Decision Notice

& Finding of No Significant Impact

MUNDS PARK ROADS AND TRAILS PROJECT

USDA Forest Service
Mormon Lake Ranger District, Coconino National Forest
Coconino County, Arizona

Decision and Reasons for the Decision

Background

This Decision Notice documents my decision for the Munds Park Roads and Trails Project. The project area is located approximately 28 miles south of Flagstaff, and encompasses an approximate one-mile to two mile radius around the Munds Park area. The project area is generally defined by Forest Road (FR) 700 on the north, and the rim of Munds Canyon and the T Six Mountain road on the south, extending south along Interstate 17 to the Little Antelope interchange. The western portion crosses Interstate 17 near the Christiansen Rest Area. The eastern portion follows FR 240 from the north end of Casner Park, coursing north to Little Horse Park tank where it ties in with FR 700. The 9492D road coursing south from FR 240, connecting back to the T Six Mountain Road, also defines the eastern boundary, and is within the Mormon Lake Ranger District, Coconino National Forest, Arizona.

The Coconino National Forest began working with the communities of Munds Park and Pinewood (hereafter referred to as Munds Park) to designate a multi-use roads and trails system to offer motorized and non-motorized trail and road opportunities on National Forest System lands immediately adjacent to the community of Munds Park in January of 2002.

The purpose of this roads and trails system is to provide quality recreational experiences for Forest visitors in the Munds Park area while maintaining and protecting Forest resources. This action is needed, because as the community of Munds Park and recreational use in general has grown, the National Forest adjacent to the community has suffered resource impacts and degraded quality of recreational experiences. Soils, watershed, and wildlife impacts are occurring due to unplanned or “social” trails, and motorized trail and road use. Some Forest System roads are redundant or in poor condition causing similar impacts.

By establishing a managed, well-designed road and trail system to provide for motorized and non-motorized uses, including trailheads for parking, identified access points, and collector trails to reduce social trail proliferation, the impacts to soils, watershed and wildlife will be greatly reduced. This will also help to restore and maintain the forest character that makes the area desirable for these activities.

Through the collaborative process we identified that the crucial element of a managed system would be Forest access for the recreational use needs of the community. We specifically identified that we would emphasize use of existing access points, as we felt they are adequate in number, distribution and for safety factors. Access from the north boundary of the community to

a managed trail system from the north boundary of the community was identified as an important need. It became very clear in the collaborative process that both the managed system and access to it should be designed to the greatest extent possible to accommodate the existing public use from the community and avoid expansion beyond typical forest recreational use growth. We all agreed strongly that this wasn't an undertaking to develop a "destination" recreational area or trail system. For example, while the construction of a trailhead off Iron Springs Road was new, public, motorized recreational access from this location is not.

Through our work with the community and Forest Service specialists, we identified the following purpose and need to address the need for this action:

- Plan and construct a motorized and non-motorized trail system that provides high quality recreational experiences while protecting and enhancing natural resources, to the standards established in the Forest Service Trails Handbook. Provide motorized (ATV/motorcycle), hiking, equestrian, and mountain biking opportunities. Consider street and non-street legal ATV/motorcycle access adjacent to the community.

- Identify a Forest Road system including validating and changing road management objectives.

- Identify and/or allow for the construction of trailheads, parking areas and informational signing, including trail access points, to support the roads and trails system.

- Identify a road and trail system that considers recreational uses with the protection of wildlife habitat, and other vegetation and soils resources. Locates trails and obliterates roads to mitigate negative effects to threatened and endangered species. Strives for positive human/wildlife habitat interactions.

- Allow for obliteration and rehabilitation of redundant trails and roads in excess to the managed system to return them to natural conditions. Where roads are needed for future fuels treatment projects, fire suppression and/or utilities access, roads will be closed and gated (administrative use only).

- Establish a Forest Special Order that prohibits cross-country motorized travel and restricts motorized use to designated routes (36 Code Federal Regulations, 261.56).

The Final Environmental Assessment (FEA) documents the analysis of eleven alternatives to meet this need. A project file that contains supporting and reference materials to this Decision Notice and Finding of No Significant Impact is located in the recreation/NEPA files at the Peaks Ranger District, Coconino National Forest.

Decision

After consideration of the information provided through the Draft Environmental Assessment (Draft EA), my review of all alternatives, substantive comments received from the public review of this EA, and internal Forest Service specialist input, I have selected Alternative A.

Alternative A will designate and construct a multi-use roads and trails system that will offer motorized and non-motorized opportunities immediately adjacent to the Community of Munds Park. This road and trail system is designed to designate roads and trails, which provide quality

recreational experiences adjacent to the Munds Park community. The proposed trail system is estimated at approximately 22 miles, of which approximately 7 miles are motorized and provide linkage into existing Forest Service roads, and 15 miles of which are non-motorized. Forest Road 9457Y would be improved from its junction with Iron Springs Road at the Forest boundary approximately ¼ mile or more to a trailhead and parking area. This trailhead would provide access for both non-motorized and motorized users. Legal access for non-street legal ATV users would be accommodated as they could trailer their ATVs to the trailhead and connect to a trail west to the motorized trail system. The non-motorized trail system includes the existing Crystal Point Trail. The road system exists and no new roads will be constructed. Some existing roads are proposed for obliteration and or closure and/or for conversion to trail (see maps on FEA pages 23-28).

