Chapter 3. Management Area Direction

Management areas are areas that have similar management intent and a common management strategy. The plan decisions and other content are described for each management area in this chapter. See chapter 1 for descriptions of plan decisions and other content. This direction does not substitute for, or repeat, forestwide direction. In the event that a plan decision in this section and the plan decision in another section conflict, a project or activity level evaluation may be required to resolve the conflict; generally the more restrictive plan decision prevails. Plan decisions apply to projects or activities where site conditions provide an inherent capability to meet those plan decisions.

Plan decisions for management area direction are displayed in shaded boxes to distinguish them from other sections of the plan.

Plan decisions and other content for forestwide direction (chapter 2) and suitability (chapter 4) should also be consulted.

Twelve management areas have been identified and are listed in table 4 below. Several management areas are designated special areas, such as wilderness. These are places that have been designated by statute or through past administrative process because of their unique or special characteristics. In addition, there are two categories of preliminary administrative recommendations that occur as separate management areas (recommended research natural areas and recommended wilderness). Those areas recommended for designation are managed to protect their special characteristics until a decision on the designation is made. Table 4 shows the different management areas on the Apache-Sitgreaves NFs. Maps of the management areas can be found in appendix F.

Table 4. Management areas of the Apache-Sitgreaves NFs (acres of NFS land)

Management Area	Size (acres)
General Forest	1,224,071
Community-Forest Intermix	60,564
High Use Developed Recreation Area	16,549
Energy Corridor	2,547
Wild Horse Territory	18,761
Wildlife Quiet Area	50,173
Natural Landscape	404,802
Research Natural Area	261
Recommended Research Natural Area	7,814
Wilderness	23, 234
Primitive Area	199,502
Recommended Wilderness	7,074

General Forest

Background for General Forest

The General Forest Management Area encompasses the majority of the Apache-Sitgreaves NFs. All PNVTs occur in this management area. This area is capable of providing a variety of forest products—both commercial and noncommercial—that may contribute to local and regional communities. The management area contains undeveloped areas as well as developed facilities and open roads and trails. It also contains special areas including eligible and suitable wild and scenic rivers, national recreation trails, and scenic byways. The scenery in some parts of this area may reflect an intensively managed landscape where human influence is evident.

Desired Conditions for General Forest

- Watershed condition rating is at satisfactory.
- Landscapes in the General Forest Management Area vary from moderately altered where human activities are evident (low scenic integrity) to natural where generally only ecological changes occur (very high scenic integrity).
- Recreation opportunities range from semiprimitive nonmotorized to rural.

Management Approaches for General Forest

The emphasis of this area is to restore priority 6th level HUC watersheds, restore fire-adapted ecosystems, reduce the threat of uncharacteristic wildfire, and provide forest products. A wide variety of management activities occur and a wide variety of forest products are available within this management area. Lands identified as suitable for timber production have a regularly scheduled harvest of commercial timber.

Related Plan Content for General Forest

See all resource and special area (Scenic Byways, National Recreation Trails, Eligible and Suitable Wild and Scenic Rivers) sections listed in chapter 2.

Community-Forest Intermix

Background for Community-Forest Intermix

The Community-Forest Intermix Management Area consists of National Forest System (NFS) lands that are within one-half mile of communities-at-risk. Due to the threat of fire moving into or from developed areas, more intensive treatments (including regular maintenance) may be needed to reduce the risk of uncharacteristic wildfire and restore fire-adapted ecosystems. This management area may act as a zone in which fire suppression activities can be safely and effectively conducted. Likewise, it can act as a buffer to protect forest resources.

The Community-Forest Intermix Management Area makes up a portion of the wildland-urban interface (WUI). The WUIs were identified in community wildfire protection plans (CWPPs) and may be located in several management areas. A WUI includes areas around human development at imminent risk from wildfire.

Desired Conditions for Community-Forest Intermix

- The Community-Forest Intermix Management Area is composed of smaller groups of trees that are more widely spaced than other forested areas. These conditions result in fires that burn primarily on the forest floor and rarely spread as crown fire.
- There is legal and adequate access to public lands for resource management and recreation.
- As a result of forest management, most wildfires are low to mixed severity surface fires resulting in limited loss of structures or ecosystem function.
- Residents and visitors are knowledgeable regarding wildfire protection of their homes and property, defensible space, and appropriate uses of the forests.
- These areas provide a safer firefighting environment than the general forest.
- Native grasses, forbs, shrubs, and litter (i.e., fine fuels) are abundant enough to maintain and support natural fire regimes, protect soils, and support water infiltration.
- The composition, density, structure, and mosaic of vegetative conditions reduce uncharacteristic wildfire hazard to local communities and forest ecosystems.
- Ponderosa pine and dry mixed conifer forest structure is similar to forestwide conditions or is composed of smaller and more widely spaced tree groups than in the general forest.
- Wet mixed conifer and spruce-fir forests are growing in an overall more open condition than the wet mixed conifer forest outside of the Community-Forest Intermix Management Area. These conditions result in fires that burn primarily on the forest floor and rarely spread as crown fire.
- Where potential occurs, pure deciduous stands (e.g., aspen, Gambel oak) act as natural firebreaks and enhance scenery.
- Grasslands have less than 10 percent woody canopy cover.
- Piñon-juniper stands have open canopy conditions.
- The integrity of riparian areas is maintained.
- Vandalism and pilfering of cultural resources are uncommon.
- Landscapes in the Community-Forest Intermix Management Area vary from moderately altered where human activities are evident (low scenic integrity) to natural appearing where human activities do not stand out (high scenic integrity).
- Recreation opportunities range from roaded natural to rural.

