that is part of permit administration, covered in FSH 2209.13.
Consideration of Best Available Scientific Information for Management of Livestock Grazing (RNG-8)	Document the best available scientific information used in grazing management on the forest, including design features and monitoring items, where impacts to resources might occur.	Literature referenced in the FEIS is considered to be the best available scientific information. Literature provided by objectors was reviewed and incorporated where applicable or appropriate. Best available scientific information is not limited to scientific research and literature citations but may also include local knowledge and local monitoring results (FSH 1909.12, zero code, section 07.13). Added forest-level monitoring by reference (which includes Reading-the-Range) as further best available scientific information to support the effects documented in the final EIS.
Consideration of Best Available	Complete a literature review of the objector's citations.	Literature provided by the objectors was reviewed and documented separately in the project record. Most of the literature provided pertains to site-specific analysis, which is analyzed for site-specific, project-level NEPA

Concern	Instruction	How It Was Resolved
Scientific Information for Management of Livestock Grazing (RNG-8)		decisions, which come later, and does not apply directly at the forest plan scale. A written review can be found in the project record.
Consideration of Best Available Scientific Information for Management of Livestock Grazing (RNG-8)	Incorporate existing monitoring (including Reading the Range results) as best available scientific information.	Further information was added to the Affected Environment section of the Rangelands, Forage, and Grazing section of the FEIS Vol 1 to incorporate existing monitoring, including Reading the Range specifically by reference and clarify how this information is used.
Livestock Grazing Utilization Limits (RNG-10)	Provide rationale in the ROD for why plan components to restrict grazing in desert ecological response units were not included in the plan.	A plan component was proposed in the Preliminary Proposed Plan (2017) as a standard that read "Allotments comprised of large percentages of Desert Ecological Response Units (Sonora-Mojave Mixed Salt Desert Scrub, Sonoran Paloverde-Mixed Cactus Desert Scrub, and Sonoran Mid Elevation Desert Scrub) should be closed, in whole or in part, as they become vacant." Based on public comments related to logistics and physical issues like fences or other barriers, to the PPP, this standard was dropped. Most allotments on the forest are comprised of multiple ERUs. It would not be feasible to remove just desert ERUs from allotments. Additionally, grazing in desert and other ERUs would be considered at the site-specific level in future allotment planning.
Livestock Grazing Utilization Limits (RNG-10)	Add a review of Smith 1993 and Rosiere 1975 to the planning record.	We were unable to find both Smith 1993 or Rosiere 1975 in the planning record or as submitted by objectors. A google search revealed Rosiere 1975 is about diet preferences of cattle by season. Preferences were inconsistent and mostly affected by availability. This article did not seem relevant to the analysis but was reviewed and added to the project record. However, the forest, in site specific analysis relies on more recent science and on the ground monitoring (such as Reading the Range data) when making allotment decisions.
Grazing Assessment	Document how the methodology and protocol for rangeland monitoring (e.g., the Reading the Range program) is consistent with FSH 2209.13, chapters 20 and 30, and Southwestern Region's FSH 2209.13, chapter 40.	R3 supplement to 2209.13 Ch 90 states "Procedures for rangeland assessment and monitoring are not limited to procedures in the current edition of the Rangeland Analysis and Management Training Guide. Other

Concern	Instruction	How It Was Resolved
Methodology (RNG-11)		sources of information related to appropriate procedures for rangeland assessments and monitoring for application with the Southwestern Region include the following sources, which are hereby incorporated by reference for use within the Southwestern Region." Number seven in the listed items is the CNVSP Field Guide. (USDA Forest Service Southwestern Region Fire and Range Common Non-Forested Vegetation Sampling Protocol (CNVSP) Field Guide, November 2013). Reading the Range is essentially the "Common Non-Forested Vegetation Sampling Protocol (CNVSP)" which is commonly used for rangeland assessment in the southwestern United States. Reading the Range, as administered by University of Arizona, typically omits the fuels related indicators and only collects the range related metrics of CNVSP. This information was added for clarity into the FEIS.
