

Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests 2005 Annual Report

Caring for the Land and Serving People

The Apache and Sitgreaves National Forests are administered as one National Forest and include over two million acres of generally forested lands. The Forests run along the Mogollon Rim and the White Mountains in East Central Arizona.

The Apache-Sitgreaves is an important part of Arizona's natural heritage. The land, forests, lakes, streams, fish, and wildlife provide us with places to recreate, sustain us with food, and fuel the engines of our economic activities.

Managed for today's needs without compromising the needs of future generations, the Apache-Sitgreaves provides for a full spectrum of uses. When a forest is managed properly, it can provide diversified value with a variety of habitats for wildlife, numerous recreational opportunities, scenic landscapes, jobs which help support a rural lifestyle, clean air, stable soil, high quality water, wood products which we need every day, and healthy forests for the future. Our commitment to the land and people that use it has prompted a management style that contributes to ecological, social, and economic sustainability.

Work toward achieving the desired future condition of the Forests is guided by our Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan), which was adopted in 1987.

The Forest Plan represents one integrated plan which guides all resource management activities on the Apache-Sitgreaves. Accomplishments made in achieving Forest Plan goals and objectives are contained in this 2005 Report.



Escudilla Mountain reflected in Luna Lake

As we continue to meet society's needs and address the changes in national direction concerning forest management, we look forward to working with the users of this great and beautiful land we call the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests.

Recreation

The Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests offer a variety of recreation opportunities. The Forests have over 100 developed recreation sites, including campgrounds, picnic areas, trailheads, and two visitor centers, over 1,300 miles of hiking, equestrian, and off highway vehicle trails, 3 wilderness areas, 1 primitive area, and numerous opportunities for dispersed recreation, such as hunting, fishing, hiking and camping.

The Forests continue to make strides in providing improved opportunities for our visitors with disabilities, including upgrades to restrooms and ramadas at Greer



Backpackers hiking amidst the aspens on Mount Baldy



OHV enthusiasts on the Saffel Canyon OHV Trail

Lakes Recreation Area, Nelson Reservoir, Big Lake Recreation Area, Saffel Canyon Off Highway Vehicle Trailhead, and the Coronado Trail Scenic Byway.

Forest partners were instrumental in obtaining national

recognition for US 191 which runs through the eastern portion of the Forests. This stretch of highway, known as the Coronado Trail Scenic Byway, was designated a national scenic byway on September 22, 2005. More information can be found at <http://www.byways.org/browse/byways/2059/designation.html>.

Cultural Resources

Over 15% of the Apache-Sitgreaves has received some form of archaeological inventory. The Forests regularly survey for potential cultural resources prior to on-the-ground land management activities such as road construction, campground development, and vegetative treatments. Through these inventories, sites are identified and archaeologists recommend protection or mitigation measures that are implemented during prescribed activities.

All unevaluated cultural resource sites are flagged for avoidance or excluded from project boundaries as protective measures. All National Register of Historic Sites on the Forests are visited routinely to assure that essential characteristics are protected. Where site density is high, projects are reviewed to assure that cultural resource sites are not disturbed.

In 2005 during a project-related archaeological survey, a 10,000 - 12,000 year old Clovis dart point was discovered. This PaleoIndian dart point was made and used by prehistoric mammoth hunters and is one of only three complete Clovis points found above the Mogollon Rim in Arizona. The human occupation of the Apache-Sitgreaves is now known to have occurred much earlier than was previously thought.



Archaeologist Pete Taylor holding Clovis dart point

Wildlife

Habitat conditions for game and non-game wildlife species, fish and rare plants are managed to maintain populations across the Forests. Special emphasis is provided in the management, protection and recovery of federally listed threatened and endangered species (T&E).

The Forests' status report of 17 Management Indicator Species (MIS) indicate that population trends of 15 species are stable and 2 are in decline. MIS species monitored in 2005 included red squirrel middens, Abert's squirrels, migratory birds, and active prairie dog towns.

The Forests coordinate with the AZ Game & Fish Department, which monitors game species population and trends. Several of these are also MIS species, including mule deer, elk,

pronghorn and turkey. Mule deer populations statewide continue to slowly decline, while populations of the other three are stable.

Two major habitat improvement projects were completed in 2005, the Iris Spring Winter Range Restoration and Sheep's Wash Ecosystem Restoration. These projects restored 5,000 acres of habitat. Partners included the Resource Advisory Committee, Filleman Ranch Partnership, AZ Mule

Deer Association, AZ Game and Fish Dept., AZ Antelope Foundation, AZ Elk Society, SE AZ Sportsman's Club, Safari Club International, Quail Unlimited, and AZ Deer Association.



