



Making Sense of Forest Planning Projects

Keeping up with "what's up" with the Forest Service is challenging! Yet your involvement and comments make a difference! We were pleased with the conservation community's turnout in Eagar where many of you expressed your concerns personally to the Forest Service. Others of you attended open houses in Pinetop or Heber. Many of you wrote great comments and we appreciated you sharing them with us.

There are currently three processes underway that could affect the health of the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forest:

1. Forest Planning Rule

This rule provides guidelines that forests across the nation use when creating their Forest Plans. Included in the rule are the types of concerns that each forest must address in its management plan. Forests are now operating under the 1982 rule that focuses on many traditional uses of the forest, including grazing and logging and to a lesser extent wildlife management, recreation, and water resources. We hope that the new rule will expand planning guidelines to include the role of sustainable forests to; mitigate climate change, encourage forest restoration, promote watershed health, and contribute

Emphasis on Restoring Forest Resiliency

Secretary Vilsack recently stated, "Our shared vision begins with restoration. Restoration means managing forest lands first and foremost to protect our water resources, while making our forests more resilient to climate change." The Forest Service Manual defines Ecological Restoration as "the process of assisting the recovery of resilience and adaptive capacity of ecosystems that have been degraded, damaged, or destroyed. Restoration focuses on establishing the composition, structure, pattern, and ecological processes necessary to make terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems sustainable, resilient, and healthy under current and future conditions."

to vibrant rural communities. We expect that the new Forest Planning Rule will be released late in 2011. Public meetings to gain citizen input have already been held but there will be more opportunities for you to influence the process. **We will keep you posted as these opportunities arise.**



2. Forest Planning

Each National Forest is charged with creating a new management plan every 10 to 15 years. The Planning Rule (described above) provides the umbrella of issues each forest must address as it creates a specific management plan for a particular forest. The plans in most Arizona forests (or NM forest) are already well over 15 years old and badly in need of revision. This spring the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forest released its draft alternatives and asked for public input. We asked you to comment on the range of alternatives the Apache-Sitgreaves Forest developed. Many of you responded to our call for comments by asking for a more conservation-minded

alternative. The comment period ended April 30, 2010.

This summer, the Forest will finalize alternatives and begin analysis and development of the DEIS (Draft Environmental Impact Statement) and the Draft Plan. **The DEIS for the Apache-Sitgreaves plan revision is scheduled for release in the fall 2010. The public will have 45 days to comment on this plan. We will send out announcements about when and how to make your opinions on this important document known to the Forest Service.**

3. Travel Management

In November 2005, the Forest Service announced the travel management rule that requires each National Forest to designate where on the forest the public can operate motor vehicles. The rule was developed in reaction to the Forest Service Chief's identification of unmanaged recreation as a key threat to the health of the nation's National Forests.

When implemented, a free-of-charge map will be provided that displays the designated system. General use off the system will then be considered prohibited. This rule requires all forests to end the extremely damaging practice of off-road vehicle cross-country travel (though small play areas are still allowed). Travel Management Planning is still in progress on the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forest. You will have opportunity to give the Apache-Sitgreaves your input on the various alternatives for this plan sometime in



May or June of 2010. **The WMCL will be reviewing the alternatives closely and asking members to send comments to the Forest Service. The final MVUM for the Apache-Sitgreaves is expected to be published in November or December of 2010.**

As you can see decisions made over the next two years will affect the health of the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forest for years to come. Your input into these three processes is critical. We urge you to take every opportunity to make your voice heard through written comments and by

Not Opposed to ATV--but opposed to their use as Thrillcraft (<http://www.stopthrillcraft.org/index.htm>) in ways that damage our public lands.

The off-roaders and the industry that backs them are clamoring for unrestricted motorized access to our public lands. Currently off-road vehicles can go cross country throughout the Forests with very few exceptions.

Travel Management planning gives us a rare a rare, and perhaps our only, opportunity to help create a balanced plan for our favorite National Forest. Each forest is at a different place in its planning process. Act now to preserve quiet recreation in your backyard.

The WMCL seeks a Travel Management Plan that minimizes cross country ORV play areas, protects existing wilderness and inventoried roadless areas, maintains the eligibility of potential wilderness areas, and determines that motorized game retrieval is

unnecessary or should be very limited in nature.