Guidelines for Community-Forest Intermix

- Unauthorized infrastructure should be removed.
- To reduce fire hazard and spread of insects and disease onto adjacent lands, slash should be treated (e.g., removal, pull back, relocation, burned) as soon as possible.

- Where more than 80 percent of the host species or 90 percent of the area is infected with dwarf mistletoe (if regeneration or deferred treatment is not feasible), then thinning from below and/or prescribed fire should be used as needed for fire hazard reduction.
- Due to the greater values to be protected (e.g., homes, property), tree basal areas should be at the lower end of the desired range and openings should occur at the higher end of the desired range (as described in the applicable PNVT desired conditions).
- Retention of fire-resistant tree species (e.g., ponderosa pine, Douglas-fir, pure aspen) should be emphasized in the wet mixed conifer and spruce-fir forested PNVTs to reduce fire hazard.

Management Approaches for Community-Forest Intermix

Forest managers work toward achieving the goals outlined in the CWPPs for the counties within the Apache-Sitgreaves NFs. Within this management area, these include the CWPP for At-Risk-Communities in Apache County, and the Sitgreaves CWPP (includes Apache, Coconino, and Navajo Counties).

Figure 10. Treated area within the CFI that survived the 2011 Wallow Fire

Treatments may occur more often than in other management areas. Both mechanized methods and prescribed fire may be used regularly. A higher degree of temporary ground disturbance may occur. The amount of snags and residual large coarse woody debris is generally lower than in the General Forest Management Area. In addition, forest openings are larger and basal areas are lower than in the General Forest Management Area. The management approach within this management area is to complete initial treatments to reduce fire hazard. Once initial treatments are complete, the focus is to maintain the investment and desired conditions primarily through prescribed fire and mechanical treatments. Other objectives may also be considered.

Best available control technologies are used to limit smoke impacts from forest management activities. Forest managers coordinate with adjacent land management agencies and tribes to help reduce the impacts of prescribed fire programs on nearby communities. The forests work closely with adjacent landowners and communities, particularly their planning and zoning departments, to encourage new and existing developments to take into account measures to protect people, property, and natural resources from wildfire.

Related Plan Content for Community-Forest Intermix

See the following sections: All PNVTs, Scenic Byways, National Recreation Trails, Eligible and Suitable Wild and Scenic Rivers, Scenic Resources, Lands, Cultural Resources, American Indian Rights and Interests, and Wildland Fire Management.

High Use Developed Recreation Area

Background for High Use Developed Recreation Area

The High Use Developed Recreation Area Management Area includes places with relatively high levels of visitor use that are managed to provide a wide variety of opportunities to a broad spectrum of visitors. High use developed recreation areas contain one or more facilities and may accommodate large numbers of people. They are associated with, and often provide, access to popular destinations, transportation corridors, scenic byways, scenic vistas, lakes, and streams. Interaction among visitors is high. The High Use Developed Recreation Area Management Area includes the following recreation areas: Rim Lakes, Fool Hollow, Woodland Lake Park, Big Lake, Greer Lakes, and Luna Lake.

Desired Conditions for High Use Developed Recreation Area

- Facilities are well maintained and provide for accessibility, user safety, comfort, and convenience, as well as protection of resources.
- Visitors can expect to see a wide range of human activities and development (including roads, trails, interpretive sites, campgrounds, trailheads, fences, and day-use facilities).
- The evidence of management activities is common.
- The surrounding landscape is natural appearing, pastoral, or historic with variations created by the recreational facilities.
- Trails are well marked and may include features such as loop systems or interpretive information.
- Recreation opportunities range from semiprimitive motorized to rural.

Guidelines for High Use Developed Recreation Area

- Roads, facilities, and signing should be designed to blend with surroundings.
- Management should focus on operation and maintenance, safety, aesthetics, and control of noxious weeds and nonnative invasive species.

Management Approaches for High Use Developed Recreation Area

Recreation site plans describe the detailed management for each high use developed recreation area, including vegetation management plans for campgrounds. In addition to recreation use, other uses (including livestock grazing, timber management, and wildlife management) may occur in combination with surrounding recreation and scenic desired conditions.

Related Plan Content for High Use Developed Recreation Area

See the following sections: Developed Recreation, Scenic Resources, Scenic Byways, National Recreation Trails, and Eligible and Suitable Wild and Scenic Rivers.

Energy Corridor

Background for Energy Corridor

The Energy Corridor Management Area includes the three existing high voltage energy corridors located on the Apache-Sitgreaves NFs. Two corridors traverse the Sitgreaves NF: one containing 500 kV transmission lines and one containing 345 kV transmission lines. These are operated by Arizona Public Service and the Salt River Project. One 345 kV transmission line runs through a portion of the Clifton Ranger District; it is operated by Tucson Electric Power. Local distribution and low voltage transmission lines (up to 230 kV) are not included in this management area but are part of the management area in which they are physically located.

Although not mapped as a management area, there is one corridor that has been designated for future transmission facilities; it is located on the Sitgreaves NF and shares the same centerline as the existing 500 kV transmission line. It was set in place in January 2009 by the Secretary of Agriculture's Record of Decision for the "Designation of Section 368 Energy Corridors on National Forest System Land in 10 Western States." The corridor has a width of 3,500 feet and is multimodal. The existence of this corridor does not authorize any projects, nor does it mandate that future rights-of-way locate in the corridor, or preclude the Forest Service from denying a project or requiring design revisions. If transmission facilities or rights-of-way are authorized in this corridor, this plan would be amended to adjust the Energy Corridor Management Area.

