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Environmental Assessment

Camp Verde Unified School District Land Acquisition Under the Educational Land Grant Act

Red Rock Ranger District, Coconino National Forest
Yavapai County, Arizona

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CHAPTER 1. PURPOSE AND NEED FOR THE ACTION

Document Structure

This Environmental Assessment (EA) has been prepared to describe and assess the environmental consequences that may result from Coconino National Forest (CNF) selling land to Camp Verde Unified School District (CVUSD). The land conveyance is sought under the authority of the Education Land Grant Act (ELGA) of 2000 (P.L. 106-577, 114 Stat 368; 16 U.S.C. 479a). In addition to fulfilling ELGA requirements, the completion of an EA is required for the conveyance of federal lands under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, as amended.

This document discloses the direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts that would result from the No Action and Proposed Action alternatives and is organized into 4 chapters: Chapter 1, Purpose and Need for the Action; Chapter 2, Alternatives including the Proposed Action; Chapter 3, Affected Environment and Environmental Consequences and; Chapter 4, Consultation and Coordination.

Location

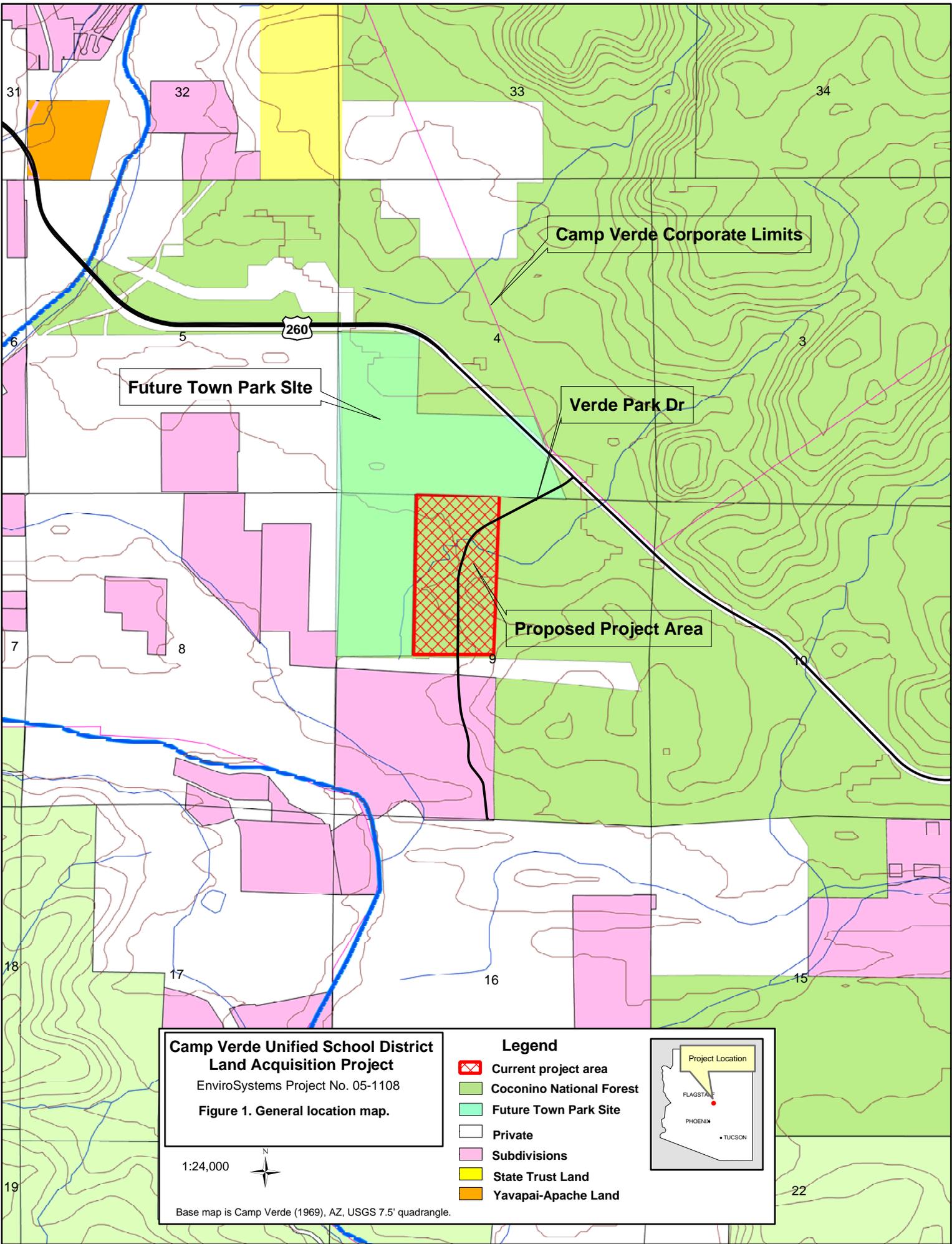
CNF is considering conveyance of approximately 80 acres of U.S. Forest Service (USFS) land to the CVUSD. The land in consideration is located in Yavapai County, Arizona, within the limits of the Town of Camp Verde, just south of State Highway 260, and falls within the E½ of the NW¼ of Section 9, T13N, R5E, Gila and Salt River Baseline and Meridian, USGS 7.5 minute Camp Verde Quadrangle (1969; see Figure 1). The land is currently under the jurisdiction of the Red Rock Ranger District of CNF.

CNF has accepted an ELGA application from CVUSD who selected this property due to its proximity to a parcel under consideration for sale to the Town of Camp Verde under the Townsite Act. This potential Town property is planned for the development of a park and recreation site. CVUSD would like to develop new educational facilities next to the proposed park in order to share future facilities. Other rationale for site selection are discussed below under project purpose and need for action.

Project Background

CVUSD is planning to construct solely, or in partnership with other area school districts, K-12 facilities including Career Technology Educational facilities for the southern Verde Valley area schools participating in the Joint Regional Vocational Educational District. The first identified need is for an elementary school, followed later by a secondary school.

Student enrollment (K -12) for 2003/2004 in the existing CVUSD facilities grew from the previous school year by 3.3 percent. These facilities are clustered together in northern Camp Verde; however, most of the projected residential growth in the District is anticipated to occur in the southern part of the Town. There are currently four planned residential projects in various stages of approval before the Town Council, totaling up to approximately 1,000 residential lots



**Camp Verde Unified School District
Land Acquisition Project**
EnviroSystems Project No. 05-1108
Figure 1. General location map.

1:24,000



Base map is Camp Verde (1969), AZ, USGS 7.5' quadrangle.

Legend

-  Current project area
-  Coconino National Forest
-  Future Town Park Site
-  Private
-  Subdivisions
-  State Trust Land
-  Yavapai-Apache Land



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(Letter from Will Wright, Camp Verde Community Development Director, August 2005). These proposed residential developments are in the southern portion of Camp Verde and when combined with the population trends published by the Town of Camp Verde (2005) would contribute a 3.5 to 4.5 percent increase in student enrollment per year through 2010, based on conservative projections.

To address potential growth in Camp Verde, CVUSD has been searching for property some distance from their present facilities, preferably in the southern part of Town. The recommended size of a state campus planned by the CVUSD is a minimum of 60 acres. This minimum acreage was calculated from the site size requirements for useable acreage in land acquisition for new schools in Chapter IV of the State of Arizona Schools Facility Board Policy Book, adopted March 4, 1999 (ASFB 2005). The entire land base within CVUSD consists of roughly 10 percent privately-owned land, much of which has already been developed or is in the process of being developed. The remainder of the land is publicly held by the USFS or the State of Arizona, or is held in trust by the Yavapai-Apache Nation (Figure 2). Of the state land parcels, only two are of sufficient size for a school campus. However, existing utilities are not readily accessible and are located some distance from areas expecting the greatest growth in the District. CVUSD thus chose to pursue obtaining USFS lands for building new school facilities.