Targeted Grazing (RNG-12)	Amend GRZ-G-09 by replacing “stock and monitor” with “adaptive management”, so that it states: An adaptive management approach incorporating best available science should be used when evaluating stocking rates.	This plan component was updated as instructed.
Annual Operating Instructions (RNG-13)	Update the planning record to clarify that allotment grazing management modifications may be made through allotment management plans, term grazing permits, and/or annual operating instructions, all of which are done at the site-specific level and outside the scope of a forest plan.	Additional information was added to the Affected Environment section of the Rangelands, Forage, and Grazing Section (FEIS, Vol 1) to clarify "Allotment management is guided by a document called an Allotment Management Plan (AMP) The AMP is developed through a site-specific NEPA process. Ranchers apply for and may be issued term grazing permits. Grazing permits incorporate the AMP and may also include additional allotment-specific terms. Both the issuance of the permit and the development or amendment of an AMP that becomes a part of the permit is considered an administrative action that implements the NEPA-based decision (FSH 2209.13, chapter 90, section 94). Permanent grazing management modifications are authorized through the term grazing permit. Each year, the district ranger sends each permittee Annual Operating Instructions (AOI) to implement the AMP and permit. Annual operating instructions allow for temporary adjustments while implementing the terms and conditions of a term grazing permit. Annual operating instructions do not constitute a permit modification and are not an appealable decision (36 CFR 214.4). Allotment grazing management modifications may be made through the AMP, term grazing permits, and/or annual operating instructions, all of which are done at the site-specific level and outside the scope of a forest plan. "

Concern	Instruction	How It Was Resolved
Annual Operating Instructions (RNG-13)	Update the introduction of the Rangelands, Forage, and Grazing section of the plan (p. 41) to clearly explain that adjustments are made within the bounds of site-specific NEPA decisions.	The introduction of the Rangelands, Forage, and Grazing section of the plan was updated to clearly explain that adjustments are made within the bounds of site-specific NEPA decisions. It now reads, "Within the scope of the site-specific NEPA allotment grazing decisions, adjustments are made annually through the annual operating instructions to respond to changing conditions and move towards desired conditions. Authorized number of livestock, pasture season of use and timing, salt locations, and pasture rest periods may be adjusted as needed through the annual operating instructions. Information from monitoring such as frequency plots, canopy cover, pace frequency transects, photo points, and allotment inspections inform appropriate adjustments. Other factors such as weather patterns, likelihood of plant regrowth, and previous years' utilization levels, are also considered in annual operating instructions development. If repeat monitoring indicates annual adjustments are not achieving the desired effects, further adjustments may be made to the allotment management plan or term grazing permit. Permitted number of livestock as well as grazing intensity may be adjusted up or down according to the grazing decision to move towards desired conditions."
Annual Operating Instructions (RNG-13)	Remove reference to the Recissions Act of 1995, which is no longer applicable.	Reference to the Recissions Act of 1995, which is no longer applicable, was removed in the plan and in the response to comment section (FEIS Vol 3, Concern Statement 184)
Minerals Geophysical Investigation (MIN-4)	Update MMAM-S-04 to clarify that it does not constrain the public, such as by re-wording the standard to: The District Ranger shall confirm that any person proposing to conduct geophysical investigations (e.g., induced polarization, gravity surveys, magnetic surveys, seismic investigations) submits a Notice of Intent under 36 CFR 228.4(a).	MMAM-S-04 was deleted in the final plan. Existing law, regulations, and Forest Service policy covers the intent of this standard and it was found to be redundant.
