

PRINCIPLES TO GUIDE FOREST PLAN REVISIONS

10/17/06

ARIZONA FOREST PLAN REVISION COALITION

The Arizona Forest Plan Revision Coalition is organized to bring together the Arizona conservation community to share ideas, resources, and planning towards achieving the best possible Plan Revisions for Arizona's forests. Participants include a broad spectrum of conservation interests and individuals who enjoy the forests recreationally. The Coalition developed a set of principles through a collaborative process. These principles should guide the Forest Plan Revision Process for all of Arizona's National Forests.

FOREST PLANNING PRINCIPLES

COLLABORATION

- **Include Diverse and Balanced Stakeholders.** Potential stakeholders include local property owners, local governments, tribal representatives, industry groups, conservation groups, academics, scientists, and the interested public. All stakeholders must be invited to participate, both those interested as well as those directly affected, and there must be a way to involve non-local stakeholders (for instance, those from urban centers when rural issues of concern to them are at stake). Collaborative organizers should include balanced representation from relevant interests in the collaborative process and should avoid dominant representation by commercial interests, regardless of the decision-making rule used in the process.
- **Establish Clear Expectations and Goals.** The collaborative process should be open, accessible and tailored, as much as possible, to participants' needs. Meetings should be civil and respect the ideas of all participants. Participants should agree on how they are going to collaborate and develop clearly articulated and achievable goals for action. All parties should agree at the outset, in writing, on a clear set of rules to govern the workings of the group that cover: who can participate, withdrawal, facilitation, minutes, meeting procedures, what constitutes a decision, and the form that any final agreement will take. Commitments made during collaboration should be honored.
- **Collaborate Early and Often.** Collaboration is enhanced when participants are involved at all stages of project planning, including the identification of issues and concerns, potential project areas, the development of alternatives, project design and, where applicable, implementation and post-treatment monitoring. All members' key concerns should be articulated at the outset and addressed early.
- **Strive for Maximum Transparency in the Decision-Making Process.** The criteria that will be used by decision-makers to select a final project or alternative should be made clear to the

participants and the decision making process that will be used to apply the criteria should also be transparent and understood by all. There should be flexibility in the decision-making process to allow for multiple options to be considered. Financial resources should be made available to overcome lack of parity among participants in terms of expertise, skill, and experience. All participants should have access to expert advisors on relevant technical questions. Meetings must be held in various places to facilitate participation by all interested parties (urban as well as other stakeholders, those who work during the day or those for whom the process would not be part of their jobs, those without cars, etc.).

- **Encourage Stakeholders to Function as Representatives.** Participants in collaboration should serve as a liaison between the collaborative group and the interests they represent and, when appropriate, advocate within their constituency for the agreed to plan, project or activity. Communication between the entities should be enhanced as a result of the collaborative effort.
- **Foster Long-Term Participation.** Collaboration will yield longer-term benefits if participants maintain regular communication and active participation in the collaborative process and are committed to staying engaged through completion of the plan, project or activity. New stakeholders should be added when appropriate.
- **Recognize Time Frames and Resources.** Participants in collaboration should mutually agree on ways to accomplish their objectives within reasonable time frames and in consideration of resource limitations. Collaborative processes must recognize and honor participants' time and resource limitations as well as those that exist for implementing agencies.
- **Enhance Decision-Making.** Collaboration should be conducted in a way that complements and informs formal decision-making. A collaborative process for forest planning should not be used by government agencies as an alternative to enforcing existing laws, such as NEPA, nor should it be used to supplant the authority of a land management agency by counter-imposing the weight of local opinion.
- **Consensus Decision-Making.** A consensus decision-making rule adds value to collaborative processes. Legitimate consensus processes tend to:
 - Reassure opponents that they can work together, with the knowledge that they have effective veto power;
 - Require meeting the needs of each member of the group, forcing groups to seek creative solutions that might not occur otherwise;
 - Allow real consideration to be given to minority views that might otherwise be summarily dismissed;
 - Enhance a norm of responsibility for the group; and
 - Increase broad-based support and likelihood of implementation for decisions made by the group.

COMMUNITY AND WILDLAND-URBAN INTERFACE FIRE PROTECTION

Community fire protection is a high priority for forest planning. Fuels reduction and structure protection within the wildland urban interface should be completed as quickly as possible. Planning comprehensive community protection should be done in the context of both protection of life and property *and* restoration of fire adapted ecosystems and natural fire regimes. Aggressive community protection will enable effective restoration of forest ecosystems and natural fire regimes.