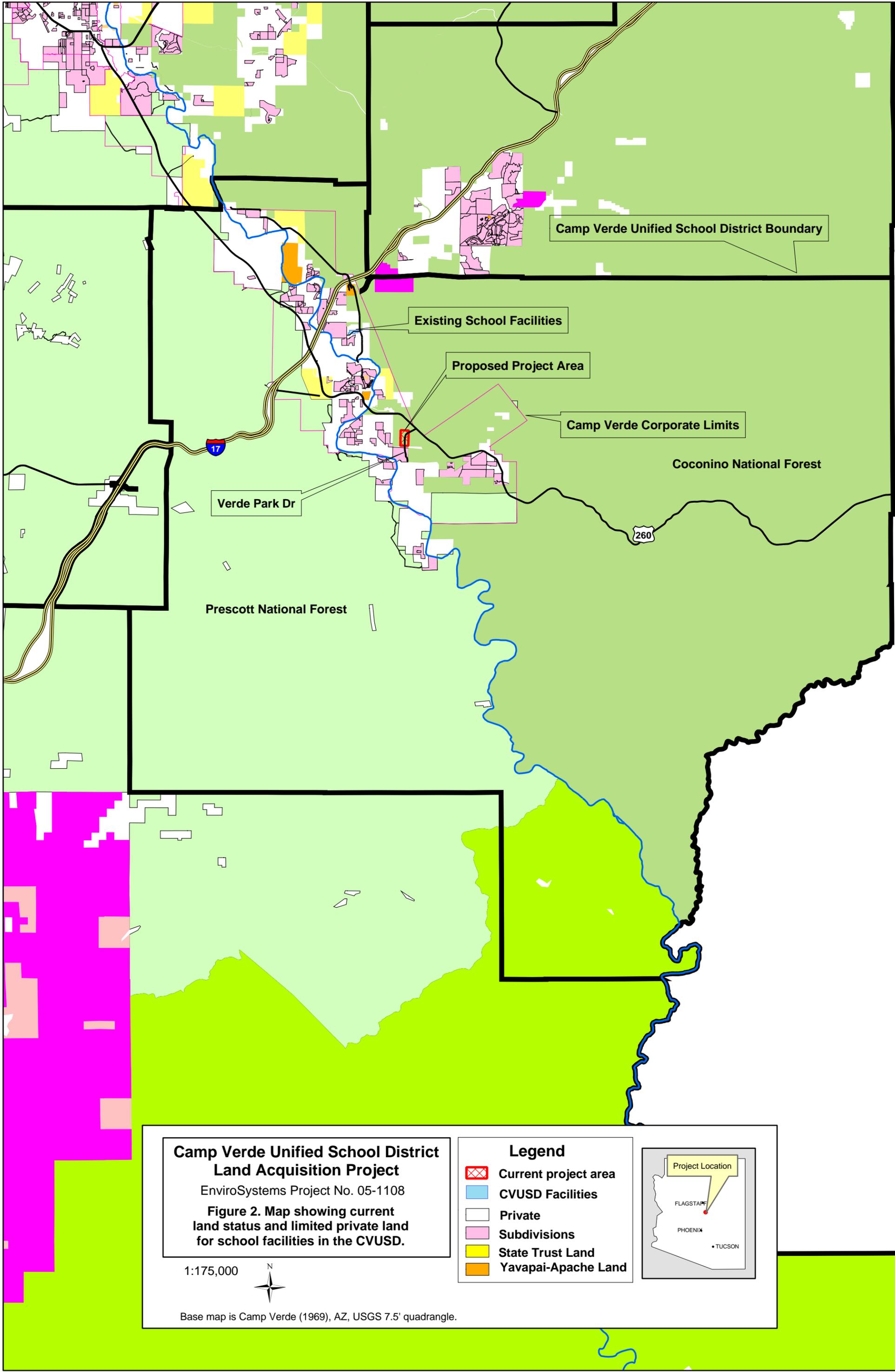
Purpose and Need for Action

CNF reviewed and accepted the application submitted by CVUSD because it meets specific criteria required under ELGA and is consistent with management guidelines in the CNF Plan (USFS 1987). These ELGA criteria are as follows:

- The proposed project's intended use is for educational facilities.
- The proposed project serves the public interest.
- The public objectives for the land outweigh the objectives of the USFS for the land to remain in federal ownership.
- The land is not otherwise needed for purposes of the National Forest System.
- The size of the parcel does not exceed 80 acres.
- The land has been identified for disposal in an applicable land and resource management plan under the Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resources Planning Act of 1974 (16 U.S.C. 1600 et seq.)

CVUSD would use the acquired land for the future development of publicly-funded elementary or secondary schools or related grounds and facilities. The specific land in this proposal was selected by the CVUSD Governing Board in a public meeting held on February 8, 2005.

Projected population growth in Camp Verde forecasts the need for new education facilities in the near future. The purpose of the proposed land conveyance is to provide a location for educational facilities that would meet the future needs of Camp Verde residents. There are few, if any, parcels of private land 60 acres or larger (as needed for a state campus) in a favorable location and suitable for a school campus available for purchase in the Camp Verde area. In addition, the cost of such a piece of private property could be prohibitive. Under ELGA, USFS lands could be sold to a public school at the extremely low cost of \$10.00/acre. Acquiring 80 acres from CNF land would thus be practical in terms of suitable size, availability, appropriate location, and overall cost, thus meeting the projected needs of the community, as well as the criteria of the law.



**Camp Verde Unified School District
Land Acquisition Project**

EnviroSystems Project No. 05-1108

Figure 2. Map showing current land status and limited private land for school facilities in the CVUSD.

1:175,000



Base map is Camp Verde (1969), AZ, USGS 7.5' quadrangle.

Legend

-  Current project area
-  CVUSD Facilities
-  Private
-  Subdivisions
-  State Trust Land
-  Yavapai-Apache Land



Furthermore, the land involved in the proposed project is not otherwise needed for purposes of the National Forest System, it does not exceed 80 acres, and it has been identified as base in exchange and therefore appropriate to consider conveyance under the CNF Plan (USFS 1987).

Decision to be Made _____

The decision to be made is whether or not to implement the proposed action to sell the parcel to the CVUSD, and whether further environmental documentation in an environmental impact statement is needed. The decision may also include mitigation measures that need to be applied in addition to those prescribed in the CNF Plan (1987). If the analysis demonstrates there are no significant impacts, the responsible official would record the decision in a Decision Notice and Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI). The responsible official for this project is the CNF Forest Supervisor.

Public Involvement Summary _____

A project notification mailer detailing the purchase of the parcel, project background, and NEPA process was mailed on July 26, 2005 to members of the public known to have interest in projects related to CNF and the Town of Camp Verde (i.e., adjacent landowners, interested organizations, and other local agencies). The mailer was also made available at the Verde Ranger Station and CVUSD Administrative Center, and a public notice was published in the Camp Verde Bugle and noticed on the CNF Schedule of proposed actions. The Yavapai-Apache Tribe in the immediate vicinity was also contacted during preliminary scoping for consultation.

A public open house was held on August 10, 2005 at the CVUSD Administrative Center located at 410 Camp Lincoln Road, Camp Verde, Arizona. The CVUSD Superintendent, Mr. Ron Maughan, and Business Manager, Ms. Montie Morris, as well as CNF staff, were available to answer questions the public voiced during the meeting. Attendees were encouraged to write down comments and all verbalized comments were noted. Eleven citizens attended the meeting.

A total of 17 responses and 40 comments were received due to the project notification mailer, public notice, and public meeting. In addition, six letters of support were received by CNF and CVUSD from various public and governmental entities. On August 23, 2005, the Mayor and Council of Camp Verde voted unanimously to support the land acquisition. The majority of comments regarding land acquisition for educational facilities were favorable. Comments also addressed the proposed location, need for educational facilities, monetary concerns regarding facility development, noise and light pollution, and the area's soil, vegetation, and water resources. A summary of the public scoping comments may be found in Appendix A.

The Draft EA was available for comment from April 17, 2006 to May 17, 2006. Copies of the Draft EA were sent to individuals who provided specific comments during the scoping process, representatives of appropriate governmental agencies and interest groups, and the media. Five supportive comments were received in the form of letters. A summary of the comments is included as Appendix B.

Issue Identification _____

Based on comments received in response to the project notification mailer, public notice, and public meeting, the CNF interdisciplinary (ID) team summarized the issues into those shown below in Table 1.1.

| Table 1.1 Significant Issues Identified and Addressed | | |
|--|---|--|
| ISSUES | HOW ISSUES ARE MEASURED | LOCATION WHERE ADDRESSED |
| Sale of the property to CVUSD could result in a decrease in property values for adjacent landowners. | Projected changes in property values adjacent to the project area | Ch 3: Socioeconomic Impacts |
| Sale of the property to CVUSD could change the natural (appearing) setting and open space feel of the area. | Changes in landscape character type, variety class, and overall visual characteristics | Ch 3: Visual Resources |
| Noise and lights associated with the development of school buildings and ancillary facilities and activities and the potential need for improved utilities could result in disturbance or impact the quiet setting of residences adjacent to the site. | Changes in noise levels in and near the project area. Additional lighting invading neighborhood or obscuring views of the night sky | Ch 3: Noise Ch 3: Visual Resources |
| Development of a school at this location could result in increased traffic on local roads, increasing safety concerns, and noise. | Increases in traffic on Verde Park Road, Quarterhorse Lane, and State Highway 260 | Ch 3: Recreation and Access Ch 3: Noise |
| Development of school facilities at this site could be difficult due to drainages passing through the property that could result in flooding or excessive site development costs. | Amount of storm water through project area | Ch 3: Soil and Water |
| Sale of the property to the CVUSD could result in loss of recreation opportunities associated with this parcel such as equestrian and off-road vehicle (OHV) use. | Changes in recreation opportunities | Ch 3: Recreation and Access |

Applicability of the Forest Plan, Laws, Regulations, Policies, and Other Directions

Plans of Other Agencies

There are no other federal lands but National Forest lands, adjacent to or within the immediate vicinity of the project area. Therefore, other agency plans would not influence any USFS decision-making actions. However, Town of Camp Verde direction will apply after sale occurs. The subject parcel would be integrated into an area classified as “open space” under Camp Verde’s General Plan. In the General Plan, “developed open space” is described as areas that may include turfed parks, *schools*, golf courses, horse staging areas, trails, picnicking areas and bike paths and pathways” (emphasis added).

