

Chapter 1 – Purpose of and Need for Action

Document Structure

The Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests have prepared this draft environmental impact statement (DEIS) to analyze different ways to implement the Travel Management Rule (TMR). This DEIS discloses the direct, indirect, and cumulative environmental impacts which would result from the proposed action and alternatives, using best available science. The analysis complies with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and other relevant Federal and State laws and regulations. The document consists of the following:

Chapter 1. Purpose of and Need for Action: This chapter describes the history of the project proposal, the purpose and need for the project, and the proposal for achieving the purpose and need. This chapter also describes how the Forest Service informed the public of the proposal and how the public responded.

Chapter 2. Alternatives, Including the Proposed Action: This chapter provides a detailed description of the proposed action and alternative methods for achieving the purpose. The alternatives were developed based on key issues raised by the public and other agencies. This chapter also includes a summary of the environmental consequences for each alternative.

Chapter 3. Affected Environment and Environmental Consequences: This chapter describes the environmental effects of implementing each alternative. The analysis in this chapter is organized by resource topic.

Chapter 4. List of Preparers; Consultation and Coordination: This chapter provides a list of people who prepared this document and the list of agencies, organizations, and persons to whom copies of the statement are sent.

Glossary: A description of terms used in the document.

Literature Cited: A list of references used for the project.

Appendix: The appendix consists of multiple parts and provides more detailed information to support the analyses presented in the DEIS.

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The project record, including more detailed analyses of forest resources, is located at the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests Supervisor's Office, P.O. Box 640, Springerville, AZ 85938. Records are available pursuant to the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act (40 CFR 1506.6(f)).

Introduction

The Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests (referred to as the forests or ASNFs) are located in east-central Arizona (figure 1) and range in elevation from approximately 3,500 feet near Clifton to more than 11,400 feet on Mt. Baldy. There are 2,110,196 acres within the current forests boundaries. The forests cover portions of Coconino, Navajo, Apache, and Greenlee Counties (figure 2). The forests are administratively divided into five ranger districts: Alpine, Black Mesa, Clifton, Lakeside, and Springerville. Motor vehicles are used to access the forests for both motorized and non-motorized activities including sightseeing, camping, hiking, hunting, fishing, horseback riding, and firewood cutting, as well as permitted and administrative uses.

Background

On November 9, 2005, the Forest Service published final travel management regulations governing off-highway vehicles (OHVs) and other motor vehicle uses on all national forests and grasslands. The Travel Management Rule (TMR) amended regulations in 36 CFR (Code of Federal Regulations), Parts 212, 251(b) and 261(a), and removed obsolete direction at 36 CFR 295. These three regulations—36 CFR, Parts 212, 251(b), and 261(a)—are referred collectively as TMR throughout this document. The TMR was developed in response to the substantial increase in use of OHVs on National Forest System (NFS) lands and related damage to forest resources caused by unmanaged OHV use over the past 30 years. The regulations implement Executive Orders 11644 and 11989 regarding off-road use of motor vehicles on Federal lands.

The TMR provides for a system of NFS roads, trails, and areas on NFS lands designated for motor vehicle use (36 CFR 212.50(a)). After the roads, trails, and areas are designated, motor vehicle use not in accordance with these designations is prohibited, including motor vehicle use off designated roads and trails and outside designated areas (36 CFR 261.13). Therefore, under the TMR, forests that do not already restrict motorized travel to designated NFS roads, trails, and areas on NFS lands must do so. Once a decision is made, forests must display motorized roads, trails, and areas on a motor vehicle use map (MVUM) and provide it to the public free of charge (36 CFR 212.56).

The responsible official may incorporate previous administrative decisions regarding travel management made under other authorities, including designations and prohibitions of motor vehicle use, in designating NFS roads, trails, and areas for motor vehicle use (36 CFR 212.50(b)). Therefore, only changes to the existing system will be analyzed in this NEPA document.

