



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

Southwestern
Region



Environmental Assessment for the Verde Ranger Station Administrative Site Sale

Coconino National Forest

February 2006

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Chapter 1 – Purpose and Need

Document Structure

The Forest Service has prepared this Environmental Assessment in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and other relevant federal and state laws and regulations. This Environmental Assessment discloses the direct, indirect, and cumulative environmental impacts that would result from the proposed action and alternatives. The document is organized into four parts:

- **Introduction:** The section includes information on the history of the project proposal, the purpose of and need for the project, and the agency’s proposal for achieving that purpose and need. This section also details how the Forest Service informed the public of the proposal and how the public responded.
- **Comparison of Alternatives, including the Proposed Action:** This section provides a more detailed description of the agency’s proposed action as well as alternative methods for achieving the stated purpose. These alternatives were developed based on significant issues raised by the public and other agencies. This discussion also includes possible mitigation measures. Finally, this section provides a summary table of the environmental consequences associated with each alternative.
- **Environmental Consequences:** This section describes the environmental effects of implementing the proposed action and other alternatives. This analysis is organized by resource area and significant issues. Within each section, the affected environment is described first, followed by the effects of the No Action Alternative that provides a baseline for evaluation and comparison of the other alternatives that follow.
- **Agencies and Persons Consulted:** This section provides a list of preparers and agencies consulted during the development of the environmental assessment.
- **Appendices:** The appendices provide more detailed information to support the analyses presented in the environmental assessment.

Additional documentation, including more detailed analyses of project-area resources, may be found in the project planning record located at the Red Rock Ranger District Office in Sedona Arizona.

Background

This document discusses a proposal to sell approximately 213 acres of Coconino National Forest land where the current Verde Ranger Station offices of the Prescott National Forest are located. The proposal is a result of special legislation, the Arizona National Forest Improvement Act of 2000, P.L. 106-458 approved in November 2000, which allows the Forest Service to exchange or sell several sites in various locations in Arizona and use the proceeds of those sales to acquire, construct or improve administrative facilities. This legislation responded to a long standing issue of Verde Valley Forest Service offices being inadequate and high maintenance facilities that do not best serve National Forest or public purposes as well as limited funding for administrative site facilities construction. Proceeds from land sales in combination with Forest Service funding will be used to build new ranger station facilities in the Verde Valley starting in 2006. Two Verde Valley administrative sites were identified in the legislation. This proposal addresses a 213 acre parcel on State Route 260 in Camp Verde where the existing Verde Ranger District (Prescott National Forest) office is located.

Purpose and Need for Action

There is a need for the Forest Service to use the Arizona National Forest Improvement Act legislation to sell all or a portion of the Verde Ranger District Administrative Site to obtain funding to build administrative facilities that better serve the public and provide quality work environments for employees. This action is needed, because the existing ranger district facility at Camp Verde, as well as other Arizona administrative sites, are not able to provide quality public service or employee work conditions due to old and outdated facilities that are inadequate and are high maintenance or in locations that do not best serve the public. Congress passed this legislation in recognition of limited funding available to construct new facilities. This legislation allows for income derived from the sales of these properties to acquire, exchange or improve administrative facilities that better provide for public service and to improve employee working conditions.

This action responds to and implements the goals and objectives outlined in the Coconino and Prescott National Forest Land and Resource Management Plans (LMPs) that promote providing quality administrative facilities that serve the public and meet administrative service needs. The Coconino Forest Plan identified the area east of the Verde Ranger Station site as base for exchange indicating the area met one or more of the criteria under the Landownership Planning/Land Classification standards and guidelines (Coconino LMP, page 86) for possible conveyance to private ownership. The administrative site was not specifically identified as base for exchange but has similar characteristics to adjacent lands that were identified and meets the landownership adjustment guidelines in the Coconino National Forest Plan (Coconino LMP, page 86). This project also helps to implement the standard and guideline under General Administration that states “Maintain an aggressive and pro-active public affairs program, Forest-wide, to establish and maintain informed consent for resource management objectives.” The Prescott LMP Desired Future Conditions for facilities are to construct, maintain and regulate use of Forest Service facilities to protect natural resources, correct safety hazards, reduce disinvestments and support management activities and that all facilities provide visitor orientation, information and interpretation. The Prescott LMP also states in standards and guidelines that it will provide for establishing facilities necessary for the administration of National Forest lands and include construct/reconstruct FA&O facilities to support management and administration activities (Prescott LMP, page 50). Moving forward with proposed construction of new administrative facilities is also consistent with the Prescott National Forest Plan.

Proposed Action

The Forest Service proposes to sell approximately 175 acres of the 213-acre Verde Ranger District Administrative site and use the funds derived from these sales to build new administrative facilities on the existing site to meet the purpose and need. As a result of this sale, the 175-acre property would likely be developed in some form as private development as allowed by the Town of Camp Verde development process and community plan guidelines.

The new administrative facilities would be built where the existing administrative facilities are located and also extend to the east. Facilities would include approximately 12,000 square feet of office space and 16,000 square feet of warehouse/shop space. Improvements of infrastructure (such as water line extensions) and temporary office space would likely also be needed at the

existing site. The area along the Verde River, including the White Bridge recreation area would be retained in federal ownership.

This proposed action is different from the scoping letter sent in November 2003. The initial letter proposed sale of the entire 213 acre parcel with restrictions to protect the riparian and threatened and endangered species habitat along the Verde River. Since that time and considering public comment, the proposal is to sell approximately 175 acres (See Alternative D, Figure 3).

Decision Framework

The Coconino National Forest Supervisor is the deciding official for this project. Given the purpose and need, the deciding official reviews the proposed action and the other alternatives to make the following decisions:

- Should the whole 213-acre administrative site or only a portion of it be sold?
- Should any of the administrative site be sold?
- Should new facilities for the Verde Ranger District facility be built on this site or not?
- Should any of the site be sold with restrictions or limitations?

The deciding official may choose the No Action Alternative, the Proposed Action as stated above, or one of two other action alternatives in this project. The action alternatives include a variety of scenarios that sell portions of the 213 acre site or the entire site.

Public Involvement

The proposal to consider sale of the property has been listed in the Coconino National Forest Schedule of Proposed Actions since July 2003. Information on sale of the entire 213 acre parcel was provided to the public and other agencies for comment during scoping in November and December 2003. As part of the public involvement process, the agency sent letters to adjacent landowners and interested parties describing the possible sale of the 213-acre site as well as developed a news release asking for comment. The Forest Service also sponsored an open house in Camp Verde to allow for specific discussion on the sale of the Camp Verde site. The Forest Service has sent letters to approximately 600 people about a related project considering the dedication and construction of a new administrative site for the Verde Ranger District, with one alternative along Montezuma Castle Highway near Camp Verde High School and one in Cottonwood near Zalesky Road. The public meeting in Camp Verde included information on proposed new ranger station sites for the Verde Ranger District, as well as information on the proposed sale of the 213 acre existing administrative site.