Applicable Laws, Regulations, and Policies

A list of federal laws and executive orders that pertain to project-specific planning and environmental analysis on federal lands is presented below. While most pertain to federal lands in general, some are specific to Arizona.

- Endangered Species Act (ESA) of 1973, as amended
- National Forest Management Act (NFMA) of 1976, as amended

- Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resources Planning Act of 1974, as amended
- Archaeological Resource Protection Act of 1980
- Executive Order 11593 (cultural resources)
- Executive Order 11988 (floodplains)
- Executive Order 11990 (wetlands)
- Executive Order 12898 (environmental justice)
- National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, amended 1986
- National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, as amended
- Arizona Administrative Code, Title 12, Natural Resources
- Arizona Administrative Code, Title 18, Environmental Quality, Chapters 9 and 11

Forest Plan Management Direction and Consistency

The NFMA calls for developing, adopting, and revising land and resource management plans for the National Forest System as required by the Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resources Planning Act. These regulations prescribe how land and resource management planning is to be conducted on USFS lands. The Coconino National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP) (USDA 1987) was prepared pursuant to these regulations.

The LRMP contains the management direction for the CNF. One of the desired conditions to be achieved under the plan is “improved management efficiency through land exchange, purchase, or donation” (page 24). With regard to improved management, “urban expansion needs are evaluated and appropriate action taken to meet community needs on public lands where [it is] environmentally acceptable and logical to do so” (page 79).

The CNF LRMP recognizes several categories for potential land acquisition. One category addresses lands near communities and recognizes that there are lands adjacent to or within the communities of Flagstaff, Sedona, Cottonwood, and Camp Verde that may meet acquisition criteria. The LRMP states that, “National Forest lands identified as needed and suitable for community expansion will not be committed to uses incompatible with prospective community needs” (page 85).

Project Record Availability

Additional documentation is in the project record located at the Red Rock Ranger District office. These records are available for public review pursuant to any limitations in the Freedom of Information Act (5 U.S.C. 552). Copies of the EA are available at the Red Rock Ranger District and on the Internet at the following addresses:

Red Rock Ranger District
P. O. Box 300
Sedona, AZ 86339-0300
(928) 282-4119

www.fs.fed.us/r3/coconino/nepa/index.shtml

For information, contact Judy Adams at the above address or by email at jadams05@fs.fed.us.

CHAPTER 2. ALTERNATIVES, INCLUDING THE PROPOSED ACTION

Alternatives Considered but not Analyzed

One alternative considered was purchasing privately-owned land within the CVUSD boundary for development of new school facilities. However, only roughly 10 percent of the total lands within the District are privately-owned (see Figure 2), which limits the choice of potential properties for school facility development and makes it rather unlikely that a suitable 60-acre private parcel would be available for purchase. In addition, the costs of purchasing such a parcel could be prohibitive. Consequently, public lands became the emphasis of the search for new school sites. Criteria used when evaluating appropriate site locations were sufficient size (minimum of 60 acres), access to existing utilities including sanitary sewer, safe ingress and egress, and location in the southern portion of Camp Verde to provide efficient access.

CVUSD considered two State Trust parcels that were of sufficient size, however in less favorable locations. Further analysis of these parcels determined that utility access was not currently available and would require substantial investment to obtain. In addition, topographical constraints on both sites would limit the development of playing fields and building layouts unless significant and expensive site manipulation was undertaken.

The CNF parcel studied is available to CVUSD through ELGA at an extremely affordable cost of \$10.00/acre. The parcel also meets the size, ingress and egress, and location needs being in the southern portion of Camp Verde. Future school facility development needs can occur on this site that CVUSD can realistically purchase. Therefore, both privately-owned and State Trust parcels were eliminated from further consideration.

Alternatives Considered

Alternative A (No Action Alternative)

Under the No Action Alternative, the conveyance of CNF lands to CVUSD would not occur. The parcel would remain in Federal ownership and administered by the USFS; a new school campus would not be developed at this site. The parcel would continue to be managed as National Forest.

Alternative B (Proposed Action Alternative)

Under the proposed action, CNF would sell the subject parcel to CVUSD under the authority of ELGA. The CVUSD prefers this alternative because it not only meets, but also exceeds their criteria for the location of new school facilities. The project parcel is of sufficient size (80 acres), has utilities including sanitary sewer in the vicinity, has safe ingress and egress from State Highway 260 with a possible realignment of Verde Park Road, and is located in the southern portion of Camp Verde, which would meet the accessibility issues of CVUSD students and students from other southern Verde Valley school districts. In addition, the site is available for purchase under ELGA at \$10.00/acre and is immediately adjacent to the Town of Camp Verde's proposed community park, which would provide opportunities for sharing and developing recreational facilities.

Comparison of Alternatives

This section provides a summary of the effects of implementing the No Action and Proposed Action alternatives, which is presented in table format (see Table 2.1). Information in Table 2.1 is focused on activities and effects that can be distinguished quantitatively or qualitatively between the alternatives.

| TOPIC | IMPACTS | |
|-----------------------------|---|--|
| | Alternative A (No Action) | Alternative B (Proposed Action) |
| PHYSICAL RESOURCES | | |
| Air Quality | On-site Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) use would continue to generate emissions and fugitive dust. Fugitive dust from OHV use (uncontrolled) is localized and short-term. Dust levels would be highest during dry spells and periods of concentrated OHV use. Air quality standards are being met. | Closing the area to OHV use would eliminate fugitive dust and emissions caused by such use in the long term. Short-term air quality impacts from fugitive dust due to construction activities would be minimized through appropriate dust abatement strategies and would be localized. Standards would be met. |
| Soil and Water | Soil disturbance, mainly from OHV use, would continue, resulting in a reduction in soil productivity due to soil loss from erosion. Runoff water would continue to carry soil and pollutants off-site into area drainages. | Soils would be covered where school grounds are developed. Some soil would be lost during construction. Water runoff would be managed through storm water pollution prevention planning and best management practices (BMPs) improving the quality of surface water runoff. |
| Heritage Resources | Heritage resources would continue to be vulnerable to disturbance due to current activities, such as OHV use. | No long-term, adverse effects to heritage resources will occur. If, through testing, Site AR-03-04-01-492 was determined to contain significant information, it would be recommended for data recovery, which would mitigate loss of site. Cumulative impacts would include all other heritage sites that have been lost due to other projects in the area. |
| Visual Resources | The visual characteristics of the project area would continue to degrade due to excessive OHV use and illegal dumping. Dark skies would not be impacted. | Natural characteristics of the project area would be altered. Development planning proposes to preserve the knoll on the eastern side of project area in a natural state, partially protecting the visual quality of the site. Long-term impacts to dark skies would be minimized by following specific city required lighting designs for buildings and ballparks. Cumulatively, the proposed action would continue the trend of community and residential development at the expense of the natural appearing landscape. |
| Noise | High levels of noise would continue to be generated from the project area during times of concentrated OHV use. | In the long term, OHV noise from the project area would be eliminated. Noise levels associated with construction would cause short-term impacts while school facilities are being built. Long-term, noise levels would be elevated during school activities and periods of increased on-road traffic. |
| BIOLOGICAL RESOURCES | | |
| Vegetation | Continual OHV use would reduce vegetative production in project area. Most of the mesquite trees in project area should remain unchanged. | Much of the vegetation in the project area would be removed, including many mesquite trees. Landscaping focused on native vegetation could restore part of the natural landscape. |

| Table 2.1: Comparison of Alternatives | | |
|--|--|---|
| TOPIC | IMPACTS | |
| | Alternative A (No Action) | Alternative B (Proposed Action) |
| Non-native Species | Known infestations of non-native weeds, including yellow starthistle (a Class A invasive species), would likely spread and further displace native vegetation. | Invasive weeds on-site, including yellow starthistle, would potentially be spread during construction activities. Construction of facilities and parking areas and landscaping and landscaping maintenance would ultimately reduce or eliminate invasive weeds. |
| Wildlife | Disturbance would likely continue, mainly from OHV use. Foraging habitat for native wildlife would continue to be degraded. New development off-site in surrounding areas would lead to more fragmentation of habitat. | Permanent loss of wildlife habitat would occur. Some of the wildlife species now utilizing the site would be displaced to surrounding areas. Species with tolerance of human activity would continue to use areas landscaped with native vegetation and preserved areas. On a regional basis, fragmentation will be the same as under Alternative A. |
| Special Status Species | Current use of the property would likely continue to have an effect on individuals of heathleaf wild buckwheat, but not significant enough to cause a trend toward listing. | Habitat for heathleaf wild buckwheat would likely be eliminated in the project area. On a regional basis, the impact would be minimal and not cause a trend toward listing. Suitable but unoccupied habitat will be modified for a number of species. |
| HUMAN FACTORS/SOCIAL RESOURCES | | |
| Public Access and Recreation, Traffic | No direct or indirect impacts to recreation. Cumulative impacts would occur from development on adjacent lands would involve displacement of OHV users from other developed sites to the project area and/or cause pressure to manage OHV use. No short-term impacts to access. Cumulatively, traffic levels could increase due to developments on adjacent lands. | Elimination of OHV opportunities in project area would result in displacement to other areas. Cumulative impacts from additional developments in the area would result in further displacement. Short-term impacts to access would occur from construction of school facilities, increasing heavy vehicle traffic. Long-term increases from traffic would occur due to operation of school grounds. |
| Socioeconomics | CVUSD would have to seek alternatives to building a new school that would require extensive planning and associated costs. Cost for land would be greater than \$10.00/acre. High costs for developing new schools would be paid with taxpayer money. | Community would positively benefit from new school facilities being built at an easily accessible site adjacent to a park. Low cost to purchase lands for schools would benefit taxpayers. Property values would likely increase as a result of the construction. |

CHAPTER 3. AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

Affected Environment

This chapter describes the direct, indirect, and cumulative impact of implementing the No Action Alternative and the Proposed Action Alternative. Direct impacts are caused by an action and occur at the same time and place as the action. Indirect impacts are caused by the action and occur later or farther away but are still reasonably foreseeable. Cumulative impacts are the effects on the environment that result from the incremental impact of the action when added to other past, present, or reasonably foreseeable future actions, regardless of what agency (federal or nonfederal) or person undertakes such other actions. Cumulative impacts can result from individually minor, but collectively significant, actions taking place over a period of time. While most direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts would occur within the 80-acre project area, some impacts may transcend project boundaries.