Regulation 36 CFR 212.51(a) states that roads, motorized trails, and areas shall be designated by vehicle class and, if appropriate, by time of year by the responsible official, provided that the following vehicles and uses are exempted from these designations: (1) aircraft; (2) watercraft; (3) over-snow vehicles; (4) limited administrative use by the Forest Service; (5) use of any fire, military, emergency, or law enforcement vehicle for emergency purposes; (6) authorized use of any combat or combat support vehicle for national defense purposes; (7) law enforcement response to violations of law, including pursuit; and (8) motor vehicle use specifically authorized under a written authorization issued under Federal law or regulations. Exemption 8 includes (but is not limited to) uses under Forest Service written authorizations (i.e., permits) and includes uses such as access for range improvements, firewood cutting, gathering forest products (e.g., seedlings,

Definitions (36 CFR 212.1)

Road – A motor vehicle route over 50 inches wide, unless identified and managed as a trail.

Trail – A route 50 inches or less in width or a route over 50 inches wide that is identified and managed as a trail.

Forest or system road or trail – A road or trail wholly or partially within or adjacent to and serving NFS lands that the Forest Service determines is necessary for the protection, administration, and utilization of the NFS, and the use and development of its resources.

Unauthorized road – A road or trail that is not a forest road or trail, or a temporary road or trail and that is not included in a forest transportation atlas.

Area – A discrete, specifically delineated space that is smaller (in most cases, much smaller) than a ranger district.

rocks, pinecones), ceremonial gathering by tribes, outfitter and guide services, maintenance of utility corridors (e.g., power lines, pipelines), administrative use by other Federal or State agencies, and special use permit events.

In addition to specific exemptions, the TMR decision would not change the management of, or restriction of, non-motorized methods of travel on the forests, such as hiking, biking, horseback riding, etc. On National Forest System roads, roadside parking adjacent to the designated routes would continue to be allowed per Forest Service Manual (FSM) 7716.1(1). The designation includes parking a motor vehicle on the side of the road when it is safe to do so without causing damage to NFS resources or facilities, unless prohibited by state law, traffic sign, or order pursuant to (36 CFR 261.54).

In 2008, the forests finalized the travel analysis process (TAP). The purpose of the TAP was to help the forests identify the minimum road system necessary to provide safe and efficient travel and for administration, utilization, and protection of NFS lands (36 CFR 212.5(b)). The TAP also identified unneeded roads and made recommendations for the future designation process. The TAP was used to assist in the formulation of the proposed action for this project. The TAP is on the forest's Web site (<http://www.fs.fed.us/r3/asnf/projects/travel-management>).

Existing Transportation System

There are 2,832 miles of open NFS roads (table 2), 156 miles of motorized trails, and approximately 3,373 miles of closed roads. In looking at the existing transportation system, as described by the most current information in the forest's transportation database, many data errors and outdated information were discovered and the database has been corrected:

- 100 miles of roads coded as closed (maintenance level 1) in the database are actually being managed as open and public motorized use is being allowed on the ground.
- 375 miles of roads coded as decommissioned in the database are actually being managed as open and public motorized use is being allowed on the ground.

The 2,832 miles of open NFS roads shown under the existing condition now includes these 475 miles of incorrectly coded roads in the database. This system reflects ground conditions, how the forests have been managing the road system, and how the public has been using the road system. The existing system is made up of roads that are open to highway legal vehicles (standard passenger cars) and roads that are open to all motor vehicles. This includes roads with access restricted on a seasonal basis and roads closed during extreme weather conditions or for emergencies, but which are otherwise open for general public use (FSM 7705). In addition to the existing open road system, there are potentially additional miles of unauthorized routes that exist, but have not been inventoried.

Approximately 1.6 million acres of the forests are currently open to cross-country motorized travel. This has been in place since the Apache-Sitgreaves land and resource management plan was approved in 1987. The forest plan states that the forests are open to off-road vehicle (ORV) use with the exception of designated wilderness and the Blue Range Primitive Area.