Ursus americana, commonly called black bear

Threatened, Endangered and Sensitive Species

The Apache-Sitgreaves plays host to ten federally listed species, including the bald eagle, Mexican spotted owl, southwestern willow flycatcher, Mexican wolf, Chiricahua leopard frog, Little Colorado spinedace, loach minnow, Gila chub, Gila trout, and Apache trout. There are 43 species on the Regional Forester's Sensitive species list that are known to occur, or that have suitable habitat on the Forests.

There were 32 Biological Assessments and Biological Evaluations conducted by the Forests in 2005. The Forests requested concurrence of not likely to adversely affect determinations for six projects and



Southwestern willow flycatcher

requested formal consultation for another six projects.

In 2005, the Forests monitoring efforts included surveys of bald eagles, known peregrine falcon eyries, Mexican spotted owl activity centers and potential habitat, northern goshawk nests and potential habitat, and aquatic reptiles and amphibians.

The Arizona Game and Fish Department and the USGS Biological Survey conducted monitoring in areas that have previously been occupied by southwestern willow flycatchers.

They located four territories, the same as in 2004.

Rangeland Management

In line with our multiple-use mandate, the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests administered nearly 2 million acres of livestock grazing allotments during 2005. The emphasis has been on range National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) permit administration and monitoring, focusing on maintaining satisfactory conditions of vegetation for watershed, riparian, and threatened and endangered species within the context of long-term drought.



High elevation rangelands near Big Lake

During FY 2005, there were at least 20 allotments in non-use or not stocked status primarily due to the continued long-term drought and recovery from severe, large-scale wildfires.

Ecosystems, especially riparian and wetlands, are advancing toward healthy conditions described in site specific allotment management plans consistent with current social values. Upland ecosystems, however, are not advancing toward healthy conditions at a quickened pace due to the ongoing drought conditions on the Forests. Management and treatment of the piñon-juniper ecosystems are within Forest Plan objectives.

The Forests continue to work toward a fully functioning integrated noxious and invasive weed management program. Ecosystems being invaded with noxious and invasive weeds are evaluated and treated in a timely manner consistent with Forest Plan and allotment management plan goals and objectives.

Fisheries

The Forests have approximately 450 miles of fishable stream for sport fish species and 2000 acres of lake habitat. Approximately 400 miles of streams contain cold water fishery streams and about 50 miles are warm water fishery streams

There are about 30 species of fish on the Forests, of which 16 are considered game species, and include both cold and warm water fish species. There are 7 threatened and endangered fish species on the Forests. One of these is the Apache trout, for which the Forests provide the majority of habitat on National Forest lands in the southwest. There are about 60 miles of stream containing existing Apache trout populations on the Forests, and several additional streams scheduled for the reintroduction of this species in the next several years.

Management of the fishery resources of the Forests is a cooperative venture with the Arizona Game and Fish Department. The Arizona Game and Fish Department annually stocks various sizes and species of trout in both lakes and streams within the Forests.



Fisherman on Crescent Lake

Watershed, Riparian and Air Quality Conditions

Watershed and riparian conditions are in an upward trend on the Forest and current management is maintaining that trend.

New forest-wide Best Management Practices (BMPs) for White Mountain Stewardship operations were developed and implemented in 2005 to protect soil, water and riparian vegetation values. Site-specific BMPs are designed, implemented and monitored for all ground disturbing projects on the Forests.

Projects that directly improve watershed and riparian conditions accomplished in 2005



Riparian vegetation along Mineral Creek

include meadow and riparian protection fencing, closure of unnecessary eroding roads, grass seeding, hand tool grubbing of noxious weeds and construction of in-stream sediment structures. Projects that indirectly improve soil and water resources include overstory thinning, prescribed fire and livestock grazing management where site specific soil and water conservation practices have been prescribed. These projects have great potential to improve soil and water resources at a landscape scale.

Air quality monitoring at the Mt. Baldy Interagency Monitoring of Protected Visual Environments (IMPROVE) site continued in 2005. Modeling of air quality and daily approval of burning plans are regulated by the AZ Dept of Environmental Quality and ensure impacts of smoke are within acceptable levels.

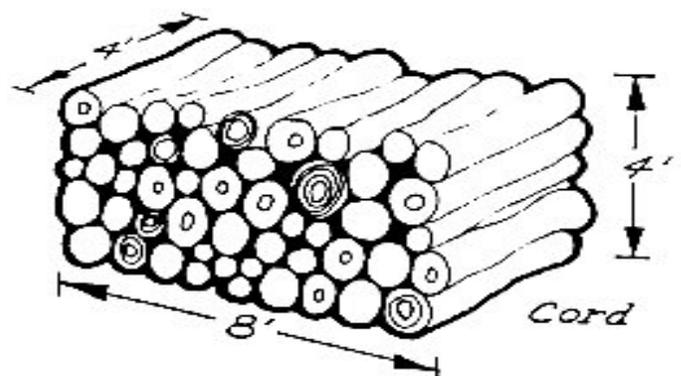
Forest Products

A total of 55,890 CCF (hundred cubic feet) of merchantable tree products were removed from the Forests in FY 2005 with a total value of \$357,054. If this material was all converted in cords it would amount to approximately 70,000 cords. This is nearly a 50% increase from FY 2004 removals.