Major issues define the scope of the environmental concern for the proposed project. These issues are summarized in Chapter 1 (Issue Identification) and are addressed under the environmental resources and uses analyzed in this chapter, which include air quality, heritage resources, noise, public access and recreation, soil and water, socioeconomics, special status species, vegetation, visual resources, and wildlife. Mineral and energy resources were not evaluated due to the lack of relevance to the proposed project (i.e., there would be no direct, indirect, or cumulative impacts).

Physical Resources

Air Quality

Affected Environment

All areas of the country that meet federal health standards for air quality are designated Class I or II under the Clean Air Act of 1963, as amended. Congress designated many national parks and wilderness areas as Class I areas, which receive the greatest degree of protection against air quality degradation. All other “clean air” areas in the country were identified as Class II. The majority of the Verde Valley, including the project area, is classified as Class II. The closest Class I airshed is the Middle-Verde Reservation of the Yavapai-Apache Tribe, which was redesignated from a Class II in 1996 to ensure that future emissions from newly constructed or expanded industrial air pollution sources are well-controlled (61 FR 56461). The re-designation did not include any other restrictions on activities in the Verde Valley.

Air quality in and surrounding the project area is in compliance with applicable standards. Temporary degradation results from fires (prescribed burns, residential trash/debris burning, and wildfires) and fugitive dust. OHV use in the project area contributes to fugitive dust, especially during dry periods.

Direct, Indirect, and Cumulative Impacts

Alternative A (No Action)

Under the No Action Alternative, the project area would remain under the jurisdiction of CNF and current uses, specifically in the form of OHV activity, would continue to directly impact local air quality from emissions and fugitive dust. While during dry periods fugitive dust can be extensive, air quality within the planning area would remain within Class II standards, and the Class I Airshed of the Yavapai-Apache Reservation would not be affected.

Alternative B (Proposed Action)

Short-term impacts under Alternative B would be similar to those under Alternative A. Once the project area is closed to OHV use, however, impacts to air quality from such use would cease. Once the new school facility construction begins, construction activities involving heavy equipment use and ground disturbance would result in short-term, direct impacts to local air quality due to increased emissions and fugitive dust. Appropriate dust abatement procedures, such as watering the construction site, would be undertaken pursuant to state and local requirements to reduce impacts to air quality. While short-term impacts could equal or be slightly greater than currently experienced from OHV use in the project area, the proposed action would improve particulate air quality over the long term after construction is complete. Traffic resulting from a new school would result in increased vehicular emissions. The cumulative impact would be a slight increase in vehicular emissions.

Heritage Resources

Affected Environment

A cultural resource files search at CNF Supervisor's Office revealed that the project area (as well as the surrounding land) had been previously inventoried for cultural resources during several projects, and that three sites had been identified on the parcel (Sites AR-03-04-01-491, AR-03-04-01-492, and AR-03-04-01-493). These three previously recorded sites were field checked to assess their condition and eligibility for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). Based on the field examination, two of the sites (AR-03-04-01-491 and AR-03-04-01-493) are recommended as ineligible for the NRHP because they lack integrity and potential to yield significant information beyond that collected during recordation. However, the NRHP eligibility of the third site (AR-03-04-01-492) could not be determined by means of surface observations alone and will require archaeological testing to determine whether it contains subsurface deposits that could yield significant information regarding prehistoric occupation, and particularly agricultural practices, in the area (ESM 2005).

All sites have been experienced recent disturbance, both by extensive vehicular traffic and litter. A portion of one site (AR-03-04-01-491) has been being completely obliterated by such disturbance.

Direct, Indirect, and Cumulative Impacts

Alternative A (No Action)

Under the No Action Alternative, heritage resources identified within the project area would remain vulnerable to disturbance due to the current public uses of the property, including the use of OHVs. Cumulatively, the continued population growth and associated development within the area surrounding the subject parcel will only intensify use of the parcel and other, nearby federal lands. The integrity of identified sites in the project and surrounding, undeveloped areas would thus continue to be compromised.

Alternative B (Proposed Action)

Prior to the actual land conveyance, a treatment plan would be prepared for CNF and the State Historic Preservation Office to facilitate the testing and appropriate data recovery efforts for Site AR-03-04-01-492. If archaeological testing indicates that this site possesses significant information, potential, full-scale data recovery would be performed in conjunction with the testing activities before the land transfer is allowed to proceed. On the other hand, if the testing does not produce any significant research results, the land transfer could be allowed to proceed with no further archaeological work required. Cumulatively, the proposed action would ensure that appropriate heritage information within the subject parcel is preserved by this mitigation in addition to other mitigation activities in the surrounding Town parcel.

Noise

Affected Environment

OHV use is the main generator of noise originating from the project area. Such noise varies on a daily and even hourly basis, from near quiet conditions to high levels of noise due to heavy and concentrated OHV use, principally on weekends. Additional noise heard from traffic along State Highway 260, Verde Park Road, and nearby residential roads adds to the project area's soundscape.

Direct, Indirect, and Cumulative Impacts

Alternative A (No Action)

There would be no direct, indirect, or cumulative impacts to the current soundscape of the project area and its vicinity under Alternative A.

Alternative B (Proposed Action)

Under the proposed action, Town noise regulations would apply to the project area. When building of the new school facilities begin, construction activities would increase noise levels until the facilities are built. However, construction and post construction activities planned for the new school grounds would need to comply with local noise ordinances. Noise associated with school activities on weekdays would be minimal, with peaks occurring at the beginning and end of the school day. Weekend, school-related noise would primarily be associated with sports events. Noise associated with school activities (particularly on weekends) would be offset by the reduction in noise due to OHV use and limited by local ordinance. Cumulatively, activities

occurring at the school and planned, adjacent park facilities and associated traffic will result in noise levels that, although controlled by ordinance, may exceed current noise levels.

Soil and Water

Affected Environment

The project area covers the western flank of a dissected ridge system and extends westward onto a broad, flat plain that is bisected by a series of shallow, seasonal drainages. Topography is generally level with slopes of less than 5 percent, except for one pronounced knoll on the eastern portion of the parcel. The elevation range on the entire project area is between 3080 and 3180 feet. Substrates range from fine clay loams to mixed cobbles to a calciferous formation around the knoll. No basaltic soils occur in the project area. Soils within the project area have been disturbed by frequent OHV use, which has led to erosion and a reduction in soil productivity. In some areas, the disturbance is extensive, including on top and around the knoll and the area directly west of the knoll and Verde Park Road. The amount of actual soil lost due to erosion is unknown.

Although located 0.5 mile from the Verde River, there are no perennial streams, permanent surface water, wetlands, springs, or seeps in the project area. A number of shallow, seasonal drainages transect the project area, two of which are of considerable size. Numerous OHV trails crisscross these washes and have caused considerable erosion in and around them. It is likely that during times of heavy precipitation, such as during summer thunderstorms, sediment is carried to the Verde River via washes in the project area.

Neither surface water rights nor groundwater wells within the site are registered with Arizona Department of Water Resources (ADWR 2001). There are a large number of small-capacity domestic wells on private land near the project area (ADWR 2004), which generally produce less than 50 gallons per minute. Groundwater occurs at relatively shallow depths in the vicinity of the project area, and can be at or near ground surface immediately along the Verde River. Depth to groundwater for wells drilled away from the Verde River is generally 50 to 100 feet below ground surface (ADWR 2004).

Direct, Indirect, and Cumulative Impacts

Alternative A (No Action)

Under the No Action Alternative, soil erosion would continue due to on-going OHV use within the project area. Overall soil productivity would also continue to decline. Such erosion could lead to the delivery of sediment and potential contaminants via stormwater conveyance from the project area to Verde River, approximately 0.5 miles away. Illegal dumping at the site could impact surface and groundwater quality if hazardous materials are involved.