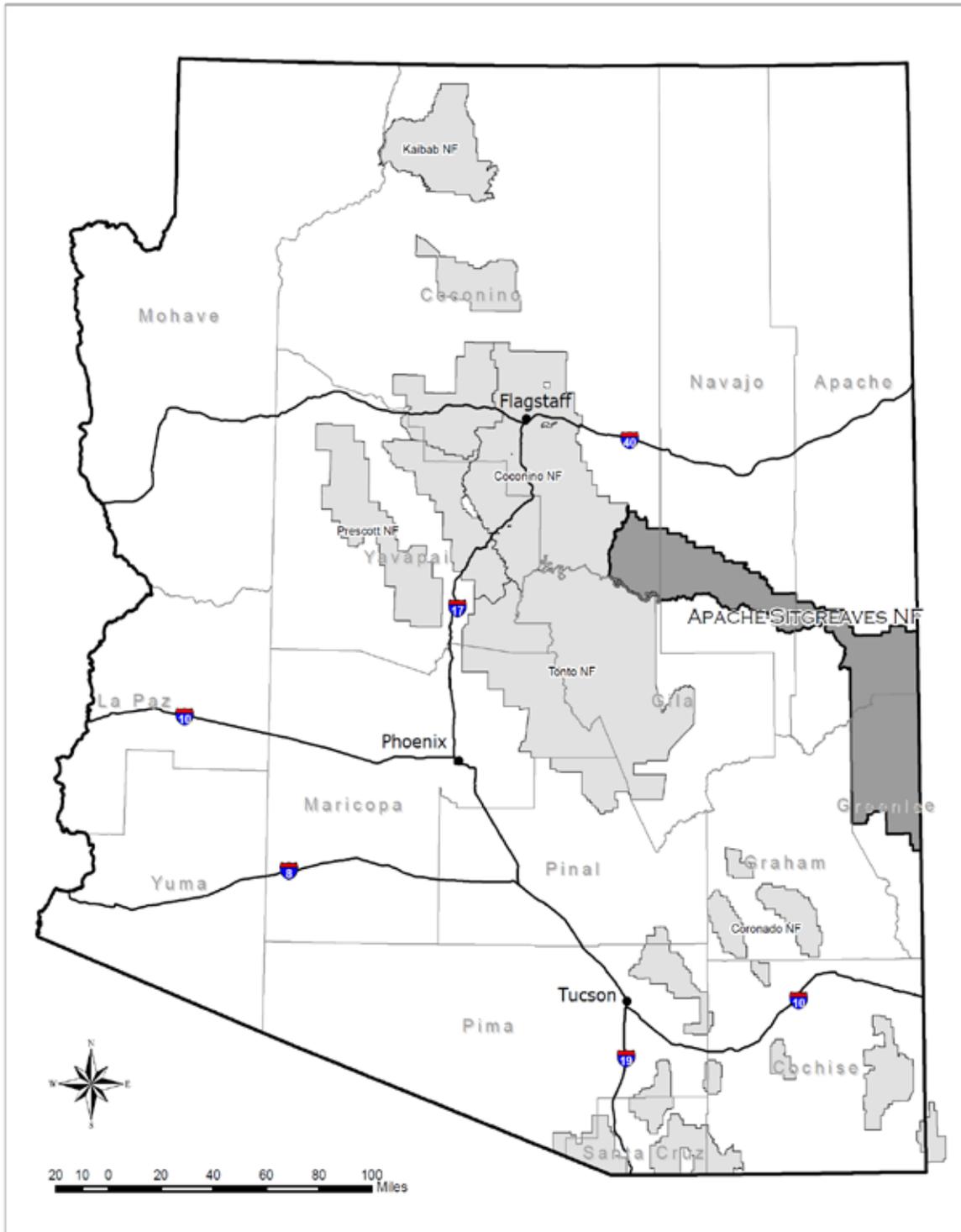


Figure 1. Location of the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests in Arizona