Desired Conditions for Energy Corridor

- Energy corridors serve a public benefit by providing for a reliable supply of energy essential to local, regional, and national economies.
- Vegetative conditions and land uses within the energy corridor facilitate the operation and maintenance of the associated facilities and infrastructure.
- Vegetation consists predominantly of grasses, forbs, shrubs, low-growing trees, and sapling-sized trees.

Standards for Energy Corridor

- Obsolete or unused facilities within energy corridors shall be removed and the areas rehabilitated.

Guidelines for Energy Corridor

- Energy corridors should be managed as nonmotorized areas to avoid conflicts with corridor operations and maintenance needs, although operations and maintenance activities may use motorized equipment.

- To limit impacts to undisturbed areas, new utilities (e.g., power lines, telephone lines, gas lines) should be colocated within existing corridors whenever technically feasible, within existing rights-of-way (including road rights-of-way), or follow major transportation routes.
- Within and adjacent to energy corridors, vegetation should be managed similarly to the Community-Forest Intermix Management Area so that facilities stay operational and reduce the hazards of human-caused damage, damage from wildland fire, and falling trees.
- Clearing of vegetation along rights-of-way, facilities, and permitted sites should be limited to that which achieves desired conditions, abates an identified hazard to the facility, or for operational efficiency and weed control.
- Trees and shrubs in riparian areas should only be removed when there is an imminent threat to facilities and, in these cases, trees should be left for large coarse woody debris recruitment into the stream and riparian system.
- When planning and implementing vegetation treatments (e.g., corridor maintenance), vegetation within riparian zones that provides rooting strength important for bank stability should be encouraged.
- As utility facilities are maintained or replaced, relocation of corridors outside of riparian areas should be considered to reduce potential impacts to these ecologically sensitive areas.
- Invasive plant species should be aggressively controlled within energy corridors to prevent or minimize spread.

Management Approaches for Energy Corridor

Existing energy corridors are managed according to approved management plans. Energy utility companies also comply with maintenance standards enforced by the North American Electric Reliability Corporation. Energy corridors are generally not managed to provide recreation opportunities. They are managed for very low scenic integrity where vegetation and structural changes may attract attention and dominate the landscape when viewed from nearby.

Forest managers work toward establishing voluntary agreements with permit holders to reduce the effects of forest conditions and activities on the facilities. Future applicants are not precluded from proposing a project outside a designated energy corridor, though consideration and approval of such a request may require a plan amendment. Applicants would also need approval from the Arizona Corporation Commission.

Related Plan Content for Energy Corridor

See the following sections: Scenic Resources, Lands, Special Uses, National Recreation Trails, and Eligible and Suitable Wild and Scenic Rivers.

Wild Horse Territory

Background for Wild Horse Territory

This management area contains most of the Heber Wild Horse Territory, approximately 19,700 acres,[1] on the Black Mesa Ranger District. The territory was established in 1973 under the Wild Free Roaming Horse and Burro Act of 1971 (Public Law 92-195) with the purpose of providing use by and for the protection of wild horses. The Heber Wild Horse Territory is considered a special area by the Forest Service. It is thought that the originally designated Heber wild horse herd is extirpated from the territory. Records from 1992 indicate that only two mares were known to exist within the territory. Currently (2014), there are bands of free-ranging stray and/or feral equine (e.g., horses) both inside and outside the territory.

Desired Conditions for Wild Horse Territory

- Grazing is in balance with available forage (i.e., grazing and browsing by authorized livestock, wild horses, and wildlife do not exceed established use levels).
- Horse numbers within the territory are aligned with the appropriate management level[2] as described in the "Heber Wild Horse Territory Management Plan."
- The Wild Horse Territory Management Area contains landscapes that vary from moderately altered where human activities are evident (low scenic integrity) to natural appearing where human activities do not stand out (high scenic integrity).
- Recreation opportunities range from semiprimitive nonmotorized to roaded natural.

Guidelines for Wild Horse Territory

- When wild horse populations exceed the appropriate management level, horses should be removed in accordance with the "Heber Wild Horse Territory Management Plan" (when completed).

Management Approaches for Wild Horse Territory

The forests work in cooperation with the Arizona Game and Fish Department (AZGFD), Arizona Department of Agriculture, White Mountain and San Carlos Apache Tribes, livestock permittees, Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), neighboring landowners, and partners to keep grazing use in balance with available forage. Development of the Heber Wild Horse Territory Management Plan will take into consideration whether a wild horse herd, as defined by Public Law 92-95, currently exists inside and/or outside the Heber Wild Horse Territory. In addition, based on site-specific analysis, the management plan will determine whether the territory has sufficient suitable habitat and essential habitat components to sustain a free-roaming wild horse herd, an appropriate

[1] Approximately 939 acres of the Heber Wild Horse Territory overlap the adjacent Community-Forest Intermix Management Area.