Nine letters were received during the initial scoping period. These letters reflected concerns about the future location of the Verde Ranger Station, sewer and water resources related to future development, threatened and endangered species concerns, recreation access, and cultural resources.

Using the comments from the public, other agencies, including the Town of Camp Verde, and adjacent property owners and the Yavapai Apache Nation (see *Issues* section), the interdisciplinary team developed a list of issues to address.

A Summary of the Proposal to Sell the Verde Ranger Station Administrative Site and opportunity to comment on the proposal was announced through a legal notice in the Arizona Daily Sun on September 17, 2005 providing for the formal 30-day comment on the proposal. Thirty-three letters and copies of the Summary document were sent to those that had commented in November 2003, had attended the public meeting or otherwise indicated interest in this project. A news release was sent out to local Verde Valley media on September 19, 2005 announcing the 30-day comment period. Articles were printed in the Red Rock News and Cottonwood Journal. One comment letter was received during the 30-day comment period, and this letter was favorable to the proposal. Comments are in the project record for both the November 2003 and September 2005 comment periods.

Issues

The Forest Service separated the issues into two groups: significant and non-significant issues. Significant issues were defined as those directly or indirectly caused by implementing the proposed action. Non-significant issues were identified as those: 1) outside the scope of the proposed action; 2) already decided by law, regulation, Forest Plan, or other higher level decision; 3) irrelevant to the decision to be made; or 4) conjectural and not supported by scientific or factual evidence. The Council for Environmental Quality (CEQ) NEPA regulations require this delineation in Sec. 1501.7, "...identify and eliminate from detailed study the issues which are not significant or which have been covered by prior environmental review (Sec. 1506.3)..." A list of non-significant issues and reasons regarding their categorization as non-significant may be found in the project record.

As for significant issues, the Forest Service identified [4] topics raised during scoping. These issues include:

[Recreation Site Access - 1]: *Sale of the Camp Verde site may result in loss of public access to the river and existing public picnic area.* The ability of the public to access the site and Verde River would be compared in the analysis. The parcel contains one of the few public access points to the Verde River in Camp Verde and has been improved using public grant funds. The site contains picnic facilities and trail access to the river. Preservation of the public access at this site would be required since SLIF (State Lake Improvement fund) funding was used to build these facilities and the grant requires that these sites remain public for 25 years after the use of the grant. Grant funding under this authority was applied to the White Bridge recreation site in the last several years. Preserving wetlands and floodplain are required under Executive Order and this also will be evaluated under each alternative.

[Historical and Cultural Resources - 2]: *Sale of Verde Ranger Station site could result in loss or removal of cultural resources.* This issue would be analyzed with how well the alternatives address preservation of the cultural resources and meet the objectives of federal cultural resource laws. Cultural resource sites on the Camp Verde site are being mitigated in expectation of sale without restrictions, through appropriate consultation with the State Historic Preservation Office and Native American interests.

[Threatened and Endangered Species Habitat - 3]: *Sale of the Camp Verde site could result in loss of habitat and potential protection for species listed under the Endangered Species Act, including southwestern willow flycatcher, yellow-billed cuckoo, Mexican spotted owl, bald eagle, loach minnow, spikedace, Colorado pikeminnow and razorback sucker.* While there is a potential

for deed restrictions and existing floodplain development restrictions mitigating potential impacts to habitat along the Verde River, there is concern about the effectiveness of these restrictions and who and how to enforce them if the area along the river were no longer in federal ownership. There is concern that despite having restrictions or requirements in place, once the property is transferred out of federal ownership, the ability to administer the restrictions to ensure protection of habitat may be limited and result in impacts to these species. Alternatives were developed that exclude a portion of the Camp Verde site from the sale to mitigate these issues by retaining this habitat in federal ownership and management. The analysis will compare impacts to special status species and their habitat.

[Existing Land Use of the Verde Administrative Site - 4] *The existing Verde Ranger District administrative site is in the best location to provide service to the public and the sale of the entire site would eliminate the option of building facilities at this location.* A separate analysis was prepared that considered new site locations for the Verde Ranger District administrative office (Coconino and Prescott National Forest’s Administrative Site Selection Environmental Assessment). These sites were evaluated but did not include development of new facilities on a portion of the existing administrative site. The Proposed Action considers the sale of a portion of the site and development of new administrative facilities on this site. Other alternatives assume development of new ranger station facilities at a new site considered and evaluated in the previously mentioned EA.

Other Public Comments

Other comments were raised during initial public involvement on this project. These comments are not considered within the scope of this analysis. Comments considered outside the scope are things where other agencies have the jurisdiction to address. In addition, specific decisions related to the sale process are also discussed. The comments are summarized below.

Some comments indicated that the property should be split into several smaller properties for sale in order to obtain the best return to the government during the sale process. While the amount of return to the federal government in the sale of National Forest land is very important, this analysis is considering the sale of a larger parcel without a specific decision as to the process or method of the sale. The Forest Service will ultimately determine the method of sale including the number of parcels that would likely provide the best financial return. The type of sale, parcel size and number, as well as the type of sale process to be used, will be an administrative decision to be made after the decision on whether to sell the parcel or not. In addition, some comments indicated an interest in bidding on the property if smaller parcels were offered. Methods of sale have not yet been determined and may offer these opportunities if parties qualify under the selected method.

There were a few other comments related to possible future development at the property after a sale, including building heights, sewer disposal, water use and traffic patterns. The future development of the parcel being proposed for sale is limited by Town of Camp Verde plans, ordinances and public process. Current land use designations are generally considered in this analysis but not in detail since the future buyer(s) will determine the ultimate development in coordination with government processes and regulations. These processes will ultimately approve wastewater treatment, building development, parcel size, transportation needs and water adequacy.

Chapter 2 - Alternatives

This chapter describes and compares the alternatives considered for the Verde Ranger Station Administrative Site Sale project. It includes a description and map of each alternative considered. This section also presents the alternatives in comparative form, sharply defining the differences between each alternative and providing a clear basis for choice among options by the decision maker and the public. Some of the information used to compare the alternatives is based upon the design of the alternative (i.e., land use restrictions vs. exclusion of parcels) and some of the information is based upon the environmental, social and economic effects of implementing each alternative (i.e., effectiveness of restrictions for protection of habitat vs. maintaining federal ownership).

Alternatives

Alternatives A No Action

Under the No Action alternatives, current management plans would continue to guide management of the project areas. No sale of the current administrative site at Camp Verde would be implemented to accomplish project goals. The entire existing Ranger Station parcel would remain in federal ownership and management.