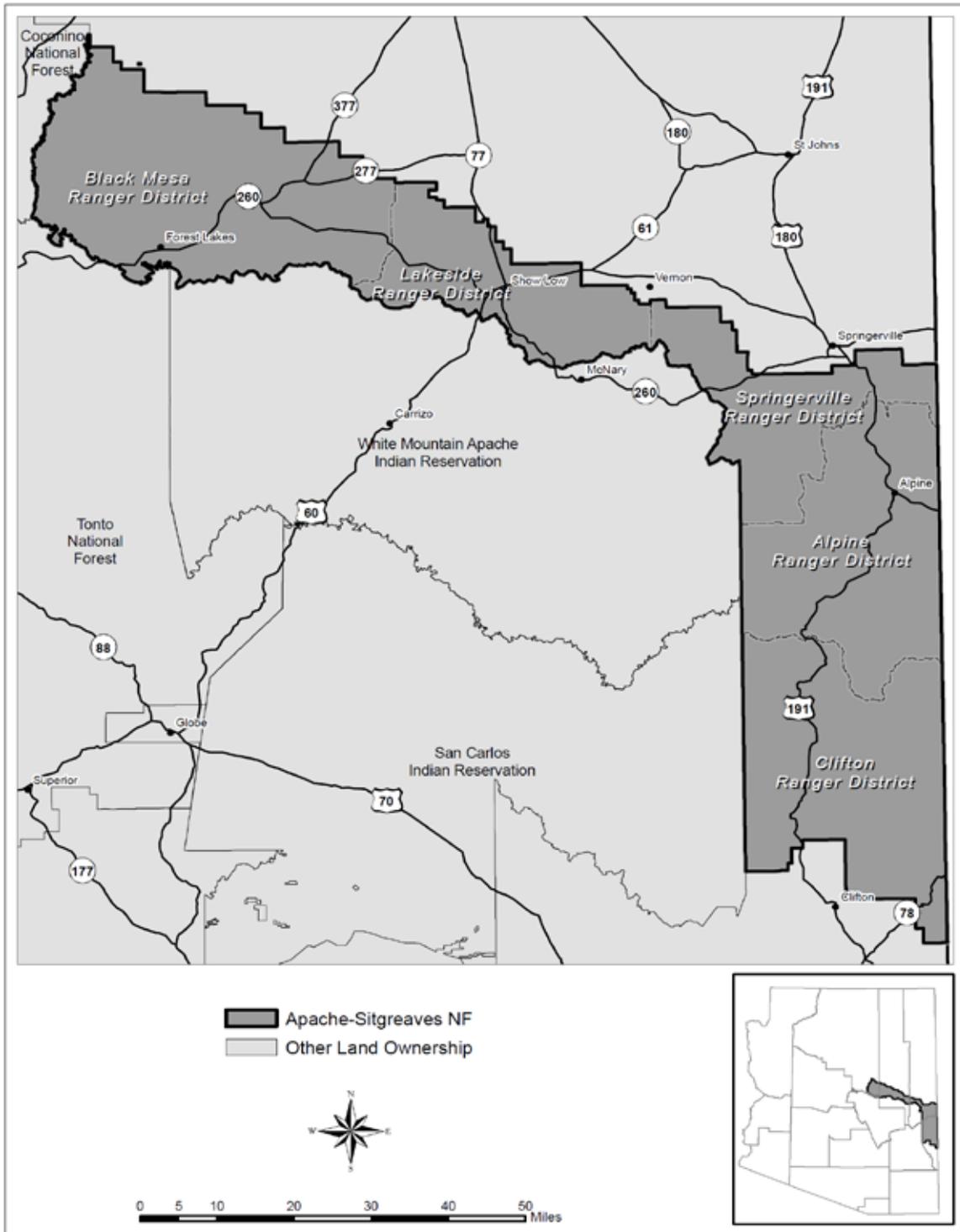


Figure 2. Ranger districts on the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests

Table 2. Existing road mileage on the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests

Road Type	Total Miles
Highway legal vehicles	765
Open to all motor vehicles	2,067
Total Open NFS Roads	2,832
Total Closed NFS Roads	3,373

The forests currently have motorized travel designations and decisions which were made under other authorities that apply to over 383,000 acres (USDA FS 2008a). For example, the Mt. Baldy, Escudilla, and Bear Wallow Wilderness areas and the Blue Range Primitive Area have had motorized use restricted or prohibited by legislation. There are nine special orders that identify motor vehicle travel restrictions by specific geographic area and season. Please refer to appendix C for existing motor vehicle prohibitions carried forward in this analysis.

Purpose and Need for Action

The purpose of this project is to comply with the Travel Management Rule by providing a system of roads, trails, and areas designated for motor vehicle use that reduces impacts to biological, physical, and cultural resources on the forests (36 CFR 212, sections 212, 251, 261). At 36 CFR 261.13, the forests are required to prohibit motor vehicle use off the system of designated roads, trails, and areas and motor vehicle use that is not in accordance with the designations.

There is a need for a safe and efficient transportation system for public use, Agency administration, and resource protection, while recognizing historic and current uses of the forests. Specifically, there is a need for: (1) identifying the system of roads that would be open to motor vehicle use; (2) identifying the system of motorized trails for vehicles 50 inches or less in width; and (3) optional designation of the limited use of motor vehicles within a specified distance of designated routes solely for the purposes of dispersed camping or retrieval of big game by an individual who has legally killed the animal.

There is a need to counter detrimental effects to resources from continued use of some roads and motorized trails, as well as cross-country travel. Some detrimental effects from motorized use of the forests include increased sediment deposits in streams which degrade water quality and fish habitat, the spread of invasive plants across the forests, disturbances to a variety of plant and wildlife species, and the risk of damaging cultural resource sites.

Modified Proposed Action

The forests published the proposed action in October 2007 requesting public comment. A large number of comments received indicated the original proposed action did not provide adequate motorized access because it proposed removing too many roads and areas from the motorized road and trail system. In response, the forest supervisor decided to modify the proposed action. The modified proposed action was released for public comment in February 2008 and was subsequently modified to respond to internal and external comments received as provided for in 36 CFR 220.5(e)(1). See the “Alternatives Considered but Eliminated from Detailed Study”

section of chapter 2 under the heading “Original Proposed Action,” to review the specific changes that occurred between modifications. The result of this process, alternative B, is described here and maps are found in appendix A. This proposal includes more miles of corridors for dispersed camping, increased acreage of motorized use areas, and slightly increased miles of motorized trails. As a result, the forestwide transportation system would include 2,673 miles of NFS roads designated for motor vehicle use and 268 miles of motorized NFS trails designated for vehicles 50 inches or less in width. The proposal would:

- Amend the forest plan to: (1) prohibit cross-country motorized travel off the designated system of roads, trails, and areas except as identified on the MVUM, as required by 36 CFR 261.13 and to be consistent with the language and intent of 36 CFR 212.50 and 261.13; and (2) remove obsolete references to using the RATM process (see appendix B which summarizes proposed changes to the forest plan).
- Designate 1 mile distance from either side of NFS roads and trails open to motor vehicles and on NFS lands adjacent to open roads managed by other State and Federal agencies except where motorized restrictions exist, solely for the purpose of motorized big game retrieval (MBGR).
- Designate five areas (totaling 459 acres) on the Black Mesa and Lakeside Ranger Districts as open to all motor vehicles.
- Designate 300-foot corridors along either side of 658 miles of road for the sole purpose of motorized dispersed camping per 36 CFR 212.51(b).
- Add 53 miles of unauthorized routes as roads open to all motor vehicles (of these, 28 miles are proposed to provide general access as well as access to existing dispersed camping locations).
- Designate 358 miles of closed roads as open to motor vehicle use.
- Convert 60 miles of closed road to motorized trails for vehicles 50 inches or less in width.
- Convert 16 miles of open road to motorized trails for vehicles 50 inches or less in width.
- Add 34 miles of unauthorized routes as motorized trails for vehicles 50 inches or less in width.
- Construct 0.8 mile of new motorized trail on the Lakeside Ranger District for vehicles 50 inches or less in width. Construct 1.3 miles of new motorized trail on the Black Mesa Ranger District for vehicles 50 inches or less in width.
- Close 493 miles of currently open roads to motor vehicle use for resource protection.
- Restrict 77 miles of roads currently open to all motor vehicles, to administrative and permitted use only, by opening 7 miles of closed roads and adding 1 mile of unauthorized road restricted to administrative and permitted use only.