[2] The Interior Board of Land Appeals (IBLA) has defined the appropriate management level as the "optimum" number of wild horses (or burros) which results in a thriving natural ecological balance and avoids a deterioration of the range. (109 IBLA 119; also reference Dahl vs. Clark, supra at 592). It is usually expressed as a range of numbers. From http://www.blm.gov/nv/st/en/prog/wh_b/appropriate_management.html

management level expressed as a high and low range, and population growth suppression techniques that may be implemented if wild horse populations exceed the management level. The focus is to maintain wild horse populations in a thriving ecological balance within the territory at the appropriate management level. Management actions may be needed both inside and outside of the territory to meet desired conditions.

Related Plan Content for Wild Horse Territory

See the following sections: Soils, All PNVTs, Riparian Areas, Forests: Ponderosa Pine, Forests: Dry Mixed Conifer, Wildlife and Rare Plants, Invasive Species, Developed Recreation, Livestock Grazing, and Community-Forest Intermix.

Wildlife Quiet Area

Background for Wildlife Quiet Area

Wildlife quiet areas (WQAs) were first identified in the 1980s by the Apache-Sitgreaves NFs in cooperation with the AZGFD to provide relatively undisturbed habitat where big game and other wildlife could reside without disturbance from motorized vehicle use. Other reasons they were set aside include the need to address road-related erosion, provide for more effective use of the habitat, and provide the nonmotorized hunter a high quality hunt opportunity without motorized impacts. These areas are recognized as key wildlife habitats. WQAs may also provide relatively undisturbed habitat and wildlife populations for research purposes.

Desired Conditions for Wildlife Quiet Area

- WQAs provide blocks of core habitat to meet wildlife life stage requirements during the breeding, rearing, and, in some cases, the critical wintering period.
- WQAs contribute to preserving natural behaviors and processes that sustain wildlife populations associated with each WQA (see below).
- WQAs provide for wide ranging predators and big game species, are large enough for a range of species, and provide for population and genetic exchange.
- WQAs lack disturbance from motorized vehicles, resulting in less stress to wildlife.
- WQAs provide undisturbed, nonmotorized hunting opportunities.
- WQAs provide semiprimitive nonmotorized recreation opportunities, including relatively quiet recreation opportunities close to or adjacent to intensively used areas.
- Landscapes in WQAs vary from slightly altered where human activities may be seen but do not attract attention (moderate scenic integrity) to natural appearing where human activities do not stand out (high scenic integrity).
- Willow Springs Horse Trap and Beaver-Turkey Ridge WQAs provide quiet areas for big game amid the intensive recreation uses on the Black Mesa Ranger District.
- Bear Springs and Cottonwood Seep WQAs provide quality travel, hiding, and thermal cover along the Mogollon Rim (Black Mesa and Lakeside Ranger Districts) for a wide variety of species ranging from turkeys to mountain lions. The WQAs provide an abundance of browse species important for deer and elk.

- Woolhouse WQA on the Lakeside Ranger District provides high quality winter range for pronghorn antelope and elk within a busy and heavily used wildland-urban interface.
- The Hulsey Bench WQA on the Alpine Ranger District provides Mexican spotted owl, northern goshawk, elk, deer, turkey, and bear refuge habitat.
- The Open Draw WQA on the Alpine Ranger District provides high quality foraging and young rearing habitat for deer, elk, turkey, and bear.
- Middle Mountain WQA provides refuge for northern goshawk, turkey, deer, elk, and Mexican spotted owl amid extensive dispersed recreation on the Alpine Ranger District.
- Upper Coyote Creek WQA on the Alpine Ranger District provides high quality habitat, especially undisturbed young rearing habitat, for deer, elk, turkey, and bear.
- St. Peters Dome WQA on the Springerville Ranger District provides high quality spruce-fir habitat for dusky grouse, bear, and other high elevation species.

Guidelines for Wildlife Quiet Area

- All WQAs should be managed to preclude snowmobile use to minimize disturbance during the critical winter period.
- WQA boundaries should be signed to identify the areas and educate the public about their purpose.
- Fences surrounding and within WQAs should be inspected and improved to allow wildlife movement within and outside of the areas. Fences should be removed if no longer needed.
- Hiding cover and travel ways for wildlife should be maintained to provide for security and connectivity of habitat.
- Restoration treatments should consider the needs of wildlife (e.g., calving/fawning areas, wallows, game crossings) to minimize potential impacts to the species and their habitat.

Management Approaches for Wildlife Quiet Area

WQAs are similar to the General Forest Management Area, but they are managed for nonmotorized access (except when otherwise authorized). There is an emphasis on improving wildlife habitat and maintaining existing wildlife developments. Management of habitat within WQAs may provide a benchmark for assessing effects of activities on generally undisturbed wildlife populations. The road in the Open Draw WQA is managed as open on a seasonal basis.

Related Plan Content for Wildlife Quiet Area

See the following sections: Overall Ecosystem Health, Wildlife and Rare Plants, Scenic Resources, National Recreation Trails, and Eligible and Suitable Wild and Scenic Rivers.

Natural Landscape

Background for Natural Landscape

These are generally undeveloped areas that are natural appearing and provide primitive and semiprimitive recreation opportunities. Management activities are allowed but are primarily focused on ecosystem restoration. This management area includes most of the inventoried roadless areas (IRAs) that were identified in the 2001 Roadless Area Conservation Rule. IRAs are managed to protect and conserve their roadless character.