Alternative B

The Forest Service would sell the entire 213-acre Verde Ranger Station site in Camp Verde and use the proceeds to build new administrative facilities that better serve the public (Figure 1). This alternative includes mitigation measures that would protect and preserve threatened, endangered and sensitive species habitat along the Verde River as well as wetland and floodplain and the existing park site. Sale would include mitigation measures to preserve public access to the park site at White Bridge for a term required by the SLIF (State Lake Improvement Fund) grant. The parcel would likely be developed as approved through a Town of Camp Verde development process, and would likely include uses designated in the Camp Verde General Plan (primarily low density residential and commercial along the highway corridor). In March 2005, the voters and the Town of Camp Verde adopted a new General Plan under Arizona's Growing Smarter laws. Designated land uses on this parcel include open space along the river at White Bridge and the ADOT drainage easement, low density residential (1 unit per acre) north of the ADOT drainage easement and commercial along the SR260 highway corridor (retail/service uses). There is a small area of Rural Residential (1 unit per 2 acres). Much of this property was also identified as a growth area in the general plan and would fall under the goals and objectives stated for growth areas. Development on the parcel to be sold likely includes road and utility improvements as well as the land uses approved by the Town of Camp Verde. In addition, granting easements for Howard Road and a right of way near the Camp Verde Sanitary access road is part of this alternative (see mitigation measures section).

Alternative C

This alternative would convey the larger portion (approximately 189 acres) of the Verde Ranger Station site but retain a small, approximately 24-acre parcel on the west side of the parcel adjacent to the Verde River, west of McCracken/Quarterhorse Lane and south of the ADOT drainage easement (Figure 2). This 24-acre parcel would remain in federal ownership to protect threatened and endangered species habitat along the Verde River, would retain the park area in National Forest management and retain floodplain and wetland associated with the Verde River. The remaining portion, approximately 189 acres, of the site would be sold, leaving an isolated

inholding of federal land along the Verde River. The parcel remaining in federal ownership would maintain current management, including the day use recreation site at White Bridge and management of wetland/floodplain and threatened and endangered species habitat. This alternative eliminates the need for any restrictions on the sale parcel. Future uses of the sale parcel would be as described in Alternative B under the rules and regulations of the Town of Camp Verde.

Alternative D

This alternative would retain a larger portion of the property in federal ownership (approximately 45 acres) and would allow for the construction of a new administrative site on this property. The river frontage area would be retained as in Alternative C as well as the existing developed ranger station area south of the ADOT easement and an additional approximately 5 acres east of the existing site (See Figure 3). This alternative would construct a new ranger station facility at the existing site (east of McCracken Road) with parking areas, warehouse facilities, horse corrals, exterior storage areas, and new administrative offices for the Forest Service, (Verde and Red Rock Ranger Districts staff), as well as temporary offices during construction. Preliminary conceptual drawings of potential site development are shown in Figure 4. The facilities to be constructed at a minimum would include the administrative site for the Verde Ranger District and shared warehouse space for the Verde and Red Rock Districts. This includes approximately 12,000 square feet of office space and 16,000 square feet of warehouse/shop space. Improvements of infrastructure would likely also be needed at the existing site. The developed site (including the White Bridge Park area) would remain withdrawn from mineral entry and other natural resource management activities as an administrative site. Old administrative facilities would be demolished. Utility construction/improvements, including a water line crossing State Route 260, would occur with new facilities. The remainder of the property (approximately 175 acres) would be sold and the proceeds used administrative facilities per the Arizona National Forest Improvement Act of 2000 legislation. Areas to be sold under this alternative includes approximately 5 acres north of the ADOT drainage area/existing ranger station office and south of existing private property; approximately 15 acres east of Quarterhorse Lane and south of SR260 and the larger 155 acre parcel on both sides of SR 260 including north of Howard Road and north of SR260. Uses and development of the sale parcel would be as described in Alternative B. In addition, for construction of the ranger station facilities as well as for other private development, road access and utility improvements would likely occur on both the sale property and the ranger station area. See also mitigation measure section.

Mitigation Measures Common to All Alternatives

In response to public comments on the proposal, mitigation measures were developed to ease some of the potential impacts the various alternatives may cause. The mitigation measures may be applied to any of the action alternatives.

- The actual sale process will not be determined in this decision. The sale process will be tailored to obtain the best value and return to the government. Options for the sale process would likely include a competitive bidding process, negotiated sale, sale of only a portion of the properties, property sold in different parcels or a whole piece, sales at different timeframes or a possibility of multiple methods of sale.

- Existing permitted uses other than grazing activities will be protected during the sale process. This would include utility and road corridors that have existing permits or easements authorizing the use of the federal lands.
- Existing land ordinances and regulations would be applied by the local government jurisdictions after sale of the properties. Future uses and development will be managed under those regulations and ordinances, including floodplain ordinances that protect 100 year floodplain.
- Issuance of an easement to the Town of Camp Verde for Howard Road along the private property.
- Right of way access will be designated on remaining National Forest land just east of the sale property in the vicinity of the Camp Verde Sanitary District road. An easement will be provided by the Forest Service for public access from State Route 260 in coordination with ADOT and provide access to the sale parcel north of the ADOT drainage easement and east of McCracken Road.

Mitigation Measures Specific to Alternative B

- A restriction that would protect the habitat of threatened and endangered species and the wetlands along the Verde River portion of the Verde Ranger Station site would be placed on the affected property areas.
- A restriction that would preserve the recreation facility at White Bridge for a required timeframe associated with the SLIF grant would be placed on the property.

Mitigation Measures Specific to Alternative D

- Development and activities associated with the new administrative facilities will be located entirely east of McCracken Lane.
- The parcels of land (lots 10 and 12 – see Figure 5) retained between the riparian area and the two paved roads (McCracken and Quarterhorse) will be retained in federal ownership and in an undisturbed state in order to serve as buffers between the riparian zone and future development in the uplands on the east sides of McCracken and Quarterhorse.
- Excessively loud construction activities associated with the demolition of the old administrative facilities and construction of the new facilities will not occur during the breeding season for species that are known to nest in the area (bald eagle/December 1-June30, common black hawk/April 1-June 30, and yellow-billed cuckoo/June 1-August 31). If surveys determine that nesting birds are not present, construction that results in excessively loud noises may recommence.

Comparison of Alternatives

This section provides a summary of the effects of implementing each alternative. Information in the table is focused on activities and effects where different levels of effects or outputs can be distinguished quantitatively or qualitatively among alternatives.