Current efforts to protect communities from the threat of forest fire are often planned without consideration for what is actually effective at protecting houses and communities from forest fires. Considering the current risks and the limited resources available for the implementation of fuels reduction projects, individual projects and strategic plans, including Forest Plans, need to utilize the best available science to develop the most effective and efficient methods for protecting houses and communities. At the same time, the focused treatment of the WUI is necessary in order to avoid inadvertently damaging adjacent forest ecosystems and wildlife habitat with poorly planned and ineffective projects.

CULTURAL RESOURCES

The desired future condition is the adoption of a comprehensive approach to ensure the continued protection of identified cultural heritage resources and enable the timely assimilation of any new information/discoveries to protect resources identified in the future. A flexible approach is urged in which the agency will utilize the full range of management mechanisms such as “special area” designations to preserve both landscapes and the cultural resources they harbor while ensuring that additional land uses remain compatible with cultural resources conservation objectives. In situations in which there are competing use demands, plans should be devised such that landscape and cultural resources preservation receive a high priority.

Prehistoric sites should be allowed to age naturally and remain undisturbed whenever possible. Active stabilization efforts should be kept to a minimum and site reconstruction projects are generally discouraged. A strategy of road closure/re-routing and provision of minimum signage is recommended to help prevent vandalism.

Active efforts to involve tribes and citizen groups such as the Arizona Archaeological Society in the process of forests resources identification and establishment and/or expansion of volunteer site steward programs are urged. In addition, because so much of the forest land cultural resources are un-surveyed, it would be desirable to consider developing mechanisms to gather and rapidly confirm new information obtained from the public that may reveal new resources deserving protection.

Plans should include as integral elements mechanisms that will enable managers to receive, store and analyze data and meta-data relevant to on-the-ground conditions. A flexible approach that recognizes useful information may come from many sources – the public, commercial users, ranchers, etc. – and offers several channels for citizens to provide such input conveniently such

as web sites, written response forms, or well-publicized phone numbers, will provide the structure and wherewithal essential for true adaptive management.

ECONOMIC

The natural heritage provided by our National Forests, i.e., productivity of native plants, wildlife, and fully-functioning natural ecosystems, improves the social, economic, and cultural condition of local communities, the nation, and future generations. The national forests provide important habitat for plants and wildlife, clean water, clean air, opportunities for hunting fishing, recreation, natural quiet, and visually pleasing natural landscapes, among many other critical ecological services. Any uses of the forests for social and economic benefit should be compatible with the national forests' long-term ecological sustainability and integrity. Any economic uses of national forests should be compatible with restoring and maintaining ecological integrity and should only be accommodated if they do not degrade the forests' natural heritage.

FIRE AND FUELS MANAGEMENT

Restoration of natural fire regimes and fire adapted ecosystems should be a high priority for the forest planning process. Restoration of natural fire regimes outside the WUI should be a primary goal of fire and fuels management. Recognition of the variability of forest and woodland ecosystems and associated fire regimes is critical to successful restoration of fire adapted ecosystems.

Wildland fire use and prescribed burning, both as fuels reduction and forest and grassland restoration tools, should be used wherever possible. Restrict mechanical thinning for fuels management and forest restoration to areas with system roads and where wildland fire use or prescribed burning is not possible. Wildland fire use and prescribed burning should be the preferred tool in areas without existing system roads.

Fire management planning consistent with the 2001 Wildland Fire Management Policy should be completed as soon as possible. Public involvement, including collaboration and NEPA, will ensure that fire management planning is effective and addresses the most critical areas and issues. Existing fire management plans that have not involved the public should be updated as soon as possible.

Fire suppression, where necessary, should include protection of habitat, fish and wildlife, watershed integrity, and other critical ecosystem elements as a high priority when conducting suppression activities. Emphasize the fire prevention responsibility of private landowners within and adjacent to the forests.

GRAZING

Manage the extent and intensity of livestock grazing on National Forest Service lands so that this practice is compatible with sustainable long-term ecological health and ecosystem integrity. If compatibility cannot be obtained, ecological values shall be given the highest priority. Ensure that permitted use does not exceed the lands' capacity and suitability for livestock grazing, and does not harm the sustained productivity of the forest. In cases where the threshold has been exceeded, rapidly implement all strategies for recovery, including rest, and then adjust livestock management to meet objectives. Base management decisions on quantifiable monitoring conducted at regular intervals, with an emphasis on methods specifically designed to meet all resource objectives. Restrict livestock use in riparian areas and the habitats of endemic and imperiled species where such use conflicts with watershed health and recovery goals. Allow for voluntary permanent retirement of grazing allotments and extended nonuse for resource protection.