This system will specifically include the following:

1) Two trailheads will provide parking. A new designated trailhead will accommodate approximately 10 vehicles with trailers, located approximately ¼ mile north of Iron Springs Road on FR 9457Y. An existing designated trailhead on FR 240, just east of Munds Park on the Forest near the east end of Pinewood Blvd, accommodates approximately 20 vehicles with trailers. Both trailheads provide access to existing and proposed Forest System roads and trails, which service motorized and non-motorized uses. The Iron Springs Trailhead provides access to the multi-use trail system to the north and west, and to the non-motorized trail system to the north and east. The Iron Springs Trailhead is the only established parking site for legal access to the motorized trail system for non-street legal vehicle users immediately accessible to the community. The trailhead at FR 240 will provide access to the Crystal Point Trail and currently provides access to the greater forest road system for legal road driving activities

2) Non-motorized Forest access will be retained at the current access points (see maps on FEA pages 23-28). The O'Dell lake trail access point is via county road Lake Meadow Drive. These designations indicate access points at the end of County roads adjacent to National Forest System lands where trails access begins. There is no parking at these locations either on the forest or the county roads, as these are not intended to be trailheads and only indicate trail system accessibility for those walking or biking to the gate.

3) Trail access at Janice Place will be multi-use, including, motorized use by ATVs and motorcycles, as well as foot, equestrian, and mountain bike use. The trail accessed at this location will be constructed to accommodate ATV use, and will be open to ATVs with a wheelbase of 52 inches or less. As such the existing gate and fence will be reconstructed to prevent entry by vehicles larger than 52" ATVs. No trailhead is being proposed at this location. There is limited parking on FS land outside the fence/gate, within the County right-of-way at this access point. There will be no parking inside the fence/gate. This access point is designed to provide access for Forest visitors to walk, bike, or ride street-legal ATVs or motorcycles to this trail. While some parking is available, users requiring parking will be encouraged through signing to use the trailhead access at FR 240 or the trailhead at FR 9457Y (Iron Springs). Vehicles towing trailers will prohibited from parking at this location due to the limited space and difficulty in parking safely.

4) The loop portion of the trail at O'Dell Lake will be pedestrian only for .7 miles. No mechanized equipment, such as mountain bikes, will be allowed on the loop to minimize

disturbance to adjacent wildlife habitat. This trail could be upgraded in the future to Forest Service Trails Accessibility Guidelines (FSTAG) which were derived from the Americans with Disabilities Act-Architectural Barriers Act guidelines to accommodate both motorized and non-motorized wheelchairs. Such an upgrade would still prohibit other motorized and mechanical uses of the trail.

5) Eight miles of new trail construction, of which approximately 1.0 mile is new motorized trail, and approximately 7.0 miles is new non-motorized trail. This will result in a total system of approximately 3.0 miles of class 2 trail[1] and approximately 19 miles of class 3 trail, with linkages to forest roads for long distance travel beyond the project boundary. The .7 miles of trail loop at O'Dell Lake will begin as a class 3 trail. However, it is intended that as funding becomes available that this trail could be upgraded to a class 4 interpretive and universally accessible trail.

6) Inclusive within the 22 mile trail system is 4 miles of road to trail conversion. Road to trail conversion is accomplished by obliteration and /or rehabilitation of a road, while leaving a trail tread using a portion of the old roadbed. This is done where the location of a road is suitable for trail location, but for various reasons, the existing road is undesirable for continued full-size motor vehicle traffic. Reasons may include factors such as resource damage, desired non-motorized use, road density, and enhanced user experience, etc.

7) Existing social trails (user-created routes) will be incorporated into the designed system where applicable and not causing resource damage. Remaining social routes will be rehabilitated as described in Item 8 below. The numerous existing pedestrian access locations originating from private land along the north boundary of Munds Park will remain for non-motorized entry into the forest. To reduce existing impacts from the user-created routes originating from these access points, each route will be evaluated and a main route will be selected to connect to the collector trail while the others will be returned to natural condition. This rehabilitation work removes the so-called "spaghetti" network of user created trails and focuses use on designated and maintained routes. Public access points located at Mescalero Drive, Mountainaire Drive, Hillside Drive (east and west), Bowstring Road, and Winding Trail will remain open.

8) Forest system roads, social roads, and social trails that are redundant or excess, causing resource damage or not identified as part of the designated road and trail system will be obliterated and naturalized. Currently there are approximately eight miles of Level 2 system roads identified for obliteration or closure[2]. In addition there are approximately 4 miles of road proposed for conversion to trail. A variety of techniques may be used to obliterate or naturalize a road or trail, including ripping the entire roadbed or tread with a dozer and only ripping portions

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[1] Class 2 trail is defined as simple/minor development of a discernible, continuous trail, but narrow and rough, made of native materials, with occasional obstacles, all in a natural essentially un-modified environment. Class 3 trail is defined as developed and improved trail with an obvious and continuous tread, unhindered one-lane travel, typically made of native materials, with infrequent obstacles and vegetation is cleared outside of the trailway, all in a natural primarily un-modified environment. Class 4 trail is defined as highly developed trail, with a wide tread relatively smooth; trail width may consistently accommodate two-lane traffic; trail is made of native or imported materials, and maybe hardened; structures are frequent and substantial, including trail bridges, and trailside amenities may be present; there is a variety of signs present, including information signs and Trail Universal Access information at trailheads, all in what may be a modified environment.

[2] The US Forest Service uses the following classes or levels to designate a Forest Development Road's operation and objective maintenance level: Level 1: closed; Level 2: a native surface road passable by four-wheel drive or high-clearnance vehicles; Level 3: a graveled or improved surface road passable by passenger cars with a reasonable degree of comfort; Level 4, a paved road or highway passable by passenger cars with a high degree of comfort.

of the roadbed or tread. If natural healing is occurring and only sections of the route present resource problems, obstructions may be placed to allow the roadbed or tread to heal naturally.