Table 1. Comparison of effects of alternatives

	Altern. A	Altern. B	Altern. C	Altern. D
Public access to recreation site/river	Retains the entire parcel in public ownership so access opportunities do not change	Preserves access through restriction for the required term and then subject to successful buyer	Preserves public ownership of the area and therefore access will not change however area nearby would likely change	Preserves public ownership of the area and includes the administrative presence of the ranger station nearby.
Cultural and historical preservation	Cultural resources remain under current management.	Cultural resource would be mitigated and any values would be collected and documented per regulations and consultation process.	Same as Alternative B.	Same as Alternative B.
Impacts to threatened/endangered species	Species would be managed under current management.	Species would be protected by restrictions tied to the property and administered by another party or the Forest Service to ensure protection of aquatic and riparian resources.	Habitat for special status fish and wildlife species would be retained in federal ownership using McCracken Road as the boundary. Administrative presence of the Forest Service Verde District office would no longer be at this site.	Habitat for special status fish and wildlife species would be retained in federal ownership and not developed. The Verde Administrative site and Forest Service presence would remain at this site.
Preservation of wetland	Wetlands would be retained in public ownership.	Wetlands would be conveyed out of federal ownership but restrictions would be in place to protect wetland resource.	Wetlands would be retained in public ownership.	Same as Alternative C.
Ability to provide public service at the existing site.	Public service would remain as currently provided at existing site or at an alternative new location.	Public service would occur at an alternative location and not at this site.	Same as Alternative B.	Public service would be provided at this site at an upgraded facility.

Chapter 3 - Environmental Consequences

This section summarizes the physical, biological, social and economic environments of the affected project area and the potential changes to those environments due to implementation of the alternatives. It also presents the scientific and analytical basis for the comparison of alternatives presented in the chart above.

Vegetation

The predominate native vegetation at the Verde site is Sonoran desertscrub, comprised mainly of creosote (*Larrea tridentata*), mesquite (*Prosopis velutina*), soaptree yucca (*Yucca elata*), loco weed (*Astragalus* sp.), blue grama (*Bouteloua gracilis*), tobosa (*Pleuraphis mutica*), three awn (*Aristida* sp.), black grama (*Bouteloua eriopoda*), four-wing saltbush (*Atriplex canescens*), silver-leaf night shade (*Solanum elaeagnifolium*), and snakeweed (*Gutierrezia sarothrae*). Around the buildings, there is Arizona cypress (*Cupressus arizonica*), wolf berry (*Lycium* sp.), and Bermunda grass (*Cynodon dactylon*).

A portion of the Verde site is deciduous riparian woodland, where cottonwood (*Populus fremontii*), ash (*Fraxinus velutina*), alder (*Alnus oblongifolia*), red willow (*Salix laevigata*), tamarisk (*Tamarix chinensis**), floating water primrose (*Ludwigia peploides**), cattails (*Typha latifolia*), monkey flower (*Mimulus guttatus*), watercress (*Rorippa nasturtium-aquaticum*), Bermuda grass (*Cynodon dactylon*), wild oats (*Avena fatua**), Russian Olive (*Elaeagnus angustifolia**), giant reed (*Arundo donax**) and deer grass (*Muhlenbergia rigens*).

The consequences of selling the Verde administrative site will be the loss of some native vegetation as these sites are subsequently developed. Alternative B would result in the loss of slightly more acreage lost than Alternative C and D. Alternative C may result in loss of native vegetation slightly more than D but likely less than B where the entire parcel is conveyed out of federal ownership. The no action alternative and alternative C and D would allow for retention of riparian, whereas alternative B would not. Riparian areas are very rare in the arid southwest. Despite its importance, riparian areas have historically experienced the most degradation. Only one to four percent of the west's native riparian woodlands remain intact after years of poor watershed and riparian area condition and the resulting change in basic hydrologic function. Currently, riparian woodlands comprise less than one percent of the Coconino National Forest. Cumulatively, Alternative B could add to potential loss of riparian woodland when added to other private land development along the Verde River riparian.

Invasive Species

Invasive plant species are indicated in the above vegetation section with an asterisk after the scientific name. Invasive species at the Verde administrative site include Russian olive, tamarisk, floating water primrose, giant reed, and wild oats.

As the site is sold and subsequently developed, invasive weed species may spread further. Invasive weed species that are on the Coconino National Forest Invasive Plant Species List will be eradicated, contained, or controlled prior to conveyance of the administrative site. Invasive weed species that occur on the land to be retained will be managed to reduce the risk

of spread. Cumulatively, invasive weed species may continue to spread as a result of development and construction in adjacent private areas where mitigation is not required.

Special Status Species (Issue 3)

Special status species consist of species listed as threatened, endangered, proposed, or candidate under the Endangered Species Act, Forest Service sensitive, and Forest Service management indicator species (MIS) as identified in the Coconino National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan.

Due the presence of the Verde River and its associated riparian woodlands, species diversity for the Verde administrative site is high. Of the 49 TES species on the Red Rock Ranger District list, 23 species (1 mammal, 7 birds, 5 fish, 4 invertebrates, 2 reptiles, 2 amphibians, and 2 plants) may potentially occur on the Verde Administrative site (refer to Table 2). Management indicator species include pronghorn antelope (Verde Valley MA) and Lucy’s warbler, yellow-breasted chat, and macro-invertebrates (Riparian and Open Water MA).

Table 2: Special Status Species/Habitat at the Verde Administration Site.

Common Name	Scientific Name	Status
Mammals		
Southwestern River Otter	<i>Lutra canadensis sonora</i>	SC, WC, Sen
Birds		
American Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus anatum</i>	WC, Sen
Common Black Hawk	<i>Buteogallus anthracinus</i>	WC, Sen, MIS
Western Yellow-billed Cuckoo	<i>Coccyzus americanus occidentalis</i>	C, WC, Sen
Bell’s Vireo	<i>Vireo bellii</i>	Sen, MIS
Bald Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus leucocephalus</i>	T, WC, Sen
Mexican Spotted Owl	<i>Strix occidentalis lucida</i>	T, WC, Sen
Southwestern Willow Flycatcher	<i>Empidonax traillii extimus</i>	E, WC, Sen
Amphibians		
Lowland Leopard Frog	<i>Rana yavapaiensis</i>	SC, WC, Sen
Arizona Toad	<i>Bufo microscaphus microscaphus</i>	SC, Sen
Reptiles		
Narrow-headed Garter Snake	<i>Thamnophis rufipunctatus</i>	SC, WC, Sen
Mexican Garter Snake	<i>Thamnophis eques megalops</i>	SC, WC, Sen
Invertebrates		
Maricopa Tiger Beetle	<i>Cicindela oregona maricopa</i>	SC, Sen
Tiger Beetle	<i>Cicindela hirticollis corpuscular</i>	Sen
Obsolete Viceroy Butterfly	<i>Limenitis archippus obsolete</i>	Sen
Comstock’s Hairstreak	<i>Callophrys comstocki</i>	Sen
Fish		
Roundtail Chub	<i>Gila robusta</i>	WC, Sen
Colorado Pikeminnow	<i>Ptychocheilus lucius</i>	E, WC, Sen
Razorback Sucker	<i>Xyrauchen texanus</i>	E, WC, Sen
Loach Minnow	<i>Tiaroga cobitis</i>	T, WC, Sen
Spikedace	<i>Meda fulgida</i>	T, WC, Sen
Plants		
Hualapai Milkwort	<i>Polygala rusbyi</i>	Sen
Verde Valley Sage	<i>Salvia dorrii mearnsii</i>	Sen

Common Name	Scientific Name	Status
Other Management Indicator Species		
Yellow-breasted Chat	<i>Icteria virens</i>	MIS
Lucy's Warbler	<i>Vermivora luciae</i>	MIS
Macro-invertebrates		MIS
Pronghorn	<i>Anitiocarpa americana</i>	MIS

Special Status Mammals

Suitable habitat for the southwestern river otter occurs along the Verde River. The Southwestern river otter occurs along rivers where they hunt, travel, take refuge, and frolic. Otters feed on fish, amphibians, turtles, crayfish, and other aquatic animals. The Southwestern river otter is historic to the Verde River, Wet Beaver Creek, Oak Creek, and other major tributaries in the Verde Valley. In 1981 and 1982, Arizona Game and Fish Department introduced a non-native otter into the Verde River. This introduced species is successfully reproducing and is most likely the only species that remains in the Verde Valley today.