In terms of cumulative impacts, the Town of Camp Verde is considering building a park and recreation site on CNF lands adjacent to project area. If such plans are realized, additional traffic to the area combined with reduced area for use (as the park/recreation area would be closed to OHV use) may increase the use of the project area by OHV enthusiasts.

Alternative B (Proposed Action)

Short-term impacts under the proposed action would be similar to those described under Alternative A, unless the CVUSD decides to close the parcel to OHV use. In this case, the rate of soil erosion would decrease with time, reducing the chance of washing sediment into the Verde River during storm events. Building the school facilities would result in soil compaction, disturbance, and loss; however, the amount would be minimized through implementation of a stormwater pollution prevention plan and Best Management Practices (BMPs), which would include retention basins to prevent flooding to adjacent areas. In addition, CVUSD would follow Army Corp of Engineers and Arizona Department of Environmental Quality guidelines in the design and building of the school facilities with regard to the on-site drainage. Such plans and practices would also prevent or reduce the amount of sedimentation moving towards the Verde River. After construction is complete and landscaping efforts are successful in stabilizing the soil, long-term soil disturbance and water quality impairment would be minimal, with the intensity of impact would be considerably reduced when compared to Alternative A.

Cumulatively, the potential development of a park on adjacent lands using a stormwater pollution prevention plan and following BMPs, along with other development activities following similar plans and practices, would ultimately reduce soil erosion and potential for sedimentation reaching the Verde River over the long term.

Visual Resources

Affected Environment

Character Type and Variety Class

All landscapes within the National Forest System are classified by “character type” that defines the broad regional context for the appearance of the landscape, and by “variety classes” that define the relative “attractiveness” of the landscape within each character type (USFS 1974). Accordingly, the project area is located within the Tonto character type and Upper Tonto sub-type, which typically consists of tablelands (mesa and buttes). The dominant feature is the Mogollon Escarpment or “Rim” located to the north and east of the project area, while the predominant vegetation is coniferous forest in the higher elevations and pinyon-juniper woodlands in the intermediate and lower elevations. The principal waterways, which are not on or adjacent to the subject parcel, are the Gila, Verde, and Salt rivers and Oak, Beaver, Clear, Tonto, and Cherry creeks.

The project area is classified as Variety Class C - Minimal (USFS 1989). This means that, compared to other areas within the same character type, this site has “minimal” scenic attributes. Characteristics of the project area include a rolling or slightly dissected landform. Vegetation is typical of desert grassland with little variation in texture and color. There are no water bodies on the site. The only prominent landmark is the knoll on the east edge of the project area, which is scarred from a two-tracked road. Much of the project area has suffered some degradation from its natural appearing condition from past use. Such degradation includes vehicle tracks and OHV trails, large areas of bare ground, and widespread litter.

Distance Zones

Distance zones are divisions of a particular landscape being viewed. The three distance zones are foreground, middleground, and background, which are based on the distance details are seen by the observer. Since the project area is roughly 80 acres, the entire area as seen from State Route

260, Verde Park Road, and Quarterhorse Lane can be considered foreground, which is usually limited to areas with ¼ to ½ mile of the observer. Middleground extends from the foreground to 3 to 5 miles from the observer, while background extends from middleground to infinity.

Sensitivity Levels

Sensitivity levels are a measure of people's concern for scenic quality. These are determined for travel routes through USFS lands on developed, system roads, and trails, and for "use areas" and residences within and adjacent to USFS lands. The project area is divided by a primary paved residential road, bordered on the south by a residential road, adjacent to a busy state highway, and is noticeable from nearby residences. The view of the project area from these roads in the nearby residences can be rated Sensitivity Level 1, which is the highest sensitivity level in the USFS rating system that reflects the highest level of concern for scenic quality by those likely to view the area.

Visual Quality Objectives

Evaluation of a site's visual characteristics determines its visual quality objective (VQO). Based on the project area's visual characteristics, it is managed by CNF for Partial Retention. Such a designation requires that activities remain visually subordinate to the natural characteristic landscape (USFS 1974). However, the degraded nature of project area's visual conditions due to extensive OHV use and illegal dumping do not meet the criteria for Partial Retention but are more appropriate for Modification VOQ designation, consequently falling short of CNF Plan objectives for the area.

Direct, Indirect, and Cumulative Impacts

Alternative A (No Action)

Under the No Action Alternative, there would be no direct or indirect impacts to dark skies as the project area would remain undeveloped. As for the presently degraded visual quality, CNF Plan (1987) direction would guide eventual visual resource enhancement of the project area to a "natural appearing" condition. However, considering present and projected funding and other CNF priorities for visual resource enhancement, the project area would probably retain the same visual characteristics for some time in the foreseeable future, with the possibility that visual characteristics would further degrade due to extensive OHV use and illegal dumping. The project area would thus continue to not meet the Partial Retention visual quality objectives due to the disturbed condition of the site.

Cumulatively, if the property adjacent to the project area were developed into a town park, greater sensitivity of the project area's visual characteristics may be experienced by the public visiting the park.

Alternative B (Proposed Action)

In the short term under Alternative B, impacts the visual characteristics of the project area would be similar to those described under Alternative A. Once construction of school facilities proceeds, the project area would be altered significantly from the natural characteristics of the area. Such changes would be readily visible from Verde Park Road, Quarterhorse Lane, State Highway 260, and nearby residences. The overall visual alteration of the project area would not meet the CNF management goal of Partial Retention, as developing school facilities would not restore the natural characteristics of the Upper Tonto sub-type throughout the planning area. However, the proposed project would meet the visual quality objective of Modification.

Modification is a management objective with a degree of greater acceptable alteration of the natural landscape. Under Modification, management activities may visually dominate the original characteristic landscape. The CNF plan (1987) allows “one classification movement downward” in visual quality objectives. Consequently, the proposed action would be consistent with Plan criteria for scenic quality management.

Development of school facilities would also affect dark skies due to lighting of the campus and playing fields at night. To minimize such impacts, CVUSD would incorporate dark sky lighting designs as required by Town of Camp Verde in development plans to alleviate the potential disturbance of excessive lighting to local residents.

One objective of the Town of Camp Verde’s General Plan (1998) includes the preservation of scenic vistas and dark skies. The views of the Verde Valley from the Mogollon Rim in the east, as well as from the southern entrance into Town, are considered valuable viewsheds for Camp Verde visitors and should thus be preserved. To protect dark skies, the Town is committed to updating and enforcing ordinances regulating lighting systems and has recommended lighting types for all Town areas and signage. These ordinances prevent the implementation of lighting that would invade neighboring property or obscure views of the night sky.

Cumulatively, the proposed action would continue the trend of community and residential development at the expense of the natural appearing setting. However, considering the amount of ongoing visual degradation of the site due to OHV use and illegal dumping, the transition would not be as drastic as it would if the project area would be in a more pristine condition.

Biological Resources

Non-native Species

Affected Environment

Non-native plant species are often found in areas with high levels of soil disturbance and associated de-vegetation. Certain non-native species are considered noxious or invasive due to their ability to out compete native species. CNF ranks invasive plants as Class A, B, and C. Class A plants receive the highest priority and management emphasis is complete eradication. Class B species receive second highest priority with the management emphasis to contain the spread, decrease population size, and eventually eliminate the infestation. Class C species receive the lowest priority; management emphasis is to contain spread to present population size or to decrease the population (Phillips et al. 1998). Results of the invasive weed survey of the project area showed that the only ranked invasive plant species was yellow starthistle (*Centaurea solstitialis*), which is considered a Class A species. This invasive plant was found scattered throughout the proposed project area, especially along both sides of Verde Park Road.

Other non-native plant species also occur within the project area. Russian thistle (*Salsola kali*) is prevalent throughout the project area, especially along areas heavily disturbed by OHV use.

Direct, Indirect, and Cumulative Impacts

Alternative A (No Action)

Continued OHV use in the project area under Alternative A would increase the level of soil disturbance and erosion, which would continue the spread of non-native plants, including yellow starthistle. Such spread could be reduced through BMPs followed by CNF for weed control, if implemented. Cumulatively, development of other parcels near the project area, following appropriate BMPs for weed control, would not increase the potential for additional noxious weed introduction.

Alternative B (Proposed Action)

Under the proposed action, short-term impacts on the presence and spread of non-native plant species, including invasive species, due to construction activities would be similar to those described under Alternative A. If CVUSD implements BMPs suggested in the Biological Assessment and Evaluation (ESM 2005), the spread of non-native plant species would be prevented. Following construction of the school facilities and associated landscaping and with landscaping maintenance, the presence and potential spread of non-native plant species would likely be reduced.

Special Status Species

Affected Environment

All 49 species on the Red Rock Ranger District's Threatened, Endangered, and Sensitive Species list were reviewed. This list details the federal, state and forest status of individual species and identifies those that are either known to occur or have suitable habitat in the project area. Based on this list, seventeen species were identified as having suitable habitat in the project area.

Out of the 17 species with suspected potential habitat in the project area, it was determined that suitable habitat did not exist for three invertebrates (Aryxna giant skipper, Freeman's agave borer, and Neumogen's giant skipper). Each of these species depends on members of the genus *Agave* as a plant host. No *Agave* were observed during field surveys. The remaining 14 special status-species with potentially suitable habitat in the project area are documented in Table 3.1.