Lands and Special Uses Plan Components (SPU-1)	Update the language in SU-S-03 from "operating plan" to "operating plan or an operating agreement", per 36 CFR 251.56(h)(2) and 36 CFR 251.51. The standard should read: "Authorizations for utilities must incorporate an operating plan or an operating agreement, which describes means of access, requirements for road construction, reconstruction, and maintenance responsibilities and incorporated design elements to minimize resource damage (e.g., dust abatement, preventing the spread of invasive weeds) from these activities."	SU-S-03 was updated as instructed. It now reads, "Authorizations for utilities must incorporate an operating plan or an operating agreement, which describes means of access, requirements for road construction, reconstruction, and maintenance responsibilities and incorporated design elements to minimize resource damage (e.g., dust abatement, preventing the spread of invasive weeds) from these activities."
Utility Corridor Guidelines (SPU-2)	Document specific rationale for changes to EG-G-01, EG-G-04, and EG-G-06 in the planning record. Documentation should include the reason for the change (e.g., new circumstances, new information, response to public comments) and should state whether the changes, new	Documentation was added to the project record as instructed. Concerns regarded changes made to these guidelines between the draft and final plans. EG-G-01 Draft Plan - Distribution lines and smaller pipelines should occur

Concern	Instruction	How It Was Resolved
	circumstances, or new information relevant to environmental concerns is or is not significant.	within existing road systems or other previously disturbed areas. EG-G-01 Final Plan - New electrical distribution lines and smaller pipelines, or similar utility, should occur along or within existing road systems or other previously disturbed areas. Rationale – Because this section is specifically for Energy Production and Delivery the guideline should only address New Electrical Distribution lines. All utilities (including electrical distribution lines) also fall under the Special Uses category which has the following similar Guidelines; SU-G-01 Utilities should utilize existing facilities, roads, sites, and corridors unless new sites can provide better social and/or ecological resource benefits. SU-G-07 Utility line corridors should be designed to blend with the existing character of the landscape EG-E-05 Draft Plan - Energy facilities and transmission corridors should avoid locations in areas identified as having a demonstrated high risk to wildlife, cultural resources, and agricultural land uses. EG-G-04 Final Plan - New energy facilities and transmission corridors should avoid locations in areas identified as having a demonstrated high risk to at-risk species, cultural resources, or other resources. Rationale - This change is not significant. All project level proposals for use of National Forest System lands (including energy facilities and transmission corridors) are reviewed for consistency with law (including the Multiple Use-Sustained Yield Act of 1960), regulation, and policy. High risk resources will be identified through that review. EG-G-07 Draft Plan - New electrical-utility lines of 33 kilovolts or less, and telephone lines should be buried, unless one or more of the following applies: a. visual quality objectives of the area can be met using an overhead line; b. burial is not feasible due to geologic hazard or unfavorable geologic conditions; c. it would result in greater long-term site disturbance; or d. it is not technically feasible. EG-G-06 Final Plan - New distribution lines and telephone lines should be buried, unless one or more of the following applies:

Concern	Instruction	How It Was Resolved
		a. scenic integrity objectives of the area can be met using an overhead line. b. burial is not feasible due to geologic hazard, unfavorable geologic conditions, or presence of cultural resources. c. it would result in greater long-term site disturbance; or d. it is not technically feasible. Rationale – "Distribution Line" is common industry term defined by the U.S. Department of Energy Office of Electricity Delivery and Energy Reliability as less than 34 kilowatts. Therefore, this change is not significant, and is nothing but use of the proper term. "Scenic Integrity Objectives" are part of the Scenery Management System. More information can be found in the Scenery section of the revised LMP and on the project website.
Roads and Mining Access (TRN-1)	Include a statement in chapter 1 of the plan that nothing in the plan affects, nor does it have the authority to affect, valid existing rights established by statute or legal instruments.	A bullet was added in Chapter 1 under Forest Plan Framework and Organization that states, "A land management plan...does not affect valid existing rights established by statute or legal instruments".