All alternatives provide for similar levels of otter habitat protection although the method by which protection is achieved differs. Under alternatives A, C, and D, all otter habitat would remain under the jurisdiction of the Forest Service. Alternatives A and D would allow for an onsite Forest Service presence which may allow for greater control of public access and recreation. Alternative C would retain an in-holding of federal land that includes the habitat but there would be no onsite presence to assist in enforcing habitat protection. Alternative B would sell all acreage, but restrictions to protect special status species would be a requirement of the sale and enforcement of those restrictions would be up to the new land owner or another designated party. The construction of the new administrative facilities, as called for in Alternative D, will not impact southwestern river otter habitat, since the new administrative site will be constructed out of the riparian zone. Additional protection to otter habitat is provided by lots 10 and 12 (See Figure 5) which are to be retained in an unaltered state to function as buffer areas between the riparian and the upland areas where future development will occur.

Special Status Birds

Peregrine falcons prey mainly on birds found in wetlands, riparian areas, meadows, parklands, croplands, mountain valleys, and lakes within a 10 to 20 mile radius from the nest site. Prey items include bats, mammals, and birds. Although no peregrine falcon nesting habitat occurs in the vicinity of the Verde administrative site, peregrine falcons have a large foraging radius and potential occurs for peregrine falcons to forage along the riparian corridor associated with Verde administrative site.

The common black hawk is a riparian obligate. Black hawks nest in tall trees adjacent to the stream course and forage on crayfish, amphibians, reptiles and fish. Common black hawks have been observed nesting along the Verde River downstream from the Verde administrative site (Sillas, pers. comm., Agyagos, pers.obs., and Narayana, pers. comm.)

Western yellow-billed cuckoos have been detected during surveys in 1998, 1999, 2002, 2003, and 2005. Cuckoos were detected in the riparian portion of the Verde administrative site and in the larger mesquites located on the terraces that lead from the riparian up to the upland terrace, but not in the upland terraces (Johnson, pers. comm. and Narayana, pers. comm.). The upland habitat in the buffer areas (Lot 10 and 12, see Figure 5) is comprised of mesquite and acacia that is very marginal for cuckoo foraging due to the shrubs being so small and sparse (Johnson, pers. comm.). None of the surveys had any detections of cuckoos in this upland habitat (Narayana, pers. comm.). Historically, cuckoos may have moved through the buffer areas to get to more suitable foraging habitat east of Quarterhorse (Johnson, pers. comm.). Matt Johnson (pers. comm) thought it unlikely that cuckoos currently forage in the mesquites east of Quarterhorse since this habitat has been reduced in size by development of private land and fragmented from the riparian area by Quarterhorse road. Although a portion of the administrative site to be sold has some marginal foraging habitat, it is historical habitat and the sale will not result in the loss of foraging habitat that is currently used by cuckoos.

Although no restricted or protected habitat (mixed conifer, ponderosa pine/Gambel oak) occurs at the Verde administrative site, the Recovery Plan for the Mexican spotted owl lists riparian as restricted habitat due to the potential for riparian areas to be used by the spotted owl as corridors for dispersal from one mountain range to another. The Verde River likely historically served as a dispersal corridor and may still.

Potential habitat for the southwestern willow flycatcher occurs along the Verde River. Despite numerous surveys (1994 through 2001) for southwestern willow flycatchers along the Verde River on the Verde administrative site, none were detected. Biologists surveying for cuckoos at the White Bridge site in 1998, 1999, 2002, 2003, and 2005, did not report hearing willow flycatchers even though surveyors detected willow flycatchers while surveying for cuckoos in other areas of the Verde Valley. The quality of the flycatcher habitat has declined since 1994 due to spread of invasive plants such as tamarisk, Russian olive, and giant reed, continued recreation at the White Bridge day use site, and loss of habitat with the construction of the new Highway 260 bridge. Since southwestern willow flycatchers have not been detected over numerous years of surveys and habitat suitability along the Verde in the planning area has been reduced to marginal at best, post-sale activities and the development of the new administrative facility will not affect the species.

All alternatives provide for similar levels of habitat protection for peregrine falcon, yellow-billed cuckoo, common black hawk, Mexican spotted owl, and southwestern willow flycatcher although the method by which protection is achieved differs. Under alternatives A, C, and D, riparian habitat on the Verde administrative site would remain under the jurisdiction of the Forest Service. Alternatives A and D would allow for an onsite presence which may allow for greater control of public access and recreation. Alternative C would retain an in-holding of federal land that includes the riparian habitat but there would be no onsite presence to assist in enforcing habitat protection. Alternative B would sell all acreage, but restrictions to protect special status species habitat would be a requirement of the sale and enforcement of those restrictions would be up to the new land owner or another designated party. The construction of the new administrative site, as called for in Alternative D, will not modify or destroy habitat for the peregrine falcon, yellow-billed cuckoo, common black hawk, Mexican spotted owl, or southwestern willow flycatcher. The use of the new administrative site and construction activities on the administrative site that are not louder than the noise associated with the day to day use of the admin site and vehicles traveling along Highway 260, will not disturb the species that are known to nest or have potential

to nest (cuckoo and black hawk) due to the distance from where the administrative facilities will occur east of McCracken and the riparian area along the Verde. Excessively loud noises during construction activities, such as that associated with earth moving equipment, jack hammers, and dump trucks, could cause aural disturbance to cuckoos and black hawks that are nesting within the vicinity of the White Bridge area. Excessively loud noise that could disturb nesting birds is identified as that which is louder (when measured from the riparian area) than the noise associated with day to day use of the administrative site and the noise associated with vehicles on Highway 260 at the White Bridge crossing. Excessively loud noises during construction could disrupt courtship and nest building, cause flushing from the nest which threatens egg viability, premature fledging of young, or complete abandonment of the site. The buffer areas located in-between the riparian and the portion of the administrative site where construction will occur will minimize the possibility for disturbance to nesting birds. To ensure total protection, however, no construction activities that result in excessively loud noises will occur during the cuckoo and black hawk breeding seasons. Surveys for nesting cuckoos and black hawks will be conducted on National Forest lands along the riparian portion of the Verde administrative site. If no cuckoos or black hawks are found nesting there, construction activities that result in excessively loud noises may recommence.