HUMAN TRENDS

Work with universities and governments to collect and analyze human growth and use trends that may impact forest use within the region. Look at trends in urban, suburban, and ex-urban growth. Understand the projected expansion of the transportation systems and how people are using or interacting with public open spaces. Be informed about socio graphic trends including how people are using discretionary time to include how they are recreating. Work to project human use and development trends for at least 20 years and incorporate that trend analysis into forest health plans so the health of the forest is assured even as human use changes and expands.

INVASIVE SPECIES

Invasive species can rapidly alter the ecology of a region. They reduce biodiversity, change ecological composition and reduce the quality and volumes of environmental services. Consistent monitoring for and identification of invaders is imperative. Effective evaluation of methods of both precluding invaders and responding to them in ways that do not degrade the environment is important. Mitigations that are founded in good science, work against the invaders while not harming the surrounding ecology must be the policy of the land agency and their partners. As climate change becomes better understood and documented the effects of warming on species migration into previously unoccupied habitat should be monitored, understood, and responded to.

MINING

Identify areas in the national forests that, because of their outstanding biological, cultural, scenic or other resource values, are incompatible with any form of mining. In addition, permanently withdraw these areas from mineral entry. No mining should occur that degrades water quality for unique waters/outstanding waters, Wild and Scenic Rivers, critical habitat or any other special

designation areas. Identify abandoned mines that present a risk to water quality and seek reclamation and restoration of those areas. Abandoned mine closures should take into consideration wildlife and include bat-friendly grates.

RECREATION

- **Motorized Recreation & Off-Road Vehicles**

Allow motorized access only to areas where damage to natural and cultural resources will not occur. Protect sensitive areas, such as washes, land with archeological sites, and habitat for threatened, endangered, or sensitive species. Ensure adequate funding for monitoring and enforcement mechanisms. Increase enforcement of laws governing

- **Nonmotorized Recreation**

Adopt a road/trail ratio that reflects the needs of wild species and communities, as well as the needs of muscle-powered human users.

Convert system and non-system roads to hiking/equestrian trails where appropriate. Prohibit the creation of wildcat trails. Reverse the trend toward increasing damage to the forest's trails from overuse or inappropriate use; take into account slope, soils, and other limitations. Steer trails away from sensitive habitat and cultural sites.

- **Commercial Recreation**

Allocations, opportunities, standards, rules, and guidelines must be applied equally to commercial and non-commercial public lands recreational users. While there is a legitimate need for professional outfitting and guiding in forests and wilderness areas, land managers should allocate use fairly and equally and avoid fixed allocations that favor commercial outfitters/guides over the general public that does not use outfitters/guides services.

OLD GROWTH - PRESERVE ALL OLD GROWTH AND LARGE TREES

Old growth and large trees that represent the next generation of old growth are important and rare ecosystem components at all scales, from individual to landscape level.. Old growth forests provide habitat for numerous birds and mammals including the northern goshawk, the Mexican spotted owl, the Kaibab squirrel in northern Arizona and the Mt. Graham Red Squirrel in southeast Arizona. Old Growth is critical to so many species because it provides key habitat attributes not found in less mature forests. These include large, old trees, large standing dead trees, vertical and horizontal structural diversity, nesting cavities, broken tops, and unique "plated" bark structure. In addition to these important habitat characteristics, Old Growth provides irreplaceable aesthetic values, recreational opportunities such as hiking and wildlife viewing, and provides a host of ecological services including overall watershed function, clean water, soil retention, and storage of greenhouse gasses.

PRECAUTIONARY APPROACH TO ECOSYSTEM CONSERVATION

Proposed land management actions should be based on a precautionary approach to land management, that is, decisions that adequately account for scientific uncertainty. These decisions should:

- be made in an open and accountable process that includes sharing with all participants
- be based on disclosed standards for justifying conclusions, and
- include full disclosure of value judgments, and assumptions that underlie the interpretation of data and information.