Desired Conditions for Natural Landscape

- Succession, fire, insects, disease, floods, and other natural processes and disturbance events primarily shape the composition, structure, and landscape patterns of the vegetation (although management activities may also have a minor influence).
- These areas contribute to ecosystem and species diversity and sustainability; serve as habitat for plants and animals; and offer wildlife corridors, reference areas, primitive and semiprimitive nonmotorized recreation opportunities, and places for people seeking natural scenery and solitude.
- Inventoried roadless areas (IRAs) maintain their overall roadless character.
- Roads and human structures may be present, although uncommon.
- Landscapes vary from natural appearing where human activities do not stand out (high scenic integrity) to natural where generally only ecological changes occur (very high scenic integrity), except as described below.
- Developed campgrounds, picnic areas, trailheads, and roads passable by passenger cars provide roaded natural recreation opportunities. Landscapes within and immediately adjacent to these features remain scenic. They may be slightly altered where human activities may be seen but do not attract attention (moderate scenic integrity) to natural appearing where human activities do not stand out (high scenic integrity).
- While emphasizing semiprimitive nonmotorized and primitive recreation opportunities, motorized travel may occur on designated NFS roads and motorized trails.
- Natural landscapes contribute to preserving natural behaviors and processes that sustain wildlife populations.

Standards for Natural Landscape

- New mineral material pits shall not be authorized.

Guidelines for Natural Landscape

- Limited cross-country motorized vehicle use may be authorized for administrative purposes.
- Temporary road construction and motorized equipment may be used in order to achieve ecological desired conditions.

- NFS roads should be maintained to the minimum standard to meet the objective maintenance level.
- Unneeded mineral material pits should be closed, recontoured, and revegetated.

Management Approaches for Natural Landscape

The management emphasis is to retain the natural appearing character of these areas. Management activities occur mostly for ecological restoration because of natural ecological events or previous management actions. Management activities may include restoration of ecological conditions or habitat components, soil stabilization, wildland fire, hazardous fuels reduction, and invasive species reduction. Livestock grazing may occur where appropriate.

Related Plan Content for Natural Landscape

See the following sections: Scenic Byways, National Recreation Trails, Eligible and Suitable Wild and Scenic Rivers, Scenic Resources, and Wildland Fire Management.

Research Natural Area

Background for Research Natural Area

RNAs are physical or biological units in which current natural conditions are maintained insofar as possible. These conditions are ordinarily achieved by allowing natural physical and biological processes to prevail without human intervention. However, under unusual circumstances, deliberate manipulation may be utilized to maintain the unique feature that the RNA was established to protect. (Forest Service Manual 4063.05)

Research natural areas (RNAs) are considered special areas by the Forest Service. RNAs are part of a national network of natural areas designated in perpetuity for research and education and/or to maintain biological diversity on NFS lands. RNAs are principally for non-manipulative research, observation, and study. However, RNAs can be used for manipulative research to help quantify and understand ecosystem processes and to improve forest management practices.

This management area contains two special areas—the Phelps Cabin Research Natural Area and Phelps Cabin Botanical Area. The botanical area is recommended to be incorporated into the Phelps Cabin RNA. See the “Recommended Research Natural Area” section for more information.

The Phelps Cabin RNA is located on the Springerville Ranger District and is approximately 290 acres[3]. It was established in 1970 to protect its natural condition and provide scientific study and education and for the maintenance of biological diversity. Located at approximately 9,400 feet in elevation, a portion of the RNA lies within Mount Baldy Wilderness. The overall terrain is gently rolling. Wetland communities contain several plant species of special interest including the Arizona willow and Mogollon paintbrush. Mixed conifer forest with spruce, fir, and aspen are present on uplands adjacent to the wet meadows.

[3] A portion of the Phelps Cabin RNA falls within the Wilderness Management Area.

Desired Conditions for Research Natural Area

- The Phelps Cabin RNA provides opportunities for research, study, observation, monitoring, and educational activities that maintain the natural conditions for which the area was established.
- The Phelps Cabin RNA, outside of Mount Baldy Wilderness, exhibits landscapes that vary from natural appearing where human activities do not stand out (high scenic integrity) to natural where generally only ecological changes occur (very high scenic integrity).
- Recreation opportunities, although not encouraged, are semiprimitive nonmotorized.

Standards for Research Natural Area

- The Phelps Cabin RNA will be surveyed and posted with boundary signs within the planning period.
- The Phelps Cabin RNA will be managed for nonmotorized access within the area; exceptions may be made for permitted research use.

Guidelines for Research Natural Area

- Management measures should be used (e.g., fencing) to protect unique features.
- To minimize impacts to unique and sensitive plant species, recreational activities (other than use on the designated trail) should not be encouraged.
- Research special use authorizations should limit impacts to sensitive resources, unique features, and species within the RNA.

Related Plan Content for Research Natural Area

See the following sections: Eligible and Suitable Wild and Scenic Rivers, Scenic Resources, and Special Uses.

Recommended Research Natural Area

Background for Recommended Research Natural Area

Research natural areas are considered special areas by the Forest Service. There is a regional need for research natural areas that fall into specific categories (e.g., piñon-juniper, ponderosa pine, semi-desert grassland, wetland/cienega riparian area, and montane willow and cottonwood-willow riparian forested PNVTs; quaking aspen; other aquatic habitats). The Apache-Sitgreaves NFs have the opportunity to contribute to these needs.

There are six recommended RNAs: Thomas Creek, Corduroy, Three Forks, Lower Campbell Blue, Sandrock, and the recommended Phelps Cabin RNA addition (Phelps Cabin Botanical Area). The first four recommended RNAs are located on the Alpine Ranger District. The Sandrock RNA is located on the Clifton Ranger District. The Phelps Cabin RNA addition is located on the Springerville Ranger District.