Suitable bald eagle nesting and foraging habitat occurs along the Verde River at the Verde site. Nesting habitat along this portion of the Verde River is limited to riparian trees as cliffs are not a part of the topographic feature in this broad-valley floodplain. The nearest occupied nesting area currently occurs 1.5 miles upstream of the White Bridge. A historical nesting area occurs 2 miles downstream of White Bridge. Wintering bald eagles may occur along the Verde River from late October through mid-April, where they mainly forage on fish and waterfowl, carrion, and occasionally terrestrial mammals in the uplands. The Verde River is particularly important to bald eagles for nesting and foraging and it is during their breeding season (December 1 through fledging in June) that eagles are more vulnerable to disturbance.

All alternatives provide for similar levels of habitat protection for bald eagle although the method by which protection is achieved differs. Under alternatives A, C, and D, riparian habitat would remain under the jurisdiction of the Forest Service. Alternatives A and D would allow for an onsite presence which may allow for greater control of public access and recreation. Alternative C would retain an in-holding of federal land that includes the riparian habitat but there would be no onsite presence to assist in enforcing habitat protection. Alternative B would sell all acreage, but restrictions to protect special status species habitat would be a requirement of the sale and enforcement of those restrictions would be up to the new land owner or another designated party. The construction of the new admin site, as called for in Alternative D, will not modify or destroy bald eagle habitat. The use of the new administrative site will not disturb nesting or foraging bald eagles due to the distance from where the administrative facilities will occur east of McCracken and the riparian area along the Verde. Administrative site construction that is not louder than the noise associated with the day to day use of the admin site and vehicles traveling along Highway 260, will not disturb bald eagles along the Verde River due to the distance from where the administrative facilities will occur east of McCracken and the riparian area along the Verde. Excessively loud noises during construction activities, such as that associated with earth moving equipment, jack hammers, and dump trucks, could cause aural disturbance to nesting eagles that are foraging within the vicinity of the White Bridge area. Excessively loud noise that could disturb bald eagles is identified as that which is louder (when measured in the riparian area) than the noise associated with day to day use of the admin site and the noise associated with vehicles on Highway 260 at the White Bridge crossing. Excessively loud noises during construction could

cause foraging eagles to temporarily abandon the White Bridge area. The disruption of foraging along a linear foraging area could ultimately compromise successful reproduction. The buffer areas located in between the riparian and the portion of the administrative site where construction will occur will minimize the possibility for disturbance to nesting eagles that are foraging within the area. To ensure total protection, however, no construction activities that result in excessively loud noise will occur during the eagle breeding season. Surveys for nesting eagles will be conducted. If no eagles are found nesting within foraging distance of the White Bridge area, construction activities may recommence.

The Bell's vireo nests in dense stands of mesquites, usually adjacent to riparian areas. Although mesquites occur in the uplands adjacent to the Verde River, they are sparse, small in size, and are unsuitable for Bell's vireo nesting. Suitable nesting habitat for Bell's vireo does exist on the slope between the riparian and the upland terraces. All alternatives retain habitat suitable for nesting by Bell's vireo. While B, C and D retain the same in the amount of habitat, alternative D will allow for an onsite presence which may result in more management of the riparian area and less impact to Bell's vireo habitat. The construction of the new admin site, as called for in Alternative D, will not impact Bell's vireo habitat. Noise from construction activities, if they occur during the breeding season, may cause aural disturbance, however, the buffer areas located between the nesting habitat and the portion of the administrative site where construction is to occur, should minimize the potential for disturbance. Should Bell's vireos nest within ¼ mile of the construction site, excessively loud noise may impact Bell's vireos.

Special Status Reptiles and Amphibians

The following aquatic reptiles and amphibians; narrow-headed and Mexican garter snakes, lowland leopard frog, and Arizona toad potentially occur at the Verde Administrative site.

The lowland leopard frog prefers permanent stream pools, springs, stock tanks, and side channels of major rivers within desert-scrub, grassland and oak and pine/oak woodland habitats. Lowland leopard frogs occurred historically in the Verde River. Introduction of nonnative fish, non-native bullfrogs and non-native crayfish have contributed to decreasing frog populations.

The Arizona Southwestern toad occurs in rocky streams, canyons, and floodplains with usually dense riparian vegetation. They breed in gently flowing waters generally with well-developed riparian vegetation. This toad feeds on insects and snails. Generally, they occupy habitat similar to that of leopard frogs.

The narrow-headed garter snake is the most aquatic of the garter snakes, seldom found far from quiet, rocky pools. Food items include fish, frogs, tadpoles, and salamanders.

The Mexican garter snake is usually found in or near streams, ponds, and cienegas in the highland canyons with pine/oak or pinyon/juniper woodland, but may follow streams into lower desert grasslands.

The Mexican garter snake's diet consists of leopard frogs, toads, tadpoles, and various native fishes. Lizards and small rodents are taken, especially by large adults, during occasional terrestrial forays. The Mexican garter snake is known to be associated with leopard frogs, which are a major prey species.

Post-sale activities can result in: loss of soil-stabilizing ground cover; soil compaction; decreased amount of grasses, forbs, shrubs, and recruitment trees; decreased infiltration of water during rain events; increase rates of run off; increased sedimentation into streams; increase of contaminants into streams; decreased water quality, and exacerbated flooding; all of which may reduce habitat suitability for both garter snakes, the lowland leopard frog, the Arizona southwestern toad, and their prey.

All alternatives provide for similar levels of lowland leopard frog, Arizona southwestern toad, Mexican and narrow-headed garter snake habitat protection although the method by which protection is achieved differs. Under alternatives A, C, and D, frog, toad and garter snake habitat would remain under the jurisdiction of the Forest Service. Alternatives A and D would allow for an onsite presence which may allow for greater control of public access and recreation. Alternative C would retain an in-holding of federal land that includes the habitat but there would be no onsite presence to assist in enforcing habitat protection. Alternative B would sell all acreage, but restrictions to protect special status species habitat would be a requirement of the sale and enforcement of those restrictions would be up to the new land owner or another designated party. The construction of the new admin site, as called for in Alternative D, will not impact lowland leopard frog, Arizona southwestern toad, Mexican and narrow-headed garter snake habitat, since the new administrative site will be constructed well out of the riparian zone and the buffer area located in between the administrative facilities and the riparian will be left undisturbed.