To implement the precautionary approach, decision makers must select alternatives that:

- avoid harm and the potential for harm resulting in serious or irreversible damage to ecosystems
- err on the side of conservation
- expand and not foreclose future conservation and actions and options
- avoid irreversible consequences
- consider "no action"
- provide high-quality scientific research for timely detection of actual or potential adverse impacts
- recognize that action to protect ecosystems is necessary, even in the presence of uncertainty, and
- shift the burden of proof to those who advocate potentially harmful action.

RESOURCES FOR RESEARCH, MONITORING, MITIGATION AND ENFORCEMENT

Use best science and practice in monitoring the ecologies in the forest. Where downward trends occur, adaptively manage to mitigate and recover. Monitoring, mitigation, education and enforcement will be integrated into all forest plans and be supported and funded in ways that conserve the ecological and environmental values of the forest.

RESTORATION OF ECOSYSTEMS

The primary goal of restoration is to enhance ecological integrity by restoring natural processes and resiliency. Effective restoration should reestablish fully functioning ecosystems. Ecological integrity can be thought of as the “ability of an ecosystem to support and maintain a balanced, adaptive community of organisms having a species composition, diversity, and functional organization comparable to that of natural habitats within a region (Karr and Dudley 1981).” A restoration approach based on ecological integrity incorporates the advantages of historical models while recognizing that ecosystems are dynamic and change over time.

Sound restoration requires an integrated, multi-disciplinary approach rooted in conservation biology and ecosystem restoration principles that include protecting intact landscapes (particularly those that serve as reference or baseline conditions); allowing the land to heal itself; and, where necessary, helping it to do so through active restoration. A key priority is to move the

lands to a more natural condition. Missing or diminished compositional elements, such as herbaceous understories, mycorrhizal fungi, or extirpated species also require restoration attention.

Restoration planning should include the conservation of habitats for diminished or extirpated wildlife species, with special emphasis placed on protecting and restoring ecologically effective populations of “strongly interactive” species to a significant portion of their historic range. Recovery plans and conservation plans for threatened, endangered, and sensitive species should be incorporated to the fullest extent possible in planning for comprehensive ecosystem restoration.

Comprehensive forest ecosystem restoration requires balancing fire risk reduction with retention of forest structures necessary for canopy dependent species, which is the group of species most in decline in the SW. It is also critical to retain some dead, deformed, and diseased trees, and some clumps of large trees with interlocking crowns, to maintain structural complexity and important food and nesting habitat. Such trees are important elements of genetic diversity in their own right as well. Trees larger than 16”dbh and old-growth trees, regardless of size, should be retained in restoration treatments because of the scarcity of these trees in Southwestern forests.

ROADLESS AREAS

Expand the forests’ network of Inventoried Roadless Areas (IRA) established by RARE II and subsequent planning processes, including the 2001 Roadless Rule. Refine boundaries of current roadless areas to reflect comprehensive conservation planning needs such as wildlife corridors and wildland fire management areas. Identify roadless areas that have not been inventoried, assess roadless characteristics, and provide official IRA status where applicable.

SPECIAL MANAGEMENT AREAS

Work with stakeholders to identify and create additional Special Management Areas and ensure that they are of an ecologically effective number and size, e.g., subwatershed. Act on the Forest Service mandate to designate at least one Research Natural Area for each habitat type on the forest. Designate new Zoological and Botanical Areas in sectors with unusual or significant biological diversity value. Recognize the Important Bird Area designation of Bird Life International and the National Audubon Society as a Zoological Area designation. Insure that management plans for such areas, including National Game Preserves and National Natural Landmarks, have explicit, effective management prescriptions necessary to achieve stated conservation goals.

TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM

Designate the minimum transportation network that is consistent with the Travel Management Rule.

Lower existing road density by closing (1) redundant or unnecessary system roads, (2) system roads that are causing significant damage to natural and cultural values, and (3) all non-system roads, unless a non-system road can be substituted for a system road to the benefit of habitat conservation. Retain or lower the current road-density standard of no more than one mile of road per square mile of forest; ensure that Wilderness and Inventoried Roadless Area acreage are excluded from this calculation for each Ecosystem Management Area, as well as across the forest.

Ensure that the route network that is adopted through the designation process is economically viable in terms of maintenance requirements, law enforcement and safety precautions.

Ensure that any design for roadbuilding is fish and wildlife friendly. Reduce sedimentation effects from road and trail construction. Minimize the impact of road paving and maintenance on fish and wildlife and fish and wildlife habitat.