Also gating will be used to close routes where there is a need for access for administrative purposes, but public motorized access is prohibited. Utility maintenance and fire access is a good example of administrative access need. (See FEA Appendix B for a table listing the specific road closure and obliteration needs and FEA maps on pages 23-28 for road locations).

9) A Forest Order prohibiting motorized use off designated roads and trails encompassing approximately 7,500 acres will be implemented in conjunction with the designated road and trail work. Closure to motorized cross-country travel will help make rehabilitation efforts more successful, help to keep the designated system intact, and help to prevent further proliferation of social roads and their associated resource concerns. (See FEA maps on pages 23-28 for closure area location and boundary).

10) A Forest Order prohibiting camping on approximately 620 acres in the vicinity of Crystal Point will be implemented for wildlife habitat protection, (See FEA maps on pages 23-28 for closure area location and boundary).

11) A detailed analysis of the Forest Service transportation system verified the authorized road system in the project area. The Coconino National Forest Roads Analysis Process (RAP) was reviewed and a project specific RAP was conducted. FEA Appendix B, Table 16 documents the roads analysis summary and provides the detail of both the open and closed/decommissioned roads systems and their maintenance levels. The analysis is consistent with both the Forest RAP and the project site-specific RAP. Appendix B of the FEA is incorporated into this Decision as the specific record for the open and closed/decommissioned road system, including the various details of activities to be used in implementing the system on the ground.

12) Based on comments received on the Draft EA, fencing systems will be constructed at both the Iron Springs Trailhead and the Janice Place access point to limit unauthorized and inappropriate access and focus use onto designated trails and into designated parking spaces.

The following project design and/or mitigation measures will be implemented:

- Design non-motorized trail width to approximately 24" in accordance with U.S. Forest Service trail management guidelines. Non-motorized trails will be open to foot, horse, and mountain bike travel except for O'Dell Lake which will open only to foot traffic. These trails are closed to all motorized uses.
- Design motorized trail width to approximately 52" in accordance with US Forest Service trail management guidelines. Motorized trails will be open to ATVs/OHV's with a 52" wheelbase or less and motorcycles, as well as all non-motorized uses. These trails will not be open to jeeps or motor vehicles wider than 52".
- Lay out the trail system to minimize impacts to sensitive plants or significant archeological features. As needed, a biologist/botanist or an archaeologist would be consulted to verify plants or features and to monitor trail routing.

- Conduct pre-construction surveys, as needed, for Forest Service sensitive plant species (*Astragalus rusbyi, Penstemon nudiflorus, Helenium Arizonicum and Hedeoma diffusum).* Conduct surveys in potential habitat along the route prior to trail construction. The surveys would provide for optimum detection and protection of sensitive plants. Personnel involved in the trail construction would be trained in the identification of these plants to expedite survey efforts.

- Conduct pre-construction surveys for noxious weeds. Prior to final trail construction, crews would be trained to identify noxious weed species. Should populations be found, workers would determine a course of action to eradicate plants and/or prevent spread.

- Cut trees as needed for the proposed trail route construction. Avoid cutting snags, pine, fir or juniper trees greater than 9 inches diameter, or oak trees larger than 5 inches diameter at root collar.

- Encourage trail users to keep pets on a leash through signing and trail steward contacts. Prohibit allowing dogs off a leash on the O'Dell trail due to concerns with riparian vegetation and wetlands wildlife being displaced or impacted.

- Prohibit camping along the portion of Crystal Point trail within ½ mile of the Mexican spotted owl Protected Activity Center. This will be accomplished with the camping closure order.

- No construction or obliteration activities will occur from March 1 through August 15 at O'Dell Lake if osprey nest is active.

- No construction of the loop trail at O'Dell Lake will occur between October 15th and April 15th so that construction occurs outside of Bald Eagle wintering season.

- No construction or obliteration activities will occur during the Mexican spotted owl breeding season (3/1 through 8/31) within Mexican spotted owl PACs.

- No construction or obliteration activities will occur during the northern goshawk breeding season (3/1 through 9/30) in northern goshawk nest stands.

- Follow the Archaeological Clearance Report for this project. The Munds Park Roads and Trails Archaeological Clearance Report (CNF Project #2004-37-A) documents archaeological inventory and compliance with the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, for this project. The report is programmatic in nature; for this reason, any new ground disturbing activities in previously un-surveyed areas will require additional survey and a subsequent clearance report prior to project implementation. The programmatic clearance calls for site-specific protection measures for implementation, with the stipulation that all National Register eligible and potentially eligible prehistoric and historic sites will be avoided by ground disturbing activities and these sites will be monitored during project implementation. Specifically, sites AR-03-04-05-203, -481, -516, -517, -518 and Segment C of the Munds Park to Howard Spring Historic Logging Railroad (AR-03-04-05-591) will be marked before project implementation and avoided by all ground disturbing activities pursuant to FSM 2361.1(2) and FSM R-3 2361.21(2). Additionally, these sites will be monitored during project implementation to ensure their protection. Sites AR-03-04-05-142, -143, and –202 have been declassified and are no longer considered archaeological sites. Site AR-03-04-05-816 was determined ineligible for the National Register of Historic Places as part of this project. The declassified sites and the ineligible site do not require further protection.

- The primary season of use of the proposed trail system would be mid-May through mid-October. The parking area on Forest Road 240 will continue to be signed and managed during the winter months for snowmobile use.
- Best Management Practices for trail construction as identified in the Forest Service Trails Handbook and Specifications for Construction and Maintenance of Trails.

Reasons for the Decision

I selected Alternative A based on three factors: (1) it best meets the purpose and need for the project; (2) community input received throughout the analysis; and (3) consistency with the Coconino Land and Resource Management Plan and other applicable laws/regulations.