During field surveys of the project area, only one of the 14 special status species with potentially suitable habitat was identified (ESM 2006). Approximately 30 individuals of heathleaf wild buckwheat were found on and around the knoll on the eastern edge of the project area. This area experiences frequent OHV use, which has degraded much of the buckwheat's habitat, as well as habitat for other special status species. Habitat for a number of special status animals, such as peregrine falcon, bald eagle, yellow-billed cuckoo, and Maricopa tiger beetle, can be considered marginal due to lack of important habitat features, such as available water, large trees, boulders, cliffs, or minimal prey base or available forage. In addition, ongoing OHV use is disruptive to many of the special status animals.

Direct, Indirect, and Cumulative Impacts

Alternative A (No Action)

Current uses of the project area under Alternative A, especially frequent OHV use, would continue to degrade the available suitable habitat identified for 14 special status species, as well as be disruptive to many special status animals that may be on site. The population of heathleaf wild buckwheat on the knoll could decline with time due to such habitat degradation. The potential loss in habitat suitability, however, would be inconsequential considering the limited amount of suitable habitat in the project area, much of which is marginal, and the amount of prime, suitable habitat in the surrounding area.

Alternative B (Proposed Action)

In the short term, impacts from the proposed action would be similar that that described under Alternative A, unless the project area would be closed to OHV use, which would reduce the rate of loss of suitable habitat. In the long term, however, construction of the school facilities would eliminate much of the existing or potential suitable habitat for the 14 special status species identified in Table 3.1. The loss of habitat, however, would be inconsequential considering the limited amount of suitable habitat in the project area, most of such habitat being marginal, its current degraded state, and the amount of prime, suitable habitat for the special status species in the surrounding area.

The identified population of heathleaf wild buckwheat would potentially be destroyed during construction of school facilities. Transplanting individual plants could be considered as a form of mitigation; however, the success of transplanting the species is unknown. Another alternative mitigation would be to gather seeds from the wild buckwheat population and plant them in an appropriate location. That part of the heathleaf population not disturbed by construction, could be fenced and preserved to be used as an educational area.

Vegetation

Affected Environment

The entire area exists in either the Arizona Upland Sonoran Desertscrub or Semidesert Grassland habitat (Brown 1994). The southern half of the project area is dominated by mesquite in and around minor ephemeral washes as well as one significant intermittent wash. The northwestern portion of the parcel is dominated by creosote and open grassland and lacks mesquite. The grassland is comprised of native bunch grasses up to four feet tall. Portions of the project area have been disturbed from extensive OHV use, resulting in complete loss of vegetation in some areas and growth of non-native species, which compete with native vegetation.

Direct, Indirect, and Cumulative Impacts

Alternative A (No Action)

Under the No Action Alternative, the vegetation type on the project area would mostly remain the same, although it would continue to degrade. Continued disturbance by OHV use would potentially increase the size of heavily disturbed and de-vegetated areas, while noxious weeds would continue to compete with native vegetation. The stands of mesquite on the southern end of

the project area would mostly remain the same, although they would potentially receive some adverse impacts from illegal cutting.

Alternative B (Proposed Action)

Impacts under Alternative B during the short term would be similar to those described under Alternative A. In the long term, development of the new school facilities would result in the removal of native vegetation within a significant portion of the project area, including the removal of mesquite from the southern half of the project area. Considering the amount of disturbed land in the project area, including large, de-vegetated areas and widespread noxious weeds, and more pristine CNF lands nearby, the loss of native vegetation in the project area would be inconsequential.

Wildlife

Affected Environment

Types of wildlife that would be present in the project area are those common to either Arizona Upland Sonoran Desertscrub or Semidesert Grassland habitat (Brown 1994). These species include coyote (*Canus latrans*), jackrabbit (*Lepus* spp.), cottontail rabbit (*Sylvilagus* spp.), Merriam's kangaroo rat (*Dipodomys merriami*), ground squirrels (*Spermophilus* spp.), deer (*Odocoileus* spp.), javelina (*Tayassu tajacu*), and a variety of birds, snakes, and lizards. Due to the disturbed nature of the project area, including large areas of reduced groundcover and foraging habitat, as well as frequent OHV use, it is likely that the prevalence of wildlife species in the project area is greatly reduced compared to nearby, less disturbed areas in the CNF. The project area is surrounded by CNF lands on all sides, with the exception of the southern boundary, which is adjacent to private lands. No fences, walls, or other barriers are present that could fragment wildlife habitat in the project area; however, the presence of Verde Park Road in the center of the project area, running north to south, poses a risk to animals that are occasionally killed or injured by oncoming traffic.

Direct, Indirect, and Cumulative Impacts

Alternative A (No Action)

Disturbance to existing wildlife habitat would likely continue under the No Action Alternative. Ongoing OHV use would continue to distress individual wildlife species that are present. Retaining the project area in federal ownership would retain its wildlife habitat connectivity with CNF lands on its north, east, and west sides. However, this wildlife habitat to the north and east has now been approved for conveyance to the Town for a park, which will further isolate the habitat on the parcel (USDA 2006).

Alternative B (Proposed Action)

Under the proposed action, impacts to wildlife in the short term would be the same as described under Alternative A. Long-term impacts would be the permanent loss of wildlife habitat within the project area due to development of a school campus. Some of the wildlife species utilizing the project area would be displaced to surrounding areas. Other species tolerant of human activity would continue to use areas landscaped with native vegetation and preserved areas. While most of the wildlife habitat within the project area would become fragmented from CNF

lands on three sides, overall impacts would not be significant when considering the amount of available wildlife habitat in the region, especially just north of State Highway 260. As under Alternative A, additional fragmentation would occur due to the cumulative impacts from other developments on the south side of State Highway 260, especially the potential use of adjacent land for a town park.

| Table 3.1: Special Status Species with Known or Potential Habitat Within or Adjacent to the Project Area | | | | | | |
|---|--|--|-------------------|--------|------|------|
| COMMON NAME | SCIENTIFIC NAME | PREFERRED HABITAT DESCRIPTION | HABITAT PRESENT | STATUS | | |
| | | | | FED | USFS | AGFD |
| Birds | | | | | | |
| American peregrine falcon | <i>Falco peregrinus anatum</i> | Nests in sheer, steep cliffs; preys on birds in woodlands, riparian areas, and other habitats with abundant prey near nest site. | Marginal Foraging | -- | S | WSC |
| Bald eagle | <i>Haliaeetus leucocephalus</i> | Nests in large trees or cliffs near water with abundant prey. Mainly feeds on fish but will also feed on waterfowl, small mammals, and carrion. | Marginal foraging | T | S | WSC |
| Western yellow-billed cuckoo | <i>Coccyzus americanus occidentalis</i> | Large blocks of riparian woodlands - cottonwood, willow, or tamarisk. Riparian obligate. | Marginal Foraging | C | S | -- |
| Bell's vireo | <i>Vireo bellii</i> | Dense brush near water - mesquite, willow or scrub oak. | Yes | -- | S | -- |
| Reptiles and Amphibians | | | | | | |
| Arizona night lizard | <i>Xantusia vigilis arizonae</i> | Desert, desert grasslands, and pine-juniper woodland - under plant debris, cow chips, or in rock crevices. | Yes | -- | S | -- |
| Invertebrates | | | | | | |
| Comstock's hairstreak | <i>Calliphrys comstocki</i> | Undisturbed, remote desert canyons; ravine bottoms in pinyon-juniper woodlands; shrubland and chaparral. Wild buckwheats, especially <i>Eriogonum racemosum</i> and <i>Eriogonum wrightii</i> , serve as host plant. | Yes | -- | S | -- |
| Early elfin | <i>Incisalia fotis</i> | Desert mountains and canyons, usually in pinyon-juniper or pinyon plant communities. Requires <i>Cowanina</i> species as food for larva. | Yes | -- | S | -- |
| Maricopa tiger beetle | <i>Cicindela oregona maricopa</i> | Sands, silts, gravels, and clays, often along stream banks or near seeps or reservoir banks | Marginal No water | SC | S | -- |
| Tiger beetle | <i>Cicindela hirticollis corpuscular</i> | Sandy and gravelly areas such as sand dunes and sand pits, either near or away from water. | Yes | -- | S | -- |
| Plants | | | | | | |
| Heatherleaf wild buckwheat | <i>Eriogonum ericifolium</i> var. <i>ericifolium</i> | Powdery, white gypseous limestone from Tertiary lakebed deposits in open creosote bush desertscrub, 3000-3500 feet in elevation. | Yes | -- | S | -- |
| Hualapai milkwort | <i>Polygala rusbyi</i> | Alluvium derived from dolomite and limestone. Has been found within grasslands and canotia/juniper woodland | Yes | -- | S | -- |
| Ripley wild buckwheat | <i>Eriogonum ripleyi</i> | Tertiary lakebeds on powdery, well-drained soils derived from limestone; on sandy clay soil on the edge of sandstone mesas and on volcanic tuff, ash, and re-deposited limestone and chalky clay. | Yes | SC | S | -- |
| Tonto Basin agave | <i>Agave delamateri</i> | Overlooking major drainages or perennial streams from atop benches or at edges of slopes or on gentle slopes in Arizona Upland Sonoran Desertscrub. | Yes | SC | S | -- |
| Verde Valley sage | <i>Salvia dorrii mearnsii</i> | White, powdery gypseous limestone and grayish powdery calcareous soils from Tertiary lakebed deposits in open Sonoran desertscrub. | Yes | SC | S | -- |
| Federal (FED): T = Threatened, C = Candidate for listing, SC = Species of Concern; State (AGFD): WSC = Wildlife Species of Concern; USFS: S = Sensitive | | | | | | |