In addition to 2,800 fuelwood permits for a fee, 681 free use permits were issued in 2005 for an estimated 3,000 cords of free fuelwood. This is 20% fewer permits than issued in 2004.

Over 2,000 permits for Christmas trees were issued statewide from the Black Mesa and Lakeside Ranger Districts in 2005 through the Arizona Forests Sale-by-Mail permit system. An additional 3,550 Christmas tree permits were made available

to the public from the Springerville, Alpine and Clifton Ranger Districts that are not included in the Sale-by-Mail program. Another 1,500 permits were issued Forest-wide throughout the year for wildlings and other miscellaneous products like tree boughs or cones. These numbers are similar to 2004.



Transportation

Recreation and administration of the White Mountain Stewardship Project brought extensive use onto the Forest transportation system. These uses in combination with the anticipated Travel Management Rule encouraged better road planning and inventory update.

The term “minimum road system” has been changing with the times, mainly due to the equipment and logging systems used in the White Mountain Stewardship Project. In most project



Forest Road 249

areas—especially in steep terrain—roads that were designed decades ago for traditional stinger-type logging trucks are being redesigned to accommodate the modern semi-trailers used for hauling chips, mulch, and other by-products of fuels reduction activities.

During Fiscal Year 2005, 7 miles of Forest Service System road were decommissioned, mainly between AZ State Highway 261 and Forest Service System Road 285, the Water Canyon Road. This decommissioning eliminated unnecessary spur roads and motorized access to meadows where resource damage was occurring.

Most Operational Maintenance Levels 3 & 4 roads received annual maintenance by blading with a motor grader, and major routes received additional attention.

Route identification markers and milepost signs were installed on major roads to assist in navigation and incident descriptions.

Timber Production

The Allowable Sale Quantity (ASQ) is commonly referred to as the quantity of timber that may be sold from suitable land as an average annual figure. The 1996 amendment to Region 3 Forest Plans did away with ASQs by Forest and replaced it with an estimated Region 3 total ASQ of 150 MMBF (million board feet). Furthermore, the purpose of timber sales has been shifted from one of meeting timber production and extraction goals to one of supporting the accomplishment of habitat improvement, fuels reduction, and ecosystem restoration. The volume of timber sold in 2005 from the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests in support of these new goals was 30.1 MMBF.



Small diameter trees

When timber harvest does occur on the Apache-Sitgreaves, managers are quick to ensure sites are reforested, soils stabilized and watersheds protected. Trees were planted on 367 acres in 2005 in areas next to communities in the Bison Ranch and Pinedale area that were burned in the Rodeo-Chediski Fire of 2002. This is the third year of such plantings that have been undertaken to help restore these forests. Another 1,431 acres were reported as naturally regenerated across the Forest in 2005. Pre-commercial thinning of small trees was also conducted on 6,634 acres of forestland and commercial thinning of larger trees on 12,648 acres to improve forest health.

Land Ownership & Minerals

Additions to the National Forest System help maintain the quality of life that comes from protected open spaces. With exploding growth and the increasing spread of human population, public lands are increasingly important.

The Apache-Sitgreaves Forest Plan focuses on consolidating forest land ownership to improve management efficiency and better meet public needs. In 2005, 854 acres were acquired in land exchanges.

One of the Forests' challenges is the backlog of trespass cases. These trespasses occur when there is an unauthorized occupancy of Forest Service land - anything from a misplaced fence to an intentional placement of a building on public lands. Ranger District staffs continue their efforts to identify and resolve these cases.

Potential for mineral discovery on the Apache-Sitgreaves, both energy and non-energy, is low.

In 2005, the Forests processed over 200 permits,



Mobile trimming unit generates aggregate material in a Forest Service gravel pit

which were issued primarily for common variety minerals including gravel, sandstone, rock, and boulders.

Both County and Forest Service transportation departments use gravel sources on the Forests for road maintenance.

Insects & Disease

The annual insect and disease aerial detection survey showed that mortality caused by the current pine bark beetle outbreak has declined. New mortality decreased to 950 acres in 2005, compared with 26,635 acres in 2004. Much of the decline is attributed to the reduced availability of food source for the beetle because much of the favorable habitat was already exploited in the first years of the outbreak. There was an additional 7,895 acres of new mortality in the non-pine forests (Douglas-fir, white fir and spruce) by different species of bark beetle than those involved in the pine beetle outbreak.