1. Best Meets the Purpose and Need for the Project

Alternative A provides a road and trail system that I believe provides the highest quality recreation experience for Forest visitors (primarily community residents) of the four alternatives. The key difference between alternatives is that Alternative A provides the Iron Springs trailhead and one motorized trail which links other motorized trails. I feel that the Iron Springs trailhead and motorized trail is critical to meeting both motorized and non-motorized trail needs of the community as well as maintaining and improving forest resources (wildlife, watershed, vegetation) uses.

A key component of the purpose and need was the need to provide access points, both motorized and non-motorized, in key locations immediately adjacent to the community. Identifying these access points and considering how they distribute motorized and non-motorized uses and users was collaboratively discussed and commented on prior to and throughout the environmental analysis. This project element received a lot of thought and input. Looking at the existing activity and agreement among the community about the way the motorized and non-motorized uses were proposed, I believe that the Iron Springs trailhead and associated trail system is a critical access and distribution point north of Forest Road 240 for residents to access both multiple use and single use trails.

Providing two trailheads (Forest Road 240; Iron Springs) with parking provides a legal and safer access point for motorized and non-motorized users to access the forest. The 240 trailhead provides access south, east and west of Forest Road 240 while Iron Springs provides access north, east (non-motorized) and west (motorized and non-motorized). There are other access points to the forest that provide non-motorized access but these do not include any trailhead parking on the forest. Janice Place does provide access for non-motorized and motorized use with very limited parking. Due to this limited parking and its configuration with private land, it is not feasible to call or make this a trailhead. However, limited parking is possible but will not accommodate trailers. This limitation makes it important to provide a parking area where trailers can park/unload and tie to the motorized trail system. Iron Springs and Janice Place together provide a better balance for motorized access to the north end of the forest. I received and agreed with comments that without the Iron Springs trailhead/motorized trail that the Janice Place access would receive too much use and concentration from community residents accessing the forest.

The location of Iron Springs trailhead and trails were collaboratively discussed and received a lot of feedback by community residents. Its location (1/4 mile from homes/private land) does address concerns with existing traffic/noise/safety (which currently isn't being controlled at all) by providing parking and trail access away from the community.

The Iron Springs trailhead provides the only non-street legal motorized access point and motorized trail link adjacent to the community. I feel this is a critical need that the Forest provides for the community. It provides a legal location for families with non-licensed children and non-street legal ATV's to be able to access the forest for ATV use.

Alternative A provides the best option for meeting the overall community need and providing the most probability for success. I fully recognize the concerns of those who disagree with Alternative A. However, comment to the Draft EA provided me the information I needed to be able to analyze and compare four alternatives and determine that Alternative A is in the best interest of the community as a whole.

2. Community Input:
In selecting Alternative A, I recognize based on community input that there is general agreement and/or acceptance with many aspects of the project. I identified these in the Draft EA (p. 7) as:

- The specific trail designs, designations, and locations.
- The proposed elimination of duplicate social roads and trails.
- Redesign of Crystal Point Trail into a loop trail.
- Constructing the O'Dell Lake pedestrian trail and the motorized loop designs.
- Establishing a cross-country motorized travel prohibition through an enforceable Area Closure Order.
- Restricting camping in the Crystal Point area.

Prior to releasing the Draft EA, I received community feedback that there was a concern with Alternative A to the proposed Iron Springs trailhead, associated parking area and motorized trail. As a result of hearing the concerns about Alternative A and as required under the National Environmental Policy Act, I created nine more alternatives, which my staff and I reviewed and studied. Two of these alternatives were considered equally with Alternatives A and B. Seven alternatives were developed but dropped because they did not meet the project purpose.

When the Draft EA was released for comment, I indicated that although any alternative could be chosen, I was considering Alternative C as a preferred alternative. At that time it was my belief that Alternative C offered a potential compromise for addressing the community conflict surrounding the proposed Iron Springs trailhead/motorized trail. I also felt I had received adequate comment and feedback on Alternatives A and B but until the Draft EA was released, community residents had not reviewed nor commented on either Alternative C or D. The Draft EA provided community residents the opportunity to consider and comment on four alternatives. I made it clear in my September 23, 2004 Draft EA cover letter that my final decision would not be made or finalized until after public comments were received and considered.

In selecting Alternative A, I weighed the various input from community residents. Comments in the Draft EA provided me an overall perspective with all four alternatives. I appreciate the

candid and pointed comments that I received throughout the environmental analysis. All of the comments received on the Draft EA provided me a variety of opinions, positions, concerns, and rationale.

The Draft EA provided me with 348 comments. I read every comment received and considered them in the context of the project's purpose and need and considering the collaborative effort generated over the past 2 years with the community including the discussions and input provided through the Munds Park Trails Stewards. The majority of commenter's supported Alternative A. A few supported Alternatives C or D. None supported Alternative B.

I learned through comment on the Draft EA that Alternative C was not a compromise. The overwhelming response I received was to go forward with Alternative A. The comments in support of Alternative A provided information that while not completely new helped me understand why Alternative C did not result in a compromise and provided the better fit for the community. Some of this information resulted in inclusions to the Draft EA as additional effects analysis that are documented in the attached Errata Sheet that when combined with the Draft EA serves as the Final EA.