Special Status Invertebrates

Suitable host plants for two butterflies (obsolete viceroy and Comstock's hairstreak) occur at the Verde administrative site indicating the potential for these species to occur as well. The host plant for the obsolete viceroy is cottonwood and willow trees which are present along the riparian area associated with the Verde River. Comstock's hairstreak favors dry, rocky areas of foothills and canyons of the Upper Sonoran plateaus and their larvae feed on buckwheat (*Eriogonum* sp.) and possibly sulphur flower (*Eriogonum bell*). Post-sale activities may result in ground-altering activities, which may preclude the future existence of these butterflies' host plants thereby minimizing or eliminating the potential for these butterflies to occur in the future. In addition to the butterflies, sandy substrate adjacent to the Verde River at the Verde administrative site provides suitable habitat for two species of tiger beetles. Post-sale activities can collapse the burrows in which these beetles hide thereby reducing the suitability of the area for these species.

Comstock's hair streak use upland habitat. The no action alternative retains the most amount of upland habitat. Alternative D retains slightly more acreage of upland habitat than C and will result in an onsite presence that may ensure added habitat protection. Alternative B retains the least amount of upland habitat. The construction of the new admin site, as called for in Alternative D, will result in the loss of some host plants for the skipperling and hairstreak.

Invertebrate species that have habitat in the riparian zone include the obsolete viceroy butterfly and the two tiger beetles. All alternatives provide for similar levels of riparian habitat protection although the method by which protection is achieved differs. Under alternatives A, C, and D, all of the riparian habitat would remain under the jurisdiction of the Forest Service. Alternatives A and D would allow for an onsite Forest Service presence which may allow for greater control of public access and recreation. Alternative C would retain an in-holding of federal land that

includes the habitat but there would be no onsite presence to assist in enforcing habitat protection. Alternative B would sell all acreage, but restrictions to protect special status species would be a requirement of the sale and enforcement of those restrictions would be up to the new land owner or another designated party. The construction of the new admin site, as called for in Alternative D, will not impact obsolete viceroy butterfly and tiger beetle habitat, since the new administrative site will be constructed out of the riparian zone and a buffer area located in between the riparian and the administrative facilities will be left undisturbed.

Special Status Fish

The Verde administrative site has habitat for special status fish species. The Colorado pikeminnow, razorback sucker, loach minnow and spinedace historically occurred in the Verde River. Currently only the razorback sucker and Colorado pikeminnow may occur near the administrative site as individuals of these two species have been reintroduced into the Verde. The round tail chub currently exists in the Verde River.

Post-sale activities can result in: loss of soil-stabilizing ground cover; soil compaction; decreased amount of grasses, forbs, shrubs, and recruitment trees; decreased infiltration of water during rain events; increase rates of run off; increased sedimentation into streams; increase of contaminants into streams; decreased water quality, and exacerbated flooding; all of which may reduce habitat suitability for native fish, their prey, and macroinvertebrates.

All alternatives provide for similar levels of riparian habitat protection although the method by which protection is achieved differs. Under alternatives A, C, and D, all of the riparian habitat would remain under the jurisdiction of the Forest Service. Alternatives A and D would allow for an onsite Forest Service presence which may allow for greater control of public access and recreation. Alternative C would retain an in-holding of federal land that includes the habitat but there would be no onsite presence to assist in enforcing habitat protection. Alternative B would sell all acreage, but restrictions to protect special status species would be a requirement of the sale and enforcement of those restrictions would be up to the new land owner or another designated party. The construction of the new admin site, as called for in Alternative D, will not impact fish, their habitat or macroinvertebrates, since the new administrative site will be constructed well out of the riparian zone and the buffer area located in between the riparian and the admin facilities will be left undisturbed.

Special Status Plants

Two sensitive plants may potentially occur on the Verde administrative site, Verde Valley sage and Hualapai milkwort. Limestone-dependent plant species occur nearby but not within the boundaries of the Verde Administrative site. Since these two species are more widespread in their distribution, there is potential for them to occur at the administrative site. However, plant surveys of the Verde administrative site did not reveal the presence of any sensitive plant species. Therefore, none of the alternatives will result in the sale of occupied habitat. Likewise the construction of a new administrative facility as called for under alternative D will not impact these two plant species.

Other Special Status Species - Management Indicator Species

Pronghorn antelope no longer occur in the Camp Verde area due to habitat fragmentation and loss of grasslands due to juniper, mesquite, and acacia encroachment. Therefore none of the alternatives will affect the trend of this species on the Coconino National Forest.

Riparian MIS species that may occur at the Camp Verde Site include Lucy's warbler, yellow-breasted chat, and macro-invertebrates (discussed under fish). Lucy's warbler and yellow-breasted chat are both riparian nesters. All alternatives provide for similar levels of warbler, chat, and macro-invertebrate habitat protection although the method by which protection is achieved differs. Under alternatives A, C, and D, riparian habitat would remain under the jurisdiction of the Forest Service. Alternatives A and D would allow for an onsite presence which may allow for greater control of public access and recreation. Alternative C would retain an in-holding of federal land that includes the riparian habitat but there would be no onsite presence to assist in enforcing habitat protection. Alternative B would sell all acreage, but restrictions to protect special status species habitat would be a requirement of the sale and enforcement of those restrictions would be up to the new land owner or another designated party. The construction of the new administrative facility, as called for in alternative D, may cause aural disturbance should these species nest along the riparian portion of the Verde administrative site. Should the presence of black hawks, cuckoos, or bald eagles be found during required surveys to be nesting within ¼ mile of the construction area, mitigation required for these species will secondarily provide protection for nesting MIS birds as well. Overall, post-sale activities will not change the forest-wide trend for these MIS species.

General Wildlife

Mammals

Game species at the Verde administrative site include elk, mule deer, mountain lion, bobcat, gray fox, coyote, javelina, cottontail and jackrabbits, squirrels, and raccoons. Although elk are primarily found in mixed conifer, ponderosa pine, and pinyon-juniper woodlands, a resident population occurs in the Camp Verde area and those elk frequent the Verde River for water. Raccoons occur primarily within riparian and other vegetative zones within close proximity to riparian areas.

Non-game mammal species include chipmunks, mice, rats, woodrats, skunks, ring-tailed cats, and numerous species of bats. Spotted and striped skunks occur primarily within riparian and other vegetative zones within close proximity to riparian areas. Rock squirrel, cliff chipmunk, western harvest mouse, and brush mouse are other small mammals that likely occur at both sites.

Approximately 10 species of bats may occur at the Camp Verde administrative site (Table 3). Potential roosts occur in natural structures such as underneath loose bark on snags, in tree and snag cavities, in tree canopies, and under rock, and in man-made structures such as buildings, and bridges. All of the bat species occurring or potentially occurring in the area are insectivorous. Water sources such as the Verde River at the Verde site are important for bat foraging due to the abundance of insects found flying above the water.

Table 3: Potential Bat Species and their Habitat Requirements*.