Aspen defoliation is still occurring with 3,035 acres of new damage identified in 2005. This is a couple thousand fewer acres than experienced in 2004. Spruce aphid damage has likewise declined from

2004 levels to only 50 acres identified in 2005. Western spruce budworm defoliation is up from 2004 with 870 acres showing damage in 2005. The easily observed silken community webs of the tiger moth on ponderosa pine and tent caterpillars on broad-leaved trees are frequently reported, but these insects usually cause little lasting damage.



Beetle damage in a ponderosa pine stand

Fire & Fuels

In 2005 there were approximately 3,200 acres burned in 203 fires. 88 % of these fires were lightning caused. Over the last decade the Forests have been in a dry cycle, causing an increased number and size of fires.

Annual fire readiness inspections are completed with each Ranger District prior to fire season. These inspections make sure the proper planning, equipment, and staffing are in place. After action reviews are conducted on some fires every year to learn what worked and what did not.

With the implementation of the National Fire Plan a significant increase in funding has allowed the Forests to increase acres of treatments. In 2005 the Forests treated over 21,800 acres of Wildland Urban Interface (WUI), of which 16,800 acres were mechanically thinned and 5,100 acres were treated with prescribed fire.

In the Non-Wildland Urban Interface over 12,400 acres were treated. Treatments included mechanical thinning of 3,150 acres and 9,300 acres of prescribed fire.

Causes of Wildfires in FY 2005	# of Fires
Lighting	147
Arson	1
Campfire	39
Children	3
Debris Burning	1
Equipment	1
Miscellaneous	11
Smoking	4

The Forests have three Community Wildfire Protection Plans in place thanks to the tremendous efforts of our partners. Two were completed in 2004, and the third was finished in 2005. They cover 895,237 acres of Wildland Urban Interface on federal, county, private, and state lands and cover 36 communities.



Prescribed fire is a forest management tool

Eastern Arizona Counties Resource Advisory Committee

The Eastern Arizona Counties Resources Advisory Committee (RAC) is a 15 member citizen committee comprised of people representing commercial uses, recreation, elected officials, environmental groups, school officials and Native Americans that recommend funding of eligible projects to the Forest Supervisor.

The grants use funds set aside by four counties – Apache, Gila, Greenlee, and Navajo- as part of the



Community Wildfire Protection Plan meeting

“payments to states” authorized in the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act of 2000. The Act authorizes grants to federal agencies, state and local

governments, private and non-profit entities for projects that improve existing infrastructure such as roads, trails, recreation facilities or projects that improve forest and land health and water quality.

Project proposals are evaluated for cost-effectiveness and partnership opportunities, educational value, human life benefits including employment, and benefits to ecosystem health. Projects will generally be less than \$60,000.

The grant applications approved in 2005 include:

- Saffel and Murray Basin trail maintenance
- Forest thinning adjacent to several county roads
- Development of community wildfire protection plans in Greenlee and in Gila counties
- Trail maintenance after a large wildfire in the Blue Range Primitive Area
- Bear habitat assessment before and after fuels reduction treatments in Apache County.

White Mountain Stewardship Project

In response to the USDA Forest Service Southwestern Region's central priority - restoration of fire-adapted ecosystems - the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests awarded a 10-year stewardship contract in August 2004. The contract was awarded to Future Forest, LLC, a local partnership of WB Contracting and Forest Energy Corporation.

The goal of the contract is to thin at least 50,000 acres of primarily small-diameter ponderosa pine trees, focusing on the wildland urban interface surrounding communities in the White Mountains of Arizona. The stewardship contract is designed to restore forest health, reduce the risk of fire to communities, reduce the cost of forest thinning to taxpayers, support local economies, and encourage new wood product industries and uses for the thinned wood fiber.

In 2005, task orders for the thinning of 7,046 acres were issued, 3,400 acres of treatment completed, and 57,512 green tons of biomass removed from the Forests.

A multi-party community monitoring board was established to assess the economic, social, and ecological impact of the contract. Monitoring began in 2005.

Dr. Lay Gibson from the University of Arizona was contracted to

monitor economic effects of the project and identify economic opportunities that are not currently being tapped in the local area.

Dr. Tim Collins from Arizona State University conducted a social survey that measures public opinion about thinning the forest to reduce the risks of wildfire and assesses their knowledge of forest health and fire issues.

The monitoring board contracted a landscape-scale monitoring assessment that will gather data from vegetative plots. This data will be used to determine the effects of treatments on fire risk reduction goals, effects on wildlife species of concern, and effects on forest health and stand condition.

Results from these monitoring efforts are expected in the summer of 2006.



A grapple skidder transports thinned trees



A feller buncher selectively cuts designated trees



Small diameter trees are chipped in the forest and then transported to mills for further processing



One product resulting from the thinned wood fiber is wood pellets



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