Human Factors/Social Resources

Public Access and Recreation

Affected Environment

The Verde Valley offers residents and visitors a variety of outdoor recreation activities, including hiking, camping, wildlife viewing, horseback riding, OHV riding, jeep touring, canoeing, kayaking, hunting, and fishing. Such recreation opportunities are part of the reason many people move into or visit the area. Camp Verde is nestled in the southeastern corner of the Verde Valley and provides opportunities for many of the recreation opportunities mentioned above, including those that take place on public lands. Forty-three percent of lands within the Town boundaries are public lands, most of which are administered by USFS (CNF and Prescott National Forest). Recreating on these public lands is an important part of the Camp Verde lifestyle and contributes greatly to the residents' quality of living.

The project area is primarily used for OHV activity, with a minimal amount of non-motorized use such as hiking, mountain bike riding, and nature viewing. The current management direction under the LRMP is for "dispersed recreation" (1987). The project area could be classified as Roded Natural, as defined by the USFS Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS). This classification is based on a combination of physical, biological, social, and managerial conditions that give value to a place. Under ROS, the project area is characterized by predominantly natural appearing environments with moderate evidence of the sights and sounds of man. Such evidence usually harmonizes with the natural environment. Interaction between users may be moderate to high, with evidence of other users prevalent. Resource modification and utilization practices are evident but harmonize with the natural environment. Conventional motorized use is allowed and incorporated into construction standards and design of facilities.

The public can currently access the south end of the project area from Quarterhorse Lane (a residential street), the center of the project area from Verde Park Road (running north to south), and the north, east, and west sides through CNF lands. Traffic on Quarterhorse Lane consists mainly of light residential use while traffic on Verde Park Road is generally heavier as it is a primary access road to a number of subdivisions south of the project area. There are currently no turn lanes or developed parking areas along Verde Park Road, which causes some risk for accidents when accessing the project area. Occasional heavy trucks on the road associated with housing developments and road construction/maintenance south of the project area increases such risks.

Direct, Indirect, and Cumulative Impacts

Alternative A (No Action)

Under the No Action Alternative, recreation within the project area would continue to be managed under USFS policies, guidelines, and regulations. In the short term, OHV use would remain as the primary recreation activity. Such OHV use may be affected by a city park being built on the west and north side of the project area. If this occurs, the proximity of the developed recreation area with its added administrative presence could lead to pressure to manage or restrict OHV use within the project area. On the other hand, development of a city park and closure of that land to OHV use could lead to greater OHV use within the project area from displaced recreationists, increasing the level of crowding. Forest Service regulations adopted in November,

2005 have the potential to impact OHV use. Under the regulations, the Forest Service will designate certain roads, trails, and areas that are open to motor vehicle use. If OHV use is restricted in the subject parcel, increased use or any negative impacts of existing use may be limited or eliminated (USDA 2005).

In the short term, access to the project area would remain unchanged. With time and additional developments south of the project area, traffic would increase on Verde Park Road, making accessing the project area more dangerous considering that there are not any turn lanes or developed parking areas. The potential development of a town park west and north of the project area include restricted access through park grounds.

Alternative B (Proposed Action)

Under Alternative B, jurisdiction over the 80 acres within the project area would be conveyed to CVUSD for future school facility development. Construction of a school complex would displace OHV users who would need to find other areas to recreate. The displaced OHV users would likely use nearby federal land, consistent with designations made by the CNF in accordance with the new travel management regulations mentioned above. Some recreationists living nearby and able to ride their OHV directly to the project area (without the need to haul their equipment) would experience a greater level of inconvenience. Cumulative impacts would occur from additional lands being developed and closed to OHV use near the project area. This would further displace users and force them to find new areas to recreate, possibly some distance from their homes. This could also cause greater potential OHV impacts to currently undisturbed USFS lands in the area. Forest Service regulations adopted in November, 2005 have the potential to impact OHV use. Under the regulations, the Forest Service will designate certain roads, trails, and areas that are open to motor vehicle use. If OHV use is restricted in the subject parcel, increased use or any negative impacts of existing use may be limited or eliminated.

Traffic off Verde Park Road would increase substantially during construction activities. This would include the increase of large construction vehicles, which could cause delays to local residents traveling on the road. This impact would be short term and mitigated through appropriate traffic management techniques through and around the construction site. Over the long term, general traffic to and from the project area would increase due to the opening of the school campus. Such traffic would involve parents and students in private vehicles, school buses, maintenance vehicles, and administrators driving to and from campus. To limit the use of small, residential roads to access the schools and reduce traffic in adjacent residential areas, CVUSD would focus access to the school grounds from State Highway 260 onto Verde Park Road, likely moving the road to the edge of the parcel further from school use areas (Arizona Department of Commerce 2005).

Socioeconomics and Environmental Justice

Affected Environment

| AREA | RACE (Percentages) | | | | | | Poverty | Income | Percent Unemployment ² |
|-----------------------|--------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------------|-------|------------------|-----------------|--------------------------|-------------------|-----------------------------------|
| | White | Black Or African American | American Indian or Alaska Native | Asian | Pacific Islander | Some Other Race | % Individuals In Poverty | Per Capita Income | |
| United States | 77.1 | 12.9 | 1.5 | 4.2 | 0.3 | 6.6 | 12.4 | 21,587 | 3.7 |
| Arizona | 77.9 | 3.6 | 5.7 | 2.3 | 0.3 | 13.2 | 13.9 | 20,275 | 3.4 |
| Yavapai County | 91.9 | 0.4 | 1.6 | 0.5 | 0.1 | 3.6 | 11.9 | 19,727 | 3.9 |
| Camp Verde | 85.0 | 0.3 | 7.3 | 0.2 | 0.1 | 4.7 | 9.5 | 15,072 | 2.5 |
| Yavapai-Apache Nation | 5.0 | 0.3 | 87.5 | 0.0 | 0.3 | 3.4 | 33.4 | 8,347 | 6.8 |

(1) Based on data from the U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000 Summary

(2) Number of individuals age 16 and older in the labor force who are unemployed divided by the number of individuals age 16 and older in the labor force

According to the U.S. Census Bureau (U.S. Census 2005), Camp Verde had a population of 9,451 in 2000, which represents a 51 percent increase from the 1990 population of 6,243. This growth rate is expected to continue as indicated in the continue rise in new building permits (Arizona Department of Commerce 2005) and subdivision planning and development. School enrollment (elementary or high school) has also increased significantly over the past decade, with 1,022 students enrolled in 1990 compared to 1,701 in 2000 (U.S. Census 2005), a 66 percent increase.

The major employment in the Camp Verde area is provided by construction, ranching, light industry, trade and service, a casino, and the government (Arizona Department of Commerce 2005). A number of local businesses, including Cliff Castle Casino, Bashas, and Bank One, are the Town's major private employers, while CVUSD along with the U.S. Postal Service, the Town of Camp Verde, and Yavapai County Justice Facility, are the Town's major public employers. The Town had an unemployment rate of 3.9 percent, which was similar to the national average of 3.7 percent during 2000. Medium household income in 2000 was \$32,409, which was lower than the national average of \$41,994 (U.S. Census 2005).

Property tax rates, including taxes used for primary and secondary education, have remained relatively stable between 1990 and 2000. Over that period, education tax rates slightly decreased from 6.58 to 6.24. A greater decrease was estimated in 2004, when tax rates for primary and secondary education was estimated at 4.59 (Arizona Department of Commerce 2005). Property values, however, have increased over the same period.

Executive Order 12898, dated February 11, 1994, established the requirement to address environmental justice concerns within the context of federal agency operations. Environmental justice concerns include any adverse affect on minority and low-income populations within a given study area. Key indicators reviewed for environmental justice include minority populations, poverty rates, and income within a community.

The Yavapai-Apache Nation is immediately adjacent to the Town of Camp Verde. Per capita, income is substantially lower, the percent of the population and unemployment is significantly higher than Camp Verde, Yavapai County, Arizona and the United States. Students from the Nation attend Camp Verde schools.

Direct, Indirect, and Cumulative Impacts

Alternative A (No Action)

There would be no noticeable impact to the socioeconomic environment of Camp Verde under the No Action Alternative, including changes to employment and income. The Town's population would continue to grow and student enrollment would continue to increase. Property values would continue to be based on the open market. The need to construct new school facilities or expand the existing ones to make room for the increasing school enrollment would remain. When that time comes (or prior to it), and the decision is to build new facilities, CVUSD would need to find suitable land for such purposes. Expenses for such land would be considerable if it is bought through the private market, which could increase the total costs for the new school facilities, which would be felt by taxpayers. Students from the Yavapai-Apache Nation would continue to attend Camp Verde schools.

