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## *Coronado Revised Forest Plan*

### *Fact Sheet*

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#### **What is a Forest Plan?**

The **National Forest Management Act (NFMA) of 1976** (PDF, 60 kb) requires every national forest to develop a Forest Plan (Plan) and periodically revise the Plan. Today, these plans provide broad direction for managing natural resources for the American people. Plans are programmatic in nature, meaning they cover a large geographic area, and their management direction is broad in scope. In addition, every forest plan must be consistent with environmental laws and regulations such as the Endangered Species Act and Clean Water Act.

#### **Why did the 1986 Forest Plan need revising?**

The original Coronado National Forest Plan was implemented in 1986. Since then, many social and resource conditions have changed, scientific information has improved, and land management policies have evolved. A few of these changes were addressed in amendments to the original Forest Plan. This plan provided a solid foundation for forest management. Instead of starting over and developing a new plan from scratch, the Forest Plan revision process determines what is working in the existing plan and what needs to be revised.

#### **What are the goals of the revised Land Management Plan?**

The revised Land Management Plan provides strategic guidance for managing the cultural and natural resources for the nearly 1.8 million acres of public land within the Coronado National Forest over the next 10 to 15 years.

The revised Land Management Plan emphasizes long-term, strategic vision or desired conditions—both with respect to natural resources and human uses—that projects and related management activities must maintain or make movement toward.

It carries forward some direction from the 1986 Plan; however, unlike the old plan, it is designed to allow forest management to be adaptable over time and to adjust to site-specific conditions.

Generally, it does not repeat existing law, regulation, and policy.

#### **What are the components of the revised Land Management Plan?**

The revised Land Management Plan contains the following plan components:

- i. Desired conditions
- ii. Objectives
- iii. Standards
- iv. Guidelines
- v. Management areas

- vi. Special areas
- vii. Suitability of Areas
- viii. Monitoring strategy.

The revised Land Management Plan is less prescriptive than the previous plan. The revised Land Management Plan allows increased flexibility through an emphasis on strategic desired conditions. Standards and guidelines have been included, when necessary, to provide constraints that ensure projects and activities are designed and conducted to maintain or move the forest toward desired conditions. It includes objectives that provide measurable, time-specific activities intended to make progress toward desired conditions and includes probable treatments designed to achieve desired conditions.

### **How was the revised plan developed?**

A team of natural and cultural resource specialists; the public; other agencies; and local, state, and tribal government officials collaboratively developed the revised Land Management Plan.

Input was gathered through a variety of public involvement activities including open houses, invitational meetings with partners and stakeholders, and consultation with tribal governments.

From this initial public input, several alternatives were prepared:

#### No action alternative:

##### A. The **1986 Forest Plan**

#### Action alternatives:

- B. The **proposed revised plan** describes general conditions necessary to support sustainable ecosystems, biodiversity, and sustainable social and economic interactions between the forest and surrounding communities. The revised plan recommends four areas for congressional designation as wilderness (108,889 acres).
- C. Responds to public suggestions for additional forest land for wilderness designation reducing human disturbance to benefit ecological and recreation resources.
- D. Responds to public suggestions for more land to be allocated specifically for motorized recreational use, including related facilities. This does not recommend any new wilderness areas and would limit direction regarding management of disturbances resulting from climate change

### **How were the alternatives evaluated?**

All the alternatives analyzed in a draft environmental impact statement (EIS) to determine how each alternative would affect or impact cultural and natural resources within the Coronado National Forest and social interests for those resources. The proposed revised Land Management Plan and accompanying EIS were released for formal 104-day public review comment period in November 2013.

More than 2,200 public comments were received. Substantive comments were analyzed, and suggested changes were used to modify the proposed revised plan (Revised Proposed Action).

### **How was the Final Land Management Plan developed from this?**

Additional adjustments were made to the proposed revised plan based on the public comments received along with internal agency reviews to form a modified version of the proposed action which became the final revised Land Management Plan.

A summary of those changes can be found in Chapter 1 of the Final EIS.

### **Were threatened or endangered species considered in this process?**

The Coronado National Forest consulted with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as required by law to determine what impacts the Forest Plan has, or may have, on federally listed plants and wildlife.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service provided the Coronado National Forest with a Biological Opinion to disclose those findings.

### **What are the key themes in the revised Forest Plan?**

In late 2005, the revision process began with focus group meetings and facilitated public workshops to develop potential revision topics, which are grouped into five common themes, each representing a potential area for change in the management of the Forest and the development of desired condition statements, based on the prioritized needs for change.