Decision Framework

The forest supervisor of the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests is the responsible official who will evaluate the purpose and need for action, the modified proposed action along with the other alternatives, and consider the environmental consequences to decide:

- What changes to the existing transportation system would be necessary to be compliant with TMR. This may include adding or removing NFS roads and trails authorized for motorized travel, and adding unauthorized roads and trails to the designated motorized system;
- Whether to provide motorized access for dispersed camping within corridors along specified routes;
- Whether to designate areas for motor vehicle use, and if so, under what conditions; and,
- Whether to provide motorized access for big game retrieval within specified distances of certain designated routes.

After a decision has been made, a motor vehicle use map (MVUM) will be published and will display the new designated transportation system with the changes made in the NEPA decision. The forest supervisor must amend the Apache-Sitgreaves forest plan to prohibit cross-country motorized travel off the designated system of roads and motorized trails and to be consistent with the language and intent of the TMR (36 CFR 212, sections 212, 251, 261).

Public Involvement

Scoping and Comments Received

This project has been listed on the forest's schedule of proposed actions beginning in 2005. Local citizens, State, county, local, and tribal governments; and other Federal agencies were invited to collaborate with the forests. From 2005 to 2008, the forests hosted and participated in 31 public meetings and workshops related to motorized travel management and the travel analysis process (TAP) across the forests and in local communities. The following local groups participated in workshops and provided specific input: the Town of Eagar, White Mountain Conservation League, White Mountain Open Trails Association, Apache County ATV Roughriders, Grand Canyon Wildlands Council, and Citizens for Multiple Land Use and Access (CMLUA). This preliminary, pre-NEPA public input was used to develop the initial proposed action.

On October 10, 2007, a notice of intent (NOI) to prepare an environmental impact statement (EIS) for motorized travel on the forests (72 FR 57514–57517) was published in the Federal Register. On October 31, 2007, a corrected NOI (72 FR 61607) was published in the Federal Register correcting the miles of road on the transportation system and the availability of maps to the general public.

The forests conducted five public meetings in November 2007 in the communities of Lakeside, Eagar, Clifton, Heber-Overgaard, and Alpine to present the proposed action. Public comment indicated the proposed action did not provide adequate motorized opportunities and access for dispersed camping. After consideration of the input received during those meetings, the forest supervisor modified the proposed action and included more miles of corridor for dispersed camping, increased the acres of the areas designated for motorized use, and slightly increased the miles of motorized trails.

A new NOI was published in the Federal Register on February 29, 2008 (73 FR 11088-11091), requesting public comment on the modified proposed action. Additional public meetings were held in March 2008 in the communities of Show Low, Springerville, Clifton, Safford, Heber-Overgaard, and Alpine. Coordination with local governments has occurred since this period.

The forests have received over 20,000 comments since the initial scoping in 2005-2008. Categories of interest include motorized access for dispersed camping, big game retrieval and other motorized uses, impacts to wildlife, soil and water and air, specially designated areas and scenery/visuals, economics, potential conflicts between motorized and non-motorized uses, noise, public safety, availability of recreation opportunities, and impacts to grazing and ranching. These comments have been incorporated into the development of alternatives B through E.