Species-Specific Plan Components (WL-1)	Include a determination for species of conservation concern in the final EIS that clarifies the tie between plan components, the projected changes in the environment, the stressors plan components make or manage, and the outcome for the species (36 CFR 219.9 as described in FSH 1909.12, chapter 20, section 23.13). For species of conservation concern, specify the ecological conditions necessary to maintain a viable population within the plan area.	A viability determination for each SCC species has been created in the species crosswalk in Vol. 4 - Appendix G.
Habitat Connectivity (WL-2)	Include a determination section for each species that clarifies the relationship between plan components, the projected changes in the environment, the stressors plan components make or manage, and the outcome for the species (36 CFR 219.9 as described in FSH 1909.12, chapter 20, section 23.13). For species of conservation concern, specify the ecological conditions necessary to maintain a viable population within the plan area.	The relationship between species identified in the plan & FEIS to plan components and stressors (=threats) are addressed in detail in Appendix G. A viability determination for the SCC species and at-risk species has been created in the species cross-walk of Vol. 4 - Appendix G.
Habitat Connectivity (WL-2)	Reconcile language between the ROD and appendix B of the final EIS regarding the description of species viability evaluation (e.g., page 11 of the ROD and plan components that increase probability of viability).	Language has been updated in the ROD to better reflect the species viability evaluation and assumptions made in that analysis. The ROD now reads, " Provide for the viability of all species, including the 72 at-risk terrestrial and aquatic insect, animal, and plant species. Through habitat desired conditions needed by those species, where known, and standards, guidelines, and objectives that address species- identified needs, maintain or improve the inherent ecological conditions and minimize disturbance in the areas where species occur. " In cases where coarse-filter, habitat related plan direction is insufficient to provide necessary ecological conditions,

Concern	Instruction	How It Was Resolved
		then additional, species-specific (or fine-filter) plan components, including standards or guidelines, have been included in the plan to provide such ecological conditions. On the Tonto National Forest, such plan components are rarely relevant to only a single species, but threats to species persistence and their accompanying plan components generally apply to groups of species. More information can be found in Appendices B and G where viability is discussed.
Habitat Connectivity (WL-2)	Document in the planning record how the forest considered Belote et al. 2016 and Fields et al. 2010.	As part of Objection review process and literature review process, both of these citations were located and evaluated in the context of applicability to the EIS analysis. Belote et al. 2016 is a compilation of complex modelling schema that made general assumptions about federal lands on the national scale. For the Tonto, existing and proposed Wilderness areas, plus Research Natural Areas/Botanical areas, and Wild and Scenic River corridors are presented in EIS. The citation does not provide any new information that would alter our analysis. For Fields et al. 2010, the citation provides a broad scale look at connectivity for the nation in a six-page paper. The assertion about Tonto's connectivity value cannot be verified via this paper as it utilized a specialized filtering & modeling system not typically examined for a multi-dimensional forest planning effort. Corridors, connectivity, and their value were stated in the LMP. Overall, the literature doesn't provide any new or applicable information and does not necessitate a change of our analysis.
Habitat Corridors and Safety (WL-3)	Modify WFP-G-07 by adding “crossing”, as shown in bold below: New infrastructure or constructed features (e.g., fences, roads, recreation sites, facilities, drinkers, crossings, and culverts) should be designed and maintained to minimize negative impacts to the movement and dispersal of wildlife, fish, and rare plants. Infrastructure and constructed features already present that negatively impact movement and dispersal should be modified or removed when no longer in use in order to improve connectivity. Barriers may be used to protect native species or prevent movement of nonnative species.	The word "crossing" was added to the plan component text in the LMP.
Ecological Conditions for Mexican Spotted Owl	Clarify in the final EIS how restoration of ponderosa pine and mixed conifer vegetation types contribute to the recovery of Mexican spotted owl, such as is documented in the biological opinion.	A clarification was added to the final EIS, Volume 4, Appendix G, under Mexican Spotted Owl to document how restoration of ponderosa pine and mixed conifer vegetation types contribute to the recovery of Mexican spotted owl.