The recommended Thomas Creek RNA is approximately 550 acres. It provides a representation of the wet mixed conifer and spruce-fir PNVTs and can serve as a reference for the study of succession and as a baseline for measuring long term change. The area may also serve as a baseline for evaluating the effects of fire and silvicultural prescriptions for timber and water production. It can also serve as an area to study the effects of climate change since the spruce-fir PNVT is sensitive to changes in temperature and moisture.

The recommended Corduroy RNA is approximately 3,350 acres. It provides a representation of high elevation vegetation types including aspen. This area may help researchers and foresters learn more about the multiple causes of sudden aspen decline (SAD), which is widespread across the Apache-Sitgreaves NFs and other Arizona national forests. SAD results in the death of aspen root systems, thus causing total loss of aspen clones from affected sites.

The recommended Three Forks RNA is approximately 2,900 acres. This area provides a representation of montane willow riparian forested PNVT, fens, and wetlands unique to the Apache-Sitgreaves NFs. It also provides habitat for several rare aquatic species: California floater, Three Forks springsnail, loach minnow, and Chiricahua leopard frog. This area provides research opportunities and serves as a reference for studying effects of fire, climate change, and management activities. It may also serve as a research area for control of invasive species while maintaining native species.

The recommended Lower Campbell Blue RNA is approximately 580 acres. This area is a prime example of high quality riparian vegetation and old growth forests. It provides habitat for Chiricahua leopard frog, loach minnow, New Mexico meadow jumping mouse, and Mexican spotted owl. This area may serve as a reference for studying grazing impacts in riparian areas and climate change.

The recommended Sandrock RNA is approximately 530 acres. It represents the semi-desert grassland PNVT containing a variety of native grasses and forbs. This area has been excluded from domestic grazing for 25 years and provides a reference for studying past and future grazing effects.

It is recommended that the Phelps Cabin Botanical Area be incorporated into the Phelps Cabin RNA (see the “Research Natural Area” section for more information). The Phelps Cabin Botanical Area, approximately 100 acres, is the only botanical area on the Apache-Sitgreaves NFs. It has been under special management for botanical and research values since 1910. It is located on the Springerville Ranger District along the East Fork Little Colorado River, adjacent to Phelps Cabin RNA and outside Mount Baldy Wilderness. Upon RNA designation, the botanical area designation would be removed.

Upon approval of the plan, the forests will recommend these RNAs to the Southwestern Region RNA Committee. If an RNA is recommended by the regional committee, it must undergo an ecological evaluation and a NEPA environmental assessment. To proceed with formal RNA designation, the committee must recommend the area to the Southwestern Regional Forester and Rocky Mountain Research Station Director for approval.

Desired Conditions for Recommended Research Natural Area

- The recommended RNAs provide opportunities for research, study, observation, monitoring, and educational activities that maintain the natural conditions for which the area was recommended.
- The Three Forks Closure Area (30 acres) of the recommended Three Forks RNA is free from human trampling and other disturbances to protect very sensitive and unique species, such as the Three Forks springsnail, California floater, New Mexico meadow jumping mouse, Chiricahua leopard frog, and loach minnow.
- The recommended Three Forks, Campbell Blue, Corduroy, and Sandrock RNAs, outside of any eligible or suitable wild and scenic river corridor, exhibit unaltered appearing landscapes where human activities do not stand out (high scenic integrity).
- The recommended Thomas Creek RNA exhibits slightly altered landscapes where human activities may be seen but do not attract attention (moderate scenic integrity).
- The recommended Phelps Cabin RNA addition (currently the Phelps Cabin Botanical Area), outside of any eligible or suitable wild and scenic river corridor, exhibits unaltered appearing landscapes where human activities do not stand out (high scenic integrity).
- Natural conditions prevail in the recommended Phelps Cabin RNA addition while providing an opportunity for interpretation, education, and research.
- Unique plant species, including willows, paintbrushes, and gentians, thrive in the recommended Phelps Cabin RNA addition.

Guidelines for Recommended Research Natural Area

- To minimize impacts to unique and sensitive plant and animal species, recreational activities should not be encouraged.
- If necessary, recommended RNAs should be fenced to manage unique features.
- Research special use authorizations should limit impacts to sensitive resources, unique features, and species within recommended RNAs.
- Recommended RNAs should be managed for nonmotorized access within the area to minimize ground disturbances and protect the resources which make these areas unique.

Management Approaches for Recommended Research Natural Area

If a recommended RNA is not designated within 5 years of this plan's approval, an evaluation may be conducted to verify the continued need as a research natural area. If there is none, a plan amendment may be completed to return the land area to other management. Lands returning to other management are evaluated for suitability (chapter 4) for appropriate uses.

Related Plan Content for Recommended Research Natural Area

See the following sections: Eligible and Suitable Wild and Scenic Rivers, Scenic Resources, and Special Uses.

Wilderness

Background for Wilderness

The Apache-Sitgreaves NFs are home to three designated wilderness areas: Mount Baldy Wilderness, located on the Springerville Ranger District, and Escudilla and Bear Wallow Wilderness areas, located on the Alpine Ranger District. Wilderness areas are managed and their values protected according to the Wilderness Act of 1964 (Public Law 88-577). Wilderness areas provide opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation. Motorized equipment and mechanical transport is prohibited in wilderness. Livestock grazing is allowed in wilderness unless specifically excluded by the law designating the area. Grazing is not restricted in any of the Apache-Sitgreaves NFs wilderness areas.