Tribal Consultation

The ASNF consulted with nine tribes and one chapter that use the ASNFs for traditional, cultural, or spiritual activities. The following tribes and chapter were consulted: White Mountain Apache Tribe, San Carlos Apache Tribe, Hopi Nation, Navajo Nation, Pueblo of Zuni, Yavapai-Apache Tribe, Tonto Apache Tribe, Fort McDowell Yavapai Nation, Yavapai-Prescott Indian Tribe, and the Ramah Chapter of the Navajo Nation.

These tribes were informed about travel management in October 2007 as part of the NEPA process. A followup consultation letter was sent in July 2008 regarding the modified proposed action. Two tribes provided written responses: the Navajo Nation and White Mountain Apache Tribe. Consultation meetings were held with the Hopi Tribe (November 2009), Navajo Nation (February 2010) and White Mountain Apache Tribe (April 2010). The forests are in the process of scheduling meetings with the Pueblo of Zuni and San Carlos Apache Tribe. So far, two concerns were identified by the tribes regarding travel management: (1) continued looting and damage to archaeological sites, and (2) has the forest taken the protection of cultural resources into consideration. These issues were taken into consideration and were incorporated into the development of alternatives.

Issues

The forests analyzed all comments to identify issues, which are defined as cause-effect relationships directly or indirectly caused by implementing the proposed action. The issues defined as within the scope of the project, and directly or indirectly caused by implementing the proposal, were used to develop the range of action alternatives. Other comments, eliminated from detailed study were identified as those: (1) outside the scope of the proposed action; (2) already decided by law, regulation, forest plan, or other higher level decision; (3) irrelevant to the decision to be made; or (4) conjectural and not supported by scientific or factual evidence.

The Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) NEPA regulations explain this delineation in Sec. 1501.7, "...identify and eliminate from detailed study the issues which are not significant or which have been covered by prior environmental review (Sec. 1506.3)..." The following issues were used to develop alternatives and focus the analysis for this project. All comments and the forests' response to these comments are located in the project record.

Issue 1: Restricting Motorized Access for Dispersed Camping

Concern: Restricting motorized access for dispersed camping may increase interactions between campers and diminish the quality of experience. Designating routes and corridors for camping may eliminate favorite spots which have been used for decades.

Response: All alternatives provide open roads to access dispersed camping. Alternative B (modified proposed action) and alternative D increase the miles of camping corridors and roads that access identified dispersed camping over what is currently available.

Units of Measure

- Miles/acres/location of motorized dispersed camping corridors, and
- Miles/location of roads accessing dispersed camping locations.

Issue 2: Restricting Motorized Big Game Retrieval

Concern: Changing the motorized big game retrieval policy to a fixed distance corridor may result in hunters being unable to collect a downed animal in a timely manner.

Response: Alternatives B, C, and D respond to this issue by including motorized big game retrieval for several animal species.

Unit of Measure: Acres available for motorized big game retrieval.

Issue 3: Impacts to Resources from Motorized Use

Concern: Adding roads and camping corridors to the transportation system will adversely impact terrestrial and aquatic wildlife species, soil and water, and cultural resources.

Response: Alternative E was developed to provide motorized access with minimal miles of camping corridors and no motorized big game retrieval.

Units of Measure

- Miles and/or acres of habitat affected.
- Proximity (distance) of motorized roads and trails to riparian vegetation and wetlands.
- Miles/acres of motorized use on sensitive soils.
- Number of cultural resources (sites) potentially impacted.

Issue 4: Economics: Loss of Revenues and Jobs

Concern: Restrictions on motorized access (a change from the current condition) could negatively impact local and State economies from a loss of local, tourist, and hunter generated revenues.

Response: The social and economic impacts the project would have on the region has been analyzed in chapter 3.

Unit of Measure: Revenues and jobs generated from motorized (recreation related) activities.