I also considered the support of Alternative A from Coconino County Supervisor Matt Ryan and the Pinewood Property Owners Association, both of whom represent the community and dialogued with many of you about this project. Coconino County Supervisor Matt Ryan stated, "…Alternative A is the most appropriate choice provided…. It reduces the impact to the resource and yet allows for historical street legal access as well as parking to accommodate trailers for non-street legal use."…(PRD 229, #107) The Board Members of the Pinewood Property Owners Association stated…"we feel that all plans may have merit, however, the one that seems to promote the most for the most number of full and part time residents of Munds Park, is Plan [Alternative A]". (PRD 229, #41)

3. Consistency with the Coconino Land and Resource Management Plan and other applicable laws/regulations.

Alternative A is consistent with the Coconino National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan and applicable amendments as well as with other laws, regulations and policies (see later section: Findings Required by Other Laws and Regulations). In the broader picture of managing a national resource, my staff and I ensured that this project was consistent and visionary with the many laws, regulations, and policies that we are required to abide by.

Other Alternatives Considered

In making the decision to select Alternative A, I considered ten other alternatives, including seven alternatives that were considered but dropped from further analysis and three alternatives, (including Alternative B, No Action), that were analyzed in detail in the Final Environmental Assessment.

The following provides a summary of these ten alternatives. A comparison of these alternatives can be found in the FEA (pp. 11-21).

Alternative B: (No Action or No Change from current management)

Under the No Action alternative, current management would continue to guide management of the project area. No changes would be made to the current Forest Service road and trail system. There would be no road obliteration activities, road to trail conversions, trail construction, or trail designations for specified use implemented. The associated area closures for camping limitations and off road travel would not be implemented. Under this alternative current use is unchanged, there are no adjustments made for resource protection, user conflicts, community impacts, or response to anticipated growth. This alternative does not address input and concerns from the community relating to roads and trails access and use.

Alternative C: (Same as Alternative A except No motorized trail from Iron Springs Trailhead)

This alternative is the same as Alternative A except that all trails from the Iron Springs Trailhead would be non-motorized. This would create the following changes: 6.3 miles of motorized trail system; a reduction of one trail of .7 miles from Alternative A. As there will be no motorized trail access from the trailhead and to alleviate the concern of increased ATV traffic on adjacent streets, ATV parking and use of Forest Road 9457Y will not be permitted. With the exception of passenger vehicles, no motorized vehicles including ATVs and motorcycles will be permitted on Forest Road 9457Y from the Forest boundary to the trailhead. Non-street legal ATV access from the community is not available within the project area. Access for non-street legal ATV's would be retained outside the project area and residents would have to trailer or haul their ATVs to these locations.

Alternative D: (Same as Alternative A except No Iron Springs Trailhead or FR 9457Y and no motorized trail or road access; Access is for non-motorized use only)

This alternative is the same as Alternatives A except the Iron Springs Trailhead and parking lot is eliminated and FR 9457Y road will be closed for administrative use only (gated). There is no motorized trail or motorized access to this area. Non-motorized access is provided but there is no designated parking area on National Forest System land. Elimination of one trailhead and parking for 10 vehicles, leaving no opportunities for parking on National Forest System lands off Iron Springs Road. Forest visitors would need to walk or ride bicycles to access the non-motorized trails off Iron Springs road. The current opportunities to park on residential streets, as allowable under County laws would still be available. The trail access from Iron Springs Road and Forest Road 9457Y is non-motorized only.

Seven alternatives were considered but not analyzed in further detail for reasons described below.

Willard Springs Road Access Point: The Willard Springs Road Access point alternative was suggested as an alternative location to the Iron Springs Trailhead, as it was felt that this location would alleviate traffic and increasing use concerns in the community.

This access option is available with or without the Proposed Action, as there is ample parking at numerous points along the road. This option would not address the project purpose to provide immediate community access for residents. From a longer-term and broader area perspective, this location could serve as a trailhead to access a variety of roads and/or trails. The Proposed

Action did not integrate the user or trail/road needs in this area or adjacent to it but when we address transportation needs/opportunities in the future, we will consider this location and how it can or could connect with trails and roads in the Munds Park/Pinewood communities.

Forest Road 78A near Frog Tank: This location was suggested as an alternative to the Iron Springs Trailhead for the same reasons as the Willard Springs Road Access option.
There is a large meadow area that could accommodate a motorized multi-use trailhead. As the mountain meadow habitat is a scarce vegetation type in our forest, we felt a trailhead in this location could lead to unacceptable environmental impacts. These potentially include disturbance of wildlife and livestock using the adjacent water tank as well as impacts to the tank itself from illegal off-trail motorized travel. While there are other locations along FR 78A to locate a trailhead, these locations would not serve or be convenient to local residents. In addition a trailhead near this location would not be responsive to an original intention of the project – to establish forest access points convenient to community residents.

Christensen Rest Area at I-17: This location was suggested for the same reasons as the two locations described above. The suggestion included rerouting access by closing the entrance off I-17 and establishing an access road from the community. As we researched this option, we were informed by Arizona Dept. of Transportation (ADOT) who is permitted specifically for the operation and maintenance of this rest area as part of their United States Department of Transportation Easement that they were considering reopening the rest area but were uncertain of the timing. ADOT also indicated that it would not be feasible for the rest area to become a trailhead because both are different uses that could conflict with ADOT's rest area and highway operations. After the Draft EA was mailed, we were informed that ADOT is now planning to permanently close the rest area and remove their facilities. Even with this closure, the ADOT and the Federal Highways Administration would not authorize access to I-17 from this location.

Regardless of the final disposition of the ADOT facilities, this location would change the scope of the project by attracting and increasing use substantially from non-residents, which is not the purpose of this project. A developed trailhead this close to I-17, would lead to the area becoming a "destination" access for motorized and non-motorized uses. This potential has been one of the greatest community concerns we have heard throughout the process, and does not fit with our intention to develop a system for existing and current uses recognizing a slow increase of use primarily from local residents. This location, like the Forest Road 78A proposal is contrary to the purposes of the project.