Concern	Instruction	How It Was Resolved
Recovery (WL-MSO-1 and MSO-3)		
Ecological Conditions for Mexican Spotted Owl Recovery (WL-MSO-1 and MSO-3)	Provide a determination section in the EIS and optionally in the plan to clarify how the plan will contribute to the recovery of Mexican spotted owl.	A determination for MSO was added to Appendix G of the final EIS to clarify how the plan will contribute to the recovery of Mexican spotted owl. This determination also directs the reader to where more information can be found.
Ecological Conditions for Mexican Spotted Owl Recovery (WL-MSO-1 and MSO-3)	Include the Southwestern Region's Mexican spotted owl strategy in the planning record, which provides a framework to ensure that all vegetation management projects in Mexican spotted owl habitat are compliant with the approved Mexican spotted owl recovery plan(s). A 2021 Regional Forester letter outlines guidance for implementing the Mexican spotted owl management strategy and includes six measures as the foundation for the conservation and recovery program for this species in the Southwestern Region.	The Regional Forester Guidance in Implementing Mexican Spotted Owl Management Strategy was added to the project record labeled "20210127_MSO_SixPointStrategyFrom RF".
Ecological Conditions for Mexican Spotted Owl Recovery (WL-MSO-1 and MSO-3)	Add clarification that the forest will generally prioritize retention of the largest trees at a site during restoration treatments, unless exceptions are needed to meet specific objectives related to forest health or other needs.	A determination for MSO was added to Appendix G of the final EIS which reads in part, "Plan components presented in Table 97 (final EIS Vol 2) will benefit the structure, function, and composition of multiple Ecological Response Units (ERUs), thereby benefiting multiple wildlife species, including Mexican Spotted Owl. The integration of Forestry and Forest Products (FP) and ERU plan components indicate large trees, snags, and downed woody debris will be retained during restoration treatments (FP-DC-01, FP-G-03, ERU-PPE-G-02, ERU-PPF-G-01, ERU-MCD-G-01, ERU-MCW-G-01, ERU-DC-03, ERU-MCW-DC-03). Implementation of conservation measures on a project-by-project basis will allow greater conservation of MSO Primary Constituent Elements Related to Forest Structure, Prey Base, Adequate Prey Species, and Elements Related to Canyon Habitat."
Ecological Conditions for Mexican Spotted Owl Recovery (WL-MSO-1 and MSO-3)	Correct the following clerical errors: · Replace"-15" with "-1" in ERU-MCW-G-15. · Replace "pant" with "plant" in WFP-G-04.	These clerical errors have been corrected.
	bullet combined with above	
	bullet combined with above	

Concern	Instruction	How It Was Resolved
Mexican Spotted Owl Monitoring (WL-MSO-2)	Clarify the monitoring that the forest intends to conduct for Mexican spotted owls and reference United States Fish and Wildlife Service's conservation recommendation from the biological opinion. (pp. 185-188).	A two-page monitoring summary which included this information was created and added to project record labeled "20230623_MSO_MonitoringStatement".
Mexican Gray Wolf Recovery (WL-W-1)	Include a literature review of the references provided by the objector during the comment period in the record.	Objector's literature was reviewed and considered. This review is documented and added to the project record labeled as "20230630_MexicanGreyWolfLiteratureReview".
Validity of Riparian Areas, Seeps, Springs, Wetlands, and Riparian Management Zones Plan Components (WTR-3)	Clarify in the plan (e.g., pp. 112-113) why "dry washes with…no riparian vegetation that have riparian vegetation downstream due to subsurface flow through the stream channel" should be designated as riparian areas. Alternatively, remove "or no" from page 113 of the plan: "Finally, a riparian management zone can be modified to incorporate ephemeral channels with minimal or no riparian vegetation that support riparian vegetation downstream due to subsurface flow through the stream channel or adjacent alluvial sediments as described in FSH 1909.12 (23.11e)."	Clarified in the plan, under Riparian Management Zones, and removed "or no" now reads Finally, a riparian management zone can be modified to incorporate ephemeral channels with minimal riparian vegetation where there is evidence that those areas that support riparian vegetation downstream due to subsurface flow through the stream channel or adjacent alluvial sediments as described in FSH 1909.12 (23.11e). Evidence of subsurface flow through an area includes groundwater at depths less than 10 meters and/or ephemeral channels with perennial or intermittent flow upstream and downstream of them.