Mount Baldy Wilderness was designated as part of the National Wilderness Preservation System in 1970 (Public Law 91-504). Its approximate 7,000 acres lie on the eastern slope of Mount Baldy. Elevations range from 9,000 to 11,400 feet above sea level. Mount Baldy is an extinct volcano which has experienced three distinct periods of glaciation. The peak's summit is on the Fort Apache Indian Reservation. Three developed trails traverse this wilderness. The East and West Forks of the Little Colorado River are perennial through this wilderness and provide habitat for the threatened Apache trout.

Escudilla Wilderness, approximately 5,200 acres, was designated in 1984 (Public Law 98-406). This area encompasses the top and sides of Escudilla Mountain. It is home to several high elevation meadows which include some relatively rare plant associations. Notable landmarks in or just outside the wilderness include Profanity Ridge, Terry Flat, Toolbox Draw, and the Punchbowl. The Escudilla National Recreation Trail leads to the top of Escudilla Mountain.

Figure 11. East Fork of the Little Colorado River in Mount Baldy Wilderness

Bear Wallow Wilderness, approximately 11,080 acres, was designated in 1984 (Public Law 98-406). This area is known for its canyon, large old conifers, and fall aspen colors. Several trails provide access into and through this area. Bear Wallow Creek flows throughout the year, providing habitat for the threatened Apache trout. Wildlife is abundant throughout the area.

Desired Conditions for Wilderness

- Ecological conditions are affected primarily by natural ecological processes, with the appearance of little or no human intervention.
- Fire functions as a natural ecological process.
- There is little evidence of human developments and little or no evidence of camping activity, unauthorized trails, trash, or other human impacts on the environment.
- Visitor use does not affect wilderness characteristics.
- Wilderness boundaries are posted and visible to visitors.
- There are unconfined opportunities for exploration, solitude, risk, and challenge. The nonmotorized trail system enhances the wilderness character. Where there is public demand, outfitters and guides provide services to visitors seeking a wilderness experience.
- Bear Wallow Wilderness provides outstanding opportunities for solitude and isolation. Encounters with small groups or individuals are infrequent.
- Within Mount Baldy and Escudilla Wilderness areas, trails concentrate use and provide access to popular destinations. Encounters with other users may occur.
- Wilderness areas maintain natural landscapes where generally only ecological changes occur (very high scenic integrity) and provide primitive and/or semiprimitive nonmotorized recreation opportunities.
- Wilderness contributes to preserving natural behaviors and processes that sustain wildlife populations.

Standards for Wilderness

- Party size of 12 persons and/or 12 head of stock for hiking and riding groups in Mount Baldy Wilderness shall not be exceeded. A party size of 6 persons for overnight camping shall not be exceeded.
- Party size of 12 persons and/or 15 head of stock for hiking and riding groups in Escudilla and Bear Wallow Wilderness and the Blue Range Primitive Area shall not be exceeded.
- Objective(s) and strategies for all wildfires shall be identified.
- Fire management activities shall be conducted in a manner compatible with the overall wilderness management objectives (minimum impact suppression tactics).
- Human-caused disturbed areas that do not complement wilderness characteristics will be rehabilitated to a natural appearance, using species or other materials native to the area.

Guidelines for Wilderness

- New trail construction may be considered if the objective is enhancement of the wilderness character (e.g., increase solitude opportunities, restore naturalness).

- Trail maintenance should be coordinated around anticipated visitor high use periods to minimize encounters.
- Trails that have minimal use, detract from the wilderness character, or cannot practically be maintained or reconstructed should be obliterated.
- Prescribed fire should be considered to reduce the risks and consequences of uncharacteristic wildfire within wilderness or escaping from wilderness by reducing unnatural fuel accumulations, if necessary to meet wilderness fire management objectives. Naturally occurring wildfires should be allowed to perform, as much as possible, their natural ecological role within wilderness.
- Fire camps, helispots, and other temporary facilities should be located outside the wilderness boundary to protect wilderness character.
- Firelines and spike camps (i.e., a remote camp usually near a fireline) should not be constructed adjacent to trails or camp areas to protect wilderness values.
- Grazing of pack stock should not occur except as authorized by the district ranger when adequate forage is available.

Management Approaches for Wilderness

There is a need to complete and implement wilderness management plans, wilderness use capacity studies, and comprehensive vegetation inventories for each designated wilderness. The Congressional Grazing Guidelines (FSM 2320 – Wilderness Management, section 2323.33 – Exhibit 01) are used to manage livestock grazing in wilderness areas. The “Minimum Requirements Decision Guide” is used to assess actions proposed within wilderness. Priorities for trail reconstruction are based on potential for loss of wilderness values, impacts to wilderness recreation opportunities, and the trails which receive the greatest use.

Related Plan Content for Wilderness

See the following sections: Air, Invasive Species, Overall Recreation Opportunities, Eligible and Suitable Wild and Scenic Rivers, Scenic Resources, and Wildland Fire Management.

Primitive Area

Background for Primitive Area

The primitive area is considered a special area by the Forest Service. This management area consists of the Blue Range Primitive Area along with the presidential recommended additions to the area (199,502 acres). The only remaining primitive area in the National Forest System, the Blue Range Primitive Area is located on the Alpine and Clifton Ranger Districts. It was administratively designated by the Forest Service (L-20 regulations[4]) as a primitive area on June 21, 1933, to preserve its wilderness qualities. The Blue Range Primitive Area is managed as wilderness, with one exception: the area is open to mineral prospecting and mineral development.