APS Substation: This location was suggested for the same reasons as stated above. Like the Forest Road 78A and Christensen Rest Area proposals, this location does not address the purpose of the Iron Springs trailhead and Janice Place access point as none of the proposed motorized trails connect to this area. This proposal was not carried forward because the project was to establish Forest access and both motorized and non-motorized trails in areas the community is currently using. Our analysis has shown that there is little public use of the Forest around the APS Substation. In addition, this location could attract itself as a destination access due to its visibility and easy access from Interstate 17, which is not consistent with the purpose and need of the project.

Janice Place: Several persons commenting suggested replacing the Iron Springs Trailhead and Parking Area with a trailhead and parking area behind the fence at the Janice Place access point.

After field review we determined that while it was feasible to engineer a trailhead/parking area at this location, the immediate proximity to private residences made this an inappropriate place for a trailhead. While we can place a trailhead/parking area at the Iron Springs location largely out of sight and noise distance from private residences, there is not room to do so at the Janice Place location due to topographic limitations and without the construction of a new road. We have identified that there is some room outside the fence to safely park a few vehicles without trailers, especially if some slight improvements are made by improving with gravel and fill the area currently used for parking. However, due to concerns with space and safe turning and stopping distances on Janice Place, vehicles towing trailers would be prohibited from parking at this location. Thus, while street legal ATV users can legally access the motorized trail system at the Janice Place location, non-street legal access would not be available without the ability to trailer. As such, this location is not suitable as a replacement to the Iron Springs location.

Non-Motorized Use: Several comments suggested making the entire area non-motorized or further restricting motorized use, such as creating a one-mile no-motorized use buffer around the community. This suggested alternative does not meet the purpose and need to provide a motorized and non-motorized trail system around the community. Motorized use is considered a valid use of the National Forest. It is the intention of this project to locate opportunities for both uses, and through a designated system, reduce user conflicts and resource impacts. Further, the intent of the project is to funnel motorized use away from the community limiting direct impacts from such use on the community. Community resident input showed the need and support for a motorized trail system. It is outside the scope of this project to eliminate motorized use on the forest in this area completely.

Alternative or Additional Motorized Routes: The suggested routes were either located in or lead into Mexican spotted owl habitat (federally-listed threatened species) and/or conflicted with the emphasis area establishing a contiguous area of non-motorized use such as in the northwest portion of the project area. These routes conflict with Forest Plan and MSO Recovery Plan direction to reduce resource impacts and were not carried further in this analysis, (See PRD 232, Biological Assessment and Evaluation, P. 11).

Public Involvement

As described in the background, the need for this action arose in January 2002. A proposal to develop the Munds Park Roads and Trails Project was listed in the Schedule of Proposed Actions in the fall of 2002. During the next year and a half my staff and I worked with the community through the Munds Park Trails Stewards (MUTS) group in many meetings that were open and advertised to all interested publics and citizens to gather information, participate in user group collaborations and determine ideas for the proposal. I used this information and developed a proposal (proposed action or Alternative A) that was provided to the public and other agencies for a 30-day comment period (i.e. scoping) on July 11, 2003. In addition, as part of this public comment period, we conducted an Open House meeting on August 2, 2003 at the Pinewood Fire Station. A news release was also issued at the time the scoping letter was released. The Proposed Action was posted on the Coconino website. As a result of this comment period, we received over 270 comments.

An update letter was mailed February 26, 2004, to the original mailing list and to those who provided comment during the scoping period. In that letter we provided some additional information about the Proposed Action, shared information on two of the key comment themes (trail access; community impacts), and provided an opportunity for the public to share any additional comments on the project after considering the information provided in this letter during a 15-day comment period. We received 12 letters. These comments either supported previous comments and concerns or re-iterated other options to consider to the Irons Springs trailhead. There were no additional issues or concerns that had not been previously identified in the scoping period.

Throughout the project planning process and the environmental analysis process the Munds Park Trail Stewards have provided extensive comment and insight into the community's use of the National Forest.

In addition, I attended the February 28, 2004 Pinewood Property Owners Association Board Member meeting and provided the group a project update and distributed a copy of the February 26th letter.

Based on these public comment periods reflecting primarily community resident input, we developed a total of 9 alternatives (described earlier).

A Draft Environmental Assessment was distributed on September 27, 2004 and a 30-day comment period was initiated on September 29, 2004, with publication of legal notice in the Arizona Daily Sun, the newspaper of record. An article in the Pinewood News also described the availability of the Draft EA for comment. As a result of this comment period, we received 348 Comments (FEA, Appendix D).

Public involvement documentation includes community coordination efforts (Project Record Documents 1-88), public comment period (scoping) (PRD 108), February 26, 2004 letter (PRD 194), and Draft EA and Response to Comments (PRD 243).

Finding of No Significant Impact

After considering the environmental effects described in the FEA for Alternative A, I have determined that these actions will not have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment considering the context and intensity of impacts (40 CFR 1508.27). Thus, an environmental impact statement will not be prepared. I base by finding on the following:

Context: The context of this project is very narrow. It is limited to the review of roads and trails immediately adjacent to the Munds Park/Pinewood community. The scope of the project was focused on local community needs and managing existing use. Even through outreach and scoping, there were no national or regional groups interested in this project because the project is not seeking to manage this area as a destination motorized or non-motorized area. Rather, the primary users are local residents with some public use in the project area.