- i. Ecosystem Restoration and Resiliency Treatments
- ii. Visitor Experiences
- iii. Access to National Forest System Lands
- iv. Preservation of Open Space
- v. Communities, Collaboration, and Partnerships

### **How will the revised Land Management Plan differ from the 1986 Plan?**

The revised Forest Plan:

- Proposes to prioritize economic, social, and ecological sustainability.
- Promotes recreation sustainability, and addresses increased public demands and needs.
- Establishes 12 unique geographic areas - Ecosystem Management Areas (EMA) - based on the major mountain ranges that comprise the Coronado National Forest.
- Provides additional direction for priority watersheds using the national watershed condition framework, designed to determine the condition of a watershed based on 12 factors. Watershed projects that assist in the protection of municipal supply watersheds should be promoted as a priority.
- Provides guidance through Plan objectives for increasing the number of permanent legal access routes; and provide guidance through desired conditions and guidelines that describe the characteristics of lands to be acquired or conveyed, rather than identifying specific lands.
- Recognizes the value of open space in desired condition statements throughout the document

- Preserves, protects, and/or restores heritage resources, including known Native American sacred sites, for their cultural and scientific importance through desired condition statements.
- Provides direction for recreation and in both wilderness areas and in developed settings to explore and experience solitude and/or more social settings with a higher number of amenities.
- Provides forage for grazing in support of domestic livestock production as a viable, sustainable economic activity in communities surrounding the Forest.
- Addresses potential viability concerns of 430 species (terrestrial, aquatic, and plant) through management objectives, desired conditions, standards, and guidelines.
- Utilizes land use zones based on community uses to provide sustainable recreational experiences, balancing the need for both quiet/dispersed and motorized/developed recreational uses.
- Restores and/or maintains all nine vegetation types that occur on the Coronado, resulting in a reduction of excess tree densities and the return to natural fire regimes resulting in a vegetative condition where natural fire could be managed more effectively.
- Sustains and/or restores habitat for fish and wildlife, including the 20 species that are listed, proposed, or candidates for listing under the Endangered Species Act (e.g., Mexican spotted owl, Mount Graham red squirrel).
- Promotes the resilience of the forest and reduce its susceptibility to uncharacteristic levels of disturbance from fire, drought, flooding, insects, and disease.
- Recommends three wilderness areas and one recommended addition to a designated wilderness area: Ku Chish, Mount Graham, and Whetstone recommended wilderness areas, and Chiricahua Addition North (an expansion to Chiricahua Wilderness). Recommended wilderness areas will total 108,889 acres. Management for recommended wilderness will focus on maintaining and enhancing their wilderness character, which includes scenic resources, primitive recreation settings and fish and wildlife habitats.
- Recommends four new research natural areas (RNAs): Goodding Extension and Pole Bridge Extension, Canelo (these three were proposed by the 1986 plan, but were never established) and Finger Rock.
- Proposes Cave Creek Canyon Birds of Prey Zoological-Botanical Area, totaling 25,764 acres, which harbors the densest known population of breeding raptors in the United States.

### **How will the transition from the 1986 Plan to the revised Land Management Plan take place?**

The transition will be smooth and gradual. The Coronado National Forest will avoid a transition that forces an immediate re-examination or modification of all contracts, projects, permits, and other activities already in progress.

Projects currently under contract, permit, or other authorizing instruments are not affected by the decision; however, projects may be modified to adopt all or part of this direction where Forest Service managers deem appropriate. As new project decisions, contracts, permits, renewals, and other activities are considered, conformity to the revised plan direction as described in the previous section is expected.

The Forest Planner will assist resource specialists and other forest employees to review revised plan direction and provide guidance on how to begin implementation. The Forest Planner will offer tutorial-type planning sessions on how to use the revised Forest Plan to staff and supervisors.

### **Can changes be made to the revised Land Management Plan after it is publically released?**

There are three types of changes that can be made to the Forest Plan:

- i. Administrative changes
- ii. Project-specific plan amendments
- iii. Programmatic plan amendments

Administrative changes include corrections or clerical errors; changes needed to conform to new laws or regulations; changes to the monitoring strategy when coupled with a public comment process; and changes to non-direction areas of the plan (such as in background and general description sections).

Project-specific plan amendments are used when a proposed project is not consistent with the direction in the plan. These amendments only accommodate the proposed project and would not lead to permanent changes in plan components or apply to future projects.

Programmatic plan amendments are used for any adjustments to plan components that cannot be addressed through administrative changes or project-specific plan amendments. Programmatic plan amendments may be used to add, modify, or remove one or more plan components, or to change how or where one or more plan components apply to all or part of the plan area (including management areas).

The process for making changes to the plan is outlined in 36 CFR 219.13 and chapter 20 of the Land Management Planning Handbook (FSH 1909.12) and includes administrative changes, such as clerical corrections, and plan amendments, which are substantive changes to plan direction. As changes are proposed for the Forest Plan, members of the public will be informed of the proposal and public engagement strategies will be publicized. Opportunities for public input and proposed changes will also be posted on the Coronado National Forest public website.

### **Why did it take so long to produce a revised Land Management Plan?**

The process of revising a Land Management Plan involves years of coordinating with many different stakeholders and partner agencies, as well as engaging with the community through public meetings and soliciting public input. However, since this process was started in 2006, a number of regulatory changes and multiple subsequent court cases at the national level caused planning efforts for the Coronado, and other national forests, to be delayed repeatedly. With those issues now settled, national forests like the Coronado are able to proceed with finalizing their plans.

Careful and deliberate consideration has been taken with all of the comments and concerns expressed by organizations, agencies, and especially the public during the course of this revision.