Alternative B (Proposed Action)

Under the proposed action, overall impacts to Camp Verde's socioeconomic environment would be the same as described under Alternative A. In the long term, CVUSD would save a significant amount of taxpayer's money through the conveyance of CNF lands for purposes of building new school facilities. Property taxes would still increase or the Town would likely vote on a school bond in order to pay for new school construction; however, such costs would be reduced due to the procurement affordability, of the CNF site.

The conveyance of USFS lands to CVUSD will not decrease the property values for adjacent landowners (Weiss 2004). Reducing the noise and fugitive dust related to frequent OHV use on the property and the attraction of families with children to the area will likely increase property values due to increased competition in the housing market. Students from the Yavapai-Apache Nation would continue to attend Camp Verde schools and receive the same benefits offered by new school facilities as Camp Verde students. Funding for a new school would not have a direct financial impact on Nation members (for example, through property tax increases). Nation members would receive the same financial benefits from the land conveyance as Camp Verde residents should any future funding arrangement be agreed upon between Camp Verde and the Nation.

CHAPTER 4. CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION

The following federal, state, and local agencies; tribes; and individuals have been consulted during the development of this environmental assessment:

ID Team Members _____

Judy Adams, District Lands Staff, Red Rock Ranger District
Janie Agyagos, District Wildlife Biologist, Red Rock Ranger District
Peter Pilles, Forest Archaeologist, Coconino National Forest Supervisor's Office
Barbara Phillips, Zone Botanist; Coconino, Kaibab, and Prescott National Forest
Jack Norman, District Watershed Staff, Red Rock Ranger District

Federal, State, and Local Agencies _____

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Arizona Game and Fish Department, Phoenix

Tribes _____

Yavapai-Apache Nation

Others _____

Ron Maughan, Superintendent, Camp Verde Unified School District
Montie Morris, Business Manager, Camp Verde Unified School District
Stephanie Treptow, EnviroSystems Management, Inc., NEPA Specialist
Brandon Harper, EnviroSystems Management, Inc., NEPA Specialist and Biologist
Gary Melvin, EnviroSystems Management, Inc., NEPA Specialist
Lynn Neal, EnviroSystems Management, Inc., Senior Archaeologist
Daniel Newsome, Senior Archaeologist and GIS Specialist

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APPENDIX A

PUBLIC SCOPING COMMENT SUMMARY

PUBLIC SCOPING COMMENT SUMMARY

| Location in Document Where Concern is Addressed if within the Scope of this Document | Document Code | Comment # | Comment |
|---|------------------|--------------|--|
| N/A | L1 | 1 | The Yavapai County School Superintendent supports the proposed purchase of land from the U.S. Forest Service by the Camp Verde Unified School District. |
| N/A | L2 | 2 | When the school land purchase was made public it was very clear to me that it would be a great opportunity for the future of our great school. |
| N/A | L3 | 3 | I am writing this letter to support the purchase of land near Verde Park Boulevard by the Camp Verde Unified School district. |
| N/A | L4 | 4 | Please accept this letter of support for the Education Land Grant Act application. |
| Project Background, Page 1 | L5 | 5 | The Mayor and Council of the Town Verde voted unanimously at their August 23, 2005 meeting to support the Camp Verde Unified School District's acquisition of lands for a school site located in the southeastern portion of Camp Verde. |
| N/A | L6 | 6 | I am pleased to write a letter of support on behalf of the Camp Verde Unified School District's Education Land Grant Act application. |
| N/A | L7 | 7 | As owners of adjoining property of the proposed land to be acquisitioned by the Camp Verde Unified School District, we whole heartedly support the efforts to secure property for the future education opportunities for our students, but also serves the entire community by allowing use of all the facilities. |
| N/A | L8 | 8 | Please be advised the Governing Board of Camp Verde Unified School District at its meeting on September 13, 2005, authorized the District to submit a Capital Improvement Plan application to the Arizona State Facilities Board. The authorization by our Board at this time to proceed with the Capital Improvement Plan reinforces the District's need to secure suitable lands now through our ELGA application. |
| N/A | F1 | 9 | I favor the purchase. |
| Visual Resources, Page 15 | | 10 | Concern that field lights meet proper codes. |
| N/A | | 11 | Concern that people using recreational fields not trespass on neighboring property. |
| Public Access and Recreation, Page 23 | | 12 | Concerned about proper traffic planning. |

| Location in Document Where Concern is Addressed if within the Scope of this Document | Document Code | Comment # | Comment |
|--|---------------|-----------|---|
| Plans of Other Agencies, Page 5 | F2 | 13 | Concern about leaving open space. |
| Visual Resources, Page 15 | | 14 | Concern about lights. |
| N/A | F3 | 15 | We recommend that you implement the proposed action. |
| Public Access and Recreation, Page 23 | F4 | 16 | Concern about increased traffic. |
| Visual Resources, Page 15 | | 17 | Concern about obstructing views. |
| Noise, Page 17 | | 18 | Concern about increased noise. |
| N/A | F5 | 19 | We are approximately ½ mile southwest of the proposed 80 acre site and separated by the Verde River and are in full support of this exchange. |
| Socioeconomics, Page 25 | F6 | 20 | Concern about decreasing property values. |
| Noise, Page 17 | | 21 | Concern about increased noise. |
| Public Access and Recreation, Page 23; Plans of Other Agencies. Page 5 | | 22 | Concern about loss of recreational space. |
| N/A | F7 | 23 | This appears to be a reasonable progressive use for this parcel. |
| N/A | F8 | 24 | Congratulations on foresightedness. The property is currently being abused. |
| Soil and Water, Page 13 | F9 | 25 | Concerned about flooding. |
| Visual Resources, Page 15 | | 26 | Concerned about lighting and dark skies. |
| Heritage Resources, Page 14 | | 27 | Concerned about archaeology. |
| Visual Resources, Page 15 | F10 | 28 | Concerned about lighting. |
| Public Access and Recreation, Page 23 | | 29 | Concerned about increased traffic. |
| Noise, Page 17 | | 30 | Concerned about noise. |
| Public Access and Recreation, Page 23 | F11 | 31 | Concerned about traffic. |
| Plans of Other Agencies, Page 5 | | 32 | Concerned about a school and park together. |
| Socioeconomics, Page 25 | | 33 | Concerned about property values. |
| Plans of Other Agencies, Page 5 | | 34 | Supposed to be rural and retirement area. |
| N/A | | 35 | Concerned about increased drug use. |

| Location in Document Where Concern is Addressed if within the Scope of this Document | Document Code | Comment # | Comment |
|---|------------------|--------------|--|
| Socioeconomics, Page 25 | F12 | 36 | Concerned about increased taxes. |
| Plans of Other Agencies, Page 5; Background, Page 1 | | 37 | Concerned about utility infrastructure (sewer, gas, water). |
| Public Access and Recreation, Page 23 | | 38 | Concerned about traffic. |
| Public Access and Recreation, Page 23 | F13 | 39 | This area is abused by ATV traffic. Transformation to a school property may be beneficial. |
| N/A | | 40 | Area not very conducive to development due to topography. |
| N/A | | 41 | What is status of park? |
| Visual Resources, Page 15 | F14 | 42 | Just don't ruin our dark skies. |
| Public Access and Recreation, Page 23 | F15 | 43 | Our children used this area for motocross biking and, later, motorcycling. |
| Plans of Other Agencies, Page 5 | | 44 | We were hoping this area would be developed for recreation. |
| Project Background, Page 1; Alternatives Considered but not Analyzed, Page 7 | | 45 | Because of drainages, it would save money to build on the north end of the parcel, along SR260. |
| Public Access and Recreation, Page 23 | | 46 | Concern that the proposed area remain open for recreation. |

APPENDIX B

SUMMARY OF COMMENTS
ON THE
DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

**SUMMARY OF COMMENTS ON THE
DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT**

| Location in Document Where Concern is Addressed if within the Scope of this Document | Document Code | Comment # | Comment |
|--|------------------|--------------|---|
| N/A | L1 | 1 | I would like to state my opinion of the development of this area for parks and schools. I am in favor of this happening. |
| | | 2 | I know there have been issues concerning noise and maybe a few more lights but we already deal with traffic noise, and the dust and noise of the dirt bikes that go to this area all the time. Ball parks and play grounds would mean less dust and a more controlled area. |
| N/A | L2 | 1 | I whole heartedly support your position that Alternative B is the best alternative. |
| N/A | L3 | 1 | At this time the ADOT has no comments. |
| N/A | L4 | 1 | The District will certainly need another elementary school within two years and a new middle school shortly after that. |
| | | 2 | All of the District's schools are in the north side of town, yet all of the residential growth is in the south side of town. |
| | | 3 | The schools have all shown to be good neighbors. |
| | | 4 | I believe the development of school sites would be the highest and best use for said Forest Service property. |
| N/A | L5 | 1 | I fully support CVUSD's Educational Land Grant Act application and hope it will continue to move forward and be finalized in a timely manner. |