Validity of Riparian Areas, Seeps, Springs, Wetlands, and Riparian Management Zones Plan Components (WTR-3)	Include a rational for why or approximately how many areas of washes without riparian vegetation could be protected or how the analysis of "dry washes with … no riparian vegetation that have riparian vegetation downstream due to subsurface flow through the stream channel" would be undertaken.	See response above. Ephemeral channels as riparian management zones would only be included where there is evidence of subsurface connection to downstream systems. Criteria for determining this would be the existence of both upstream and downstream riparian areas with an interrupted area of ephemeral in between or a shallow depth to groundwater that would be indicative of an alluvial system and subsurface flow.
Validity of Riparian Areas, Seeps, Springs, Wetlands, and Riparian Management Zones Plan Components (WTR-3)	Remove "in riparian areas" from RMZ-S-01 to clarify the need to limit projects in riparian areas: "All projects in riparian areas shall identify and delineate the riparian management zones."	Removed
New Wells and Pipelines (WTR-5)	Add a reference in the EIS and plan to explain the source of the definition of "groundwater dependent ecosystem".	This reference was already in the plan and some volumes of the EIS. To make it more clear, however, we added specific citation to USFS 2022 (revised version of the 2012 document we originally included) to the first time we mention GDEs in the plan as well as the first time the term is used in

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		the WAT section of the plan and in Vol 1 of the final EIS on and to the definition of GDEs in final EIS Vol 2.
New Wells and Pipelines (WTR-5)	Remove references to the rescinded FSM 2560 and reference current FSH or FSM definition and direction for groundwater dependent ecosystems. If this is not defined in the FSH or FSM, provide a definition from best available scientific information.	Reference to FSM 2560 removed in response to comment. Response now reads: "Groundwater dependent ecosystems are defined in the Forest Service's 2012 and 2022 General Technical Reports on Inventorying and Monitoring Groundwater Dependent Ecosystems as communities of plants, animals, and other organisms whose extent and life processes are dependent on access to or discharge of groundwater. (USFS 2022) This interaction between ground water and surface water may be critical for sustaining aquatic and riparian ecosystems along with numerous resources and activities that are dependent upon them. Therefore, we must manage groundwater and surface water on National Forest System lands as a hydrologically connected system. This management approach has been re-established in the Watersheds and Water Resources Guidelines as, "Groundwater and surface water on National Forest System lands should be managed as one hydrologically connected system."
WAT-G-13 and WAT-DC-01 (WTR-7)	Add "mining" to WAT-DC-01.	Mining was added as one of the multiple uses that watersheds support in this desired condition. WAT-DC-01 now reads "Watersheds support multiple uses (e.g., timber, recreation, grazing, cultural, mining) with no long-term decline in ecological conditions as measured by the Watershed Condition Framework or an equivalent method and provide high-quality water for downstream communities dependent on them."
WAT-G-13 and WAT-DC-01 (WTR-7)	Add rationale for why the forest modified WAT-G-13 to the planning record.	WAT-G-13 was changed to simplify/clarify it. However, based on this instruction we have changed it back to the original, with the addition of "where feasible" as requested by the objector. This guideline now reads, ". Where Forest Service management contributes to designation of a water body an as impaired water body, recommendations in Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) assessments should be implemented to enable the Tonto to assist with meeting or exceeding water quality standards for the water body. Best management practices, watershed condition improvement treatments, or other identified water quality improvement practices should be utilized to improve water quality in impaired or non-attaining streams and water bodies without completed TMDL assessments where feasible."