Intensity factors:
1) My finding of no significant environmental impact is based on no adverse effects or beneficial effects of the action. The focus and scope of this project emphasizes managing for

existing use, with an emphasis on using existing trails and roads, including the estimated one to two percent of increasing use that is occurring with or without the project. Although in our effects analysis we have recognized that changes that will occur due to the project are beneficial, that is due to improved quality and distribution of the recreational experience and the focusing use on a designated system and the project is addressing use that is ocurring and has occurred in the past. (Ref. FEA, Chapter 3 Environmental Consequences, pp. 29-49)

2) There will be no significant effects on public health and safety. Public safety issues consist mainly of encounters between different types recreational activities, including motorized and non-motorized, equestrian and bicycles. Implementing a managed recreation setting with mitigations at parking areas, designated trails that include multiple-use, pedestrian only, and non-motorized only, greatly lessens safety concerns compared to the present condition. (see FEA pages 47-49).

3) There will be no significant effects on unique characteristics of the area, because the area does not contain congressionally or Forest Plan designated parklands, prime farmlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas (research natural areas) (FEA, pp. 4, 30-31)

4) The effects on the quality of the human environment are not likely to be highly controversial, because there is no known substantial dispute existing as to size, nature or effects of Alterantive A. Public comments identifying effects were analyzed and disclosed in the FEA and Response to Comments (see FEA Chapter 3 pages 29-49, Appendix D, Response to comments to the Draft EA, and PRD # 214, Response to Comment to the Proposed Action) . Controversy in this context applies to determining if an EA or EIS is the appropriate analysis, rather than existence of opposition to a use. Case Law interpretations have helped to describe controversy in the context of NEPA. Some examples incude*: Blue Mountains Biodiversity Project v. Blackwood*, 161 F.3d 1208, 9th Cir. 1998, *Town of Cave Creek, Arizona v. Federal Aviation Admin. And Dept. of Transportation*, D.C. Cir., 2003, referencing *Found. For N. Am. Wild Sheep v. U.S. Dept of Agric.*, 9th Cir., 1982.

5) We have considerable experience with implementing these project activities (trail construction, road obliteration, road and trailhead design etc.). The effects analysis shows the effects are not uncertain, and do not involve unique or unknown risk (see FEA Chapter 3 pages 29-39).

6) The action is not likely to establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects, because this is a site specific decision for deciding whether or not to designate and manage a proposed system of roads and trails within this project area and under what specific conditions and locations. The decision also determined not to allow cross-country motorized travel in the project area. The decision will determine and identify trail access points and/or trailheads on National Forest System lands and those leading from the community to the forest. This decision applies only to National Forest System lands. (FEA. p. 6)

7) The cumulative impacts are not significant. Cumulative effects are discussed in the FEA. Through this analysis, there were no cumulative effects determined to be significant (FEA, pp. 35, 38, and 44).

The action will have no significant adverse effect on districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. The action will also not cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources, because it will follow the Archaeological Clearance Report for this project. The Munds Park Roads and Trails Archaeological Clearance Report (CNF Project #2004-37-A) documents archaeological inventory and compliance with the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, for this project, (PRD 234).

8) The action will not adversely affect any endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species act of 1973, because Informal consultation was completed with the United States Fish and Wildlife Service along with completion of and concurrence with the Biological Assessment for this project (PRD 223, 228, 232, and 239). The findings include a "not likely to adversely affect" for the Mexican spotted owl and its critical habitat" and a "will not likely to adversely affect the bald eagle or its habitat" (see FEA pages 38-43).

9) The action will not violate Federal, State, and local laws or requirements for the protection of the environment. Applicable laws and regulations were considered in the FEA (see FEA pp 30-31). The action is consistent with the Coconino Land and Resource Management Plan and associated amendments (See FEA pp 29-30). The section below describes applicable findings with other laws and regulations as it pertains to this decision.

Findings Required by Other Laws and Regulations

This decision to implement Alternative A is consistent with the intent of the forest plan's long term goals and objectives listed on FEA pp 3, 29-30. The project was designed in conformance with land and resource management plan standards and incorporates appropriate land and resource management plan guidelines. This project is consistent with both transportation policy/direction for roads and trails as well as direction for off-road driving management detailed in the Coconino National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (as amended). Specifically, standards and guidelines for Road Maintenance and Management can be found in section L2 beginning on page 88 of the Forest Plan. This project is consistent with these standards and guidelines as it seeks to close, convert or obliterate roads "not needed for industry, public and/or administrative use." On the following page, which is now replacement page 89 from Amendment Number 6 (10/90), in section L01 there is direction to manage road densities to an average of 2 miles per section in the ponderosa pine/mixed conifer zone. This project will be consistent with this standard and guideline, as with road closures densities will be at or below the standard.

Forest Plan direction for trail system planning and inventory are also consistent with the intention of this project. These standards and guidelines can also be found beginning on replacement page 89. This direction applies most accurately to the existing Crystal Point trail, but would apply to new system trails designated by this project in that the trails will be monitored and maintained on a recurring schedule. In addition the Plan urges the Forest to promote volunteer opportunities such as an Adopt-a-Trail program. Such an effort is underway with the Munds Park Trail Stewards.

Opportunities for the management of off-road motorized vehicle use proposed by this project are also consistent with Forest Plan standards and guidelines. Forest-wide direction found in section A01 on page 58 has similar objectives to this project – to limit use or close areas to off-road and trail use "to prevent resource damage and/or user conflicts." There is further direction to develop series of motorized loop trails and to work with the motorized user community to further identify and develop motorized recreation opportunities. As such, this project is consistent with this direction. A variety of criteria are listed on pages 58 and 59 for evaluating motorized use restrictions and closures. These criteria guided the analysis.