[4] In 1939, the Secretary of Agriculture issued Regulations U-1, U-2, and U-2A (collectively, the "U-Regulations") to replace the L-20 Regulation.

The Blue Range Primitive Area's approximate 180,000 acres include deep, rugged canyons separated by steep, timbered ridges. The Mogollon Rim bisects the area and provides dramatic topographic features. Elevations range from 4,500 feet in the southern portion to 9,100 feet along the rim. This rapid change in elevation results in interesting and unique ecological associations. Unusual and spectacular rock formations highlight the scenery.

The Blue Range Primitive Area is important in the distribution of wildlife species. It lies on both north-south and east-west migration corridors. The wide variety of vegetation types reflects the area's topography. There are approximately 270 miles of nonmotorized trails throughout the primitive area, about one quarter of the forests' trails.

In 1971, the Forest Service submitted a recommendation to the President of the United States for the Blue Range Wilderness in New Mexico and Arizona. The President forwarded the recommendation to Congress, who eventually acted on a portion of the recommendation. In 1980 Congress designated, and the President signed into law, the Blue Range Wilderness in New Mexico. The Arizona portion of the 1971 presidential recommendation (166,591 acres) included 20,031 acres outside and along the west primitive area boundary. The Forest Service and presidential recommendation for the Blue Range Wilderness in Arizona has not been acted upon.

The entire Blue Range Primitive Area and the presidential recommended additions have been managed to protect their wilderness characteristics.

Desired Conditions for Primitive Area

All wilderness desired conditions apply to the entire Blue Range Primitive Area and presidential recommended additions until congressional action has been taken.

- The Blue Range Primitive Area and presidential recommended additions maintain natural landscapes where generally only ecological changes occur (very high scenic integrity) and provide primitive recreation opportunities, except along the designated road (36 CFR § 293.17(a)).

Standards and Guidelines for Primitive Area

All wilderness standards and guidelines apply to the entire Blue Range Primitive Area and presidential recommended additions until congressional action has been taken.

Management Approaches for Primitive Area

The Apache-Sitgreaves NFs continue to manage the Blue Range Primitive Area and the presidential recommended additions as a primitive area until Congress acts on the 1971 wilderness recommendation. Should Congress not designate any portion of this management area as wilderness and release lands from primitive area status, the released lands would be managed as a part of the Natural Landscape Management Area.

A management plan for the area, including comprehensive vegetation inventory, is needed to provide more detailed management guidance. The Congressional Grazing Guidelines (FSM 2320 – Wilderness Management, section 2323.33 – Exhibit 01) are used to manage livestock grazing in

the primitive area. The “Minimum Requirements Decision Guide” is used to assess actions proposed within the primitive area.

Related Plan Content for Primitive Area

See the following sections: Invasive Species, Overall Recreation Opportunities, Eligible and Suitable Wild and Scenic Rivers, Scenic Resources, and Wildland Fire Management.

Recommended Wilderness

Background for Recommended Wilderness

In 2009, Apache-Sitgreaves National Forest System lands were evaluated to determine potential wilderness areas. Table 5 below identifies the areas recommended for wilderness. There are no Forest Service system trails in these areas.

Table 5. Areas recommended for wilderness

Name	Acreage
Escudilla Wilderness Addition	6,813
Bear Wallow Wilderness Additions	261
Total	**7,074**

These are preliminary administrative recommendations that will receive further review, including the applicable NEPA analyses, and possible modification by the Chief of the Forest Service, Secretary of Agriculture, and President of the United States. Congress has reserved the authority to make final decisions on wilderness designation.

Desired Conditions for Recommended Wilderness

- Recommended wilderness areas display natural landscapes where generally only ecological changes occur (very high scenic integrity) and provide primitive or semiprimitive nonmotorized recreation opportunities.
- Recommended wilderness contributes to preserving natural behaviors and processes that sustain wildlife populations.

Standards for Recommended Wilderness

- Objective(s) and strategies for all wildfires shall be identified.
- Fire management activities shall be conducted in a manner compatible with maintaining wilderness characteristics (minimum impact suppression tactics).
- Human-caused disturbed areas that do not complement wilderness characteristics shall be rehabilitated to a natural appearance, using plant species or other materials native to the area.

Guidelines for Recommended Wilderness

- The wilderness characteristics of each recommended wilderness should remain intact until a congressional decision on wilderness designation is made. Characteristics include naturalness, opportunities for solitude, opportunities for primitive recreation, and identified special features.
- Only nonmotorized travel may occur in recommended wilderness. However, motorized use associated with grazing allotments may occur and should be limited to that needed to carry out required management practices as authorized.
- Prescribed fire should be considered to reduce the risks and consequences of uncharacteristic wildfire by reducing unnatural fuel accumulations, if necessary to meet fire management objectives. Naturally occurring fires should be allowed to perform, as much as possible, their natural ecological role.
- Fire camps, helispots, and other temporary facilities should be located outside the recommended wilderness to protect wilderness values.

Management Approaches for Recommended Wilderness

The “Minimum Requirements Decision Guide” is used to assess actions proposed within recommended wilderness.

Related Plan Content for Recommended Wilderness

See the following sections: Overall Recreation Opportunities, Eligible and Suitable Wild and Scenic Rivers, Scenic Resources, and Wildland Fire Management.