Protections from Livestock (WTR-10)	Include descriptions of how monitoring of grazing effects in riparian areas is conducted and used to adjust management and ensure progress toward desired conditions.	The introduction of the Rangelands, Forage, and Grazing section of the plan was updated to clearly explain how adjustments are made to make progress towards desired conditions. It now reads, "New or revised allotment management plans typically include new or modified fences, corrals, salt locations, and artificial water sources designed to make progress towards the desired conditions in the plan to promote healthy soil, watershed and

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		riparian conditions, and consider wildlife interactions, and wildlife movement. Within the scope of the site-specific NEPA allotment grazing decisions, adjustments are made annually through the annual operating instructions to respond to changing conditions and move towards desired conditions. Authorized number of livestock, pasture season of use and timing, salt locations, and pasture rest periods may be adjusted as needed through the annual operating instructions. Information from monitoring such as frequency plots, canopy cover, pace frequency transects, photo points, and allotment inspections inform appropriate adjustments. Other factors such as weather patterns, likelihood of plant regrowth, and previous years' utilization levels, are also considered in annual operating instructions development. If repeat monitoring indicates annual adjustments are not achieving the desired effects, further adjustments may be made to the allotment management plan or term grazing permit. Permitted number of livestock as well as grazing intensity may be adjusted up or down according to the grazing decision to move towards desired conditions." Also added to Riparian/watershed monitoring questions "associated indicators" column specifics regarding collecting trend data. for example, "Watershed condition indicators related to water quality, water quantity, aquatic habitat, aquatic biota, riparian/wetland vegetation, roads and trails, soils, fire regime, forest cover, rangeland vegetation, terrestrial invasive species, and forest health and where qualitative or quantitative monitoring data are collected for these indicators how they are changing over time"
Protections from Livestock (WTR-10)	Clarify that allotment management plans are the appropriate management tool to direct site-specific management and how the adaptive management actions described in those plans are used to avoid grazing impacts.	The introduction of the Rangelands, Forage, and Grazing section of the plan was updated to clearly explain how adjustments are made to make progress towards desired conditions. It now reads, "New or revised allotment management plans typically include new or modified fences, corrals, salt locations, and artificial water sources designed to make progress towards the desired conditions in the plan to promote healthy soil, watershed and riparian conditions, and consider wildlife interactions, and wildlife movement. Within the scope of the site-specific NEPA allotment grazing decisions, adjustments are made annually through the annual operating instructions to respond to changing conditions and move towards desired conditions. Authorized number of livestock, pasture season of use and timing, salt locations, and pasture rest periods may be adjusted as needed through the annual operating instructions. Information from monitoring such as

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Groundwater Dependent Ecosystem (WTR-13)	Remove references to the proposed FSM 2560 and reference the current FSH or FSM definition and direction for groundwater dependent ecosystems. If this is not defined in the FSH or FSM, provide a definition from best available scientific information.	Changes made - see response to instructions in this table for New Wells and Pipelines for further information.
Replacing "Herbivory" with "Livestock Grazing" (WTR-15)	Provide documentation in the planning record as to why the change was made from herbivory to livestock grazing in RMZ-DC-04. Documentation should include the reason for the change (e.g., new circumstances, new information, response to public comments) and should state whether the changes, new circumstances, or new information relevant to environmental concerns is or is not significant.	The change that was made was from "herbivory" to "livestock grazing" in the desired condition: "Livestock grazing does not impact the long-term health of riparian vegetation. Vigor and diversity maintains or moves riparian vegetation as represented by Terrestrial Ecological Unit Inventory site potential and other suitable references to low departure from desired conditions for riparian vegetation types." This change was made so that the impacts of wild herbivores, e.g., elk and deer, are not taken into consideration for this desired condition. The management of them is under the purview of the Arizona Game and Fish Department. Livestock grazing is specifically called out here instead of herbivory because it is under the purview of the Forest Service and management action can be taken to improve the desired condition. This is a clarifying change and does not alter the analysis.