In addition to the Forest Plan guidance for road maintenance and management other Regional and National important policies are pending including the Cross-Country Travel by Off-Highway Vehicles Policy for the Apache-Sitgreaves, Coconino, Kaibab, Prescott, and Tonto National Forests and the National Off Highway Vehicle Policy. The Munds Roads and Trails Project as designed will comply with those policies when they are in place. As referenced in the Decision on page 5, the Forest Roads Analysis Process was reviewed and a site-specific Roads Analysis Process (RAP) was completed for the project. These analysis and included documentation complies with management and Forest Plan policy for Roads Analysis Process. (See, FEA, Appendix B for the specific RAP decisions).

Effects of the project on Management Indicator Species, (MIS), have been evaluated and documented in the FEA. Within the Munds Park Roads and Trails project area, there are 16 MIS species that are found or have potential habitat. There are no habitat impacts for any of these MIS Species. Implementation of Alternative A will have beneficial affects on MIS by reducing road and trail densities. Implementation of Alternative A will not result in effects that change the population's trend on the Coconino National Forest. (See FEA, Chapter 3, Environmental Consequences, pp. 29-30 and 40-42).

The planning and decision-making process for this project was conducted in accordance with all applicable laws, regulations, policies and plans (FEA, pp. 30-31). This section briefly describes my findings regarding the legal requirements most relevant to this project decision.

- Multiple-Use Sustained-Yield Act of 1960 – This law is followed by this project because it is consistent with the Forest Plan.
- National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (as amended) – This law is followed by this project and the appropriate documentation is located in the project file, PRD # 234.
- Wild and Scenic Rivers Act of 1968, (as amended) – there are no wild and scenic rivers within the project area.
- National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969 (as amended) – The effects of the project have been analyzed and are disclosed in the Environmental Assessment, PRD # 225.
- Clean Air Act of 1970 (as amended) – There are no effects to air quality from any alternative.
- Endangered Species Act (ESA) of 1973 (as amended) – Analysis and disclosure of effects is complete, documentation meets standards of this law and consultation with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is complete, PRD # 238. Further guidance and policy is found

in the Mexican Spotted Owl Recovery Plan (1995), the project promotes recommended actions under he plan and is within all plan guidelines and policies.

- Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resources Planning Act (RPA) of 1974 (as amended) – This law is met because this project is consistent with the Forest Plan.
- National Forest Management Act (NFMA) of 1976 (as amended) – See the Forest Plan Direction and Consistency section above. This project meets the intent of this law by consistency with the Forest Plan.
- Clean Water Act of 1977 (as amended) – There is no effect to water quality.
- American Indian Religious Freedom Act of 1978 – The effects has been analyzed and disclosed in the Cultural Resources report PRD # 234.
- Archeological Resource Protection Act of 1980 – The effects on archaeological sites has been analyzed and is disclosed in the Cultural Resources report, PRD # 234. This project was included in the annual consultation to 13 Native American Indian Tribes. No comments were received from any Tribe concerning this project.
- Cave Resource Protection Act of 1988 – There are no caves affected by this project.
- Executive Order 11593 (cultural resources) – See NHPA above.
- Executive Order 11988 (floodplains) – There are no floodplains within the project area.
- Executive Order 11990 (wetlands) – There is no construction within wetlands or disposition of wetlands to other ownership, nor easement through wetlands.
- Executive Order 12898 (environmental justice) – See the Environmental Justice section of the FEA, p. 49.
- Executive Order 12962 (aquatic systems and recreational fisheries) – There are no aquatic systems or recreational fisheries affected within this project.
- Executive Order 13186 (conservation of migratory birds) – The effects to migratory birds has been analyzed and disclosed in the FEA, Chapter 3, and pp. 42-43.

Implementation Date

If no appeals are filed within the 45-day time period, implementation of the decision may occur on, but not before, 5 business days from the close of the appeal filing period. When appeals are filed, implementation may occur on, but not before, the 15th business day following the date of the last appeal disposition.

Administrative Review or Appeal Opportunities

This decision is subject to administrative review (appeal) pursuant to 36 CFR Part 215.
The appeal must be filed (regular mail, fax, email, hand-delivery, or express delivery) with the Appeal Deciding Officer, Nora Rasure, Forest Supervisor, at 1824 S. Thompson, Flagstaff, Arizona, 86001, FAX: (928) 527-3620.

The office business hours for those submitting hand-delivered appeals are: 7:30 AM to 4:30 PM, Monday through Friday, excluding holidays. Electronic appeals must be submitted in a format such as an email message, plain text (.txt), rich text format (.rtf), or Word (.doc) to nrasure@fs.fed.us. In cases where no identifiable name is attached to an electronic message, a verification of identity will be required. A scanned signature is one way to provide verification. Appeals, including attachments, must be filed within 45 days from the publication date of this notice in the Arizona Daily Sun, the newspaper of record. Attachments received after the 45-day appeal period will not be considered. The publication date in the Arizona Daily Sun, newspaper of record, is day one of the 45-day period, and is the exclusive means for calculating the time to file an appeal. Those wishing to appeal this decision should not rely upon dates or timeframe information provided by any other source. Individuals or organizations who submitted substantive comments during the comment period specified at 215.6 may appeal this decision. A document containing the names of those who submitted substantive comment during the comment period is included in the Final EA as Appendix C. The notice of appeal must meet the appeal content requirements at 36 CFR 215.14.

Contact

For additional information concerning this decision, the environmental analysis or the Forest Service appeals process, contact Alvin R. Brown, Project Team Leader and Environmental Coordinator, Peaks and Mormon Lake Ranger Districts, Coconino National Forest, 2075 N. Hwy 89, Flagstaff, AZ 86004, (928) 527-8234.

1/31/2005

/S/ TERRI MARCERON

TERRI MARCERON **Date**

Mormon Lake District Ranger

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