Implement an enforcement and education plan to ease compliance and inform the public about new transportation system regulations.

VISUAL RESOURCES

Maintain and protect the viewsheds for which the forest is famous. Prevent any activity that would compromise the visual or habitat quality of these viewsheds. Work with adjacent private landowners to protect areas off the forest, via conservation easements. Protect views of *and* from wilderness areas. Protect all views of rivers and lakes. Protect all views from recreation sites, population centers, vista points, and transportation corridors. Prevent degradation by activities such as logging, mining and mineral exploration, road construction, power transmission lines and cell phone towers, energy, and inholding developments.

WATERSHED PRINCIPLE

Consider historic, current and future climate predictions for the climatic range of variation and the projected population growth of Arizona and potential impacts to current and estimated future human populations associated with the down stream flows of these watersheds.

Manage watersheds with a holistic approach, reestablish stream connectivity and sinuosity, and utilize the most current scientific information readily available and accepted by the scientific community.

Manage with consideration of ongoing drought conditions and the resulting stress on aquatic life, fishes, wildlife and vegetation.

Consider the impacts of every project to: the entire watershed, in-stream flows, and to groundwater and the aquifer.

For any activity with the potential to impact the stability, sustainability and productivity of any watershed, the managing agency must identify these factors with the accompanying detail through the NEPA process and alternatives. The consideration and disclosure of impacts must account for all the watershed components including: soil, plants, aquatic life, fishes, and wildlife, as well as the surface and sub-surface hydrological systems.

Acquire surface and subsurface water rights for all waters on the forest and work with partners to assure and maintain instream flows. Document historical and existing waters and water uses on the forest, and determine the ecologic and economic value of these resources.

Conserve, protect and restore water quality and quantity, protect free-flowing surface waters, ephemeral, seasonal and perennial wetlands, lakes and riparian areas.

Acknowledge that waters, both surface and subsurface, are linked hydrologic systems that are integral to the health of ecological communities and downstream users.

WILD AND SCENIC RIVERS

Ensure that management direction in Forest Plans regarding the Verde Wild and Scenic River and the proposed Fossil Creek Wild and Scenic River (legislation introduced July 2006) adequately protects the values of those river segments.

Ensure that management direction of the Forest Plans does not affect the eligibility of the river segments that were identified in the Resource Information Report (September 1993) as “potential wild and scenic rivers on the six National Forests of Arizona.”

While there may be instances where the suitability of Wild and Scenic designation of specific river segments may be analyzed during the revision of Forest Plans, we recommend that suitability analysis not be evaluated during the Forest Plan Revision process, and that such evaluations would be more effectively analyzed in separate planning processes focused on specific rivers or watersheds. This would preserve current administrative protection for recognized eligible segments as well encourage maximum community involvement and citizen participation during subsequent suitability studies.

WILDERNESS

All Forest Plans should protect the wilderness character of Wilderness Areas, Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs), and the Blue Range Primitive Area. The Forest Service is required to evaluate wilderness quality lands during the Forest Plan revision process due to the clear direction specified in the Arizona Wilderness Act of 1984 [Public Law 98-406 Section 103(b)(2)].

WILDLIFE SPECIES AND HABITATS

Focus plans on the critical relationships that exist between wildlife and between wildlife and habitat. Focus on the health of the biotic system and all of its parts. Emphasize protection and restoration of ecologically effective populations of “strongly interactive” species to a significant portion of their historic range. Understand that all wildlife depends upon healthy habitat and all efforts will be made to ensure human use of the forest does not compromise habitat capacity to sustain an appropriately diverse biotic community that is self-sustaining over generations. Through monitoring and assessment, when and if the Forest Service finds species in decline in ways that may compromise system functioning, employ the best science available to design and implement mitigations that will recover the wildlife in question and restore the system.

We support a forest-wide wildlife population status and trend process consistent with the 2000 Conservation and Recovery Act (CARA) that includes:

- Information on the distribution and abundance of species of wildlife, including low and declining populations that are indicative of the diversity and health of the forest’s wildlife; and,
- Descriptions of locations and relative condition of key habitats and community types essential to conservation of species identified in (1); and,
- Descriptions of problems which may adversely affect species identified in (1) or their habitats, and priority research and survey efforts needed to identify factors which may assist in restoration and improved condition of these species and habitats; and,
- Descriptions of conservation actions proposed to conserve the identified species and habitats and priorities for implementing such actions.