Common Name	Scientific Name	Roost Requirements					Habitat						
		S	R	C	T	F	MC	PP	PJ	C	DS	G	R
Yuma Myotis	<i>Myotis yumanensis</i>	X	X	X				X	X		X	X	X
Cave Myotis	<i>Myotis velifer</i>	X		X							X		
Long-eared Myotis	<i>Myotis evotis</i>	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X			
Southwestern Myotis	<i>Myotis auricolus</i>				X			X	X	X	X		
Fringed Myotis	<i>Myotis thysanodes</i>	X		X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	
Long legged Myotis	<i>Myotis volans</i>	X	X	X				X	X		X		
Pallid Bat	<i>Antrozous pallidus</i>	X	X					X	X				
Red bat	<i>Lasiurus borealis</i>					X							X
Hoary Bat	<i>Lasiurus cinereus</i>					X	X	X	X				
Allen's big-eared bat	<i>Idionycteris phyllotis</i>		X	X	X		X	X	X				X

Legend for Table 3

S = Structures such as buildings, barns, bridges
R = Cracks and crevices in cliffs, and under rocks
C = Caves, cliff dwellings, mines, tunnels
T = Hollow trees, snags, underneath loose tree bark
F = Among foliage of trees and leafy shrubs
MC = Mixed Conifer
PP = Ponderosa Pine
PJ = Pinyon Juniper
C = Chaparral
DS = Desert Scrub
G = Grassland
R = Riparian

* Table information obtained from AGFD Heritage Data Management System; Tuttle and Taylor, 1994; Hoffmeister, 1986; Morrell et al, 1999; Chung-MacCoubrey, 1995; and AGFD, 1992.

Birds

Due to the presence of riparian vegetation along the Verde River, there are many species of birds that occur at the Camp Verde site. The majority of these birds are passerines but other groups of birds include waterfowl, wading birds, fowl-like birds, raptors, and various non-passerine birds such as kingfishers, doves, hummingbirds, and woodpeckers. Refer to Table 4 for selected bird species that have been detected at the Verde administrative site.

Many of the birds found at the Verde administrative sites are neotropical migrants (Table 4) and spend only a portion of each year (spring and summer) in this area. These birds travel each year from their wintering grounds in Mexico, Central and South America, and the Caribbean to North America to breed during the spring and summer months. Precipitous declines in neotropical migratory bird populations have occurred over the last twenty years and are caused mainly by habitat loss and modification in the wintering grounds, breeding grounds, and along migrational

routes. Due to the abundance of quality riparian habitat at the Verde administrative site, neotropical migrants not only use the area for nesting but also as a corridor for migration.

Table 4: Selected Resident and Neotropical Migratory Birds Occurring at the Verde Administration Site.

Species	Neotropical Migrant
Great blue heron	N
Gambel's quail	N
Red-tailed hawk	N
Turkey vulture	Y
Cooper's hawk	Y
American goldfinch	Y
Belted Kingfisher	N
Gila woodpecker	N
Ladder-backed woodpecker	N
Northern flicker	N
Ash-throated flycatcher	Y
Phainopepla	Y
Bewick's wren	N
Black-chinned hummingbird	Y
Broad-tailed hummingbird	Y
Common Raven	N
Bell's vireo	Y
Yellow warbler	Y
Common Yellowthroat	Y
Solitary vireo	Y
Black-throated sparrow	Y
Song sparrow	Y
House finch	N
Bridled titmouse	N
Brown-headed cowbird	N
Northern Mockingbird	N
Mourning dove	N
Northern cardinal	N
Scrub jay	N
Violet-green swallow	Y
White-throated swift	Y
Scott's oriole	Y
Black-headed grosbeak	Y
Western kingbird	Y
Summer tanager	Y
Western tanager	Y

Reptiles and Amphibians

Amphibians that occur at the Verde administrative site include canyon tree frogs, red spotted toads, woodhouse toads, tiger salamander, and historically southwestern toad and lowland leopard frogs. Numerous species of lizards occur at this administrative site, including collared, fence, earless, side-blotched, and tree. Snake species that can potentially occur include: various garter snakes such as the black-necked and wandering; whip snakes; king snakes; gopher (bull) snake; and rattlesnakes such as the black-tailed and Western diamondback. Turtles that may occur in the Verde River include Sonoran mud, Texas spiny, and painted.

Environmental Consequences for Mammals, Birds, Reptiles, and Amphibians

It is anticipated that sale of the land will result in the subsequent subdivision and development of that land. Construction associated with anticipated development can directly affect wildlife species when workers, vehicles, and equipment cause aural and visual disturbance to individuals that may be present within and near construction areas. Most bird, mammal, and reptile are mobile and are capable of dispersing from disturbance. Individuals incapable of dispersal (nestling, altricial young, eggs, and tadpoles) or individuals unwilling to disperse (adults with immobile young, aestivating individuals) can experience negative affects including: trampling and crushing, increased physiological stress; flushing of birds from incubating eggs thus increasing potential for eggs to become unviable; premature fledging of young from nests; and increased potential for predation. Construction activities can directly affect wildlife habitat through the loss, destruction, modification, or fragmentation of vegetation.

A comparison of alternatives for species that occur entirely in the uplands is as follows. The no action alternative retains the most amount of upland habitat. Alternative B retains the least amount of upland habitat so loss of upland habitat is greatest with this alternative. Alternative D retains slightly more acreage of upland habitat than C, will have a slightly less dense development (in the acreage retained for the administrative site), retains buffer areas (Lots 10 and 12, Figure 5) no new disturbance, and will result in an onsite presence that may ensure added habitat protection. The construction of the new administrative facilities, as called for in Alternative D, will cause some disturbance to upland species, however, this disturbance will be limited in duration. Loss of habitat, however, will occur and will be permanent.

A comparison of alternatives for species that use both the riparian and the uplands follows. Although alternative A retains the same amount of riparian habitat as all other alternatives, it retains the most amount of upland habitat and would have least amount of impacts to upland species. Alternative B and the restrictions associated with that alternative would protect the riparian zone, but no upland habitat resulting the highest level of effect to upland species. Since alternatives C and D retain 25 acres next to the Verde River, they will retain equal amounts of upland habitat. However, there will be an on-site Forest Service presence with Alternative D that may result in more management of the riparian area, less dense development on the administrative parcel, and buffer areas (Lots 10 and 12, Figure 5) located in between the riparian and the paved roads; all of which result in less impact to species and their habitat when compared to alternative C.

A comparison of alternatives for species that are riparian obligates follows. All alternatives provide for similar levels of riparian habitat protection although the method by which protection is achieved differs. Under alternatives A, C, and D, all of the riparian habitat would remain under the jurisdiction of the Forest Service. Alternatives A and D would allow for an onsite Forest

Service presence which may allow for greater control of public access and recreation. Alternative C would retain an in-holding of federal land that includes the habitat but there would be no onsite presence to assist in enforcing habitat protection. Alternative B would sell all acreage, but restrictions to protect special status species would be a requirement of the sale and enforcement of those restrictions would be up to the new land owner or another designated party. The construction of the new administrative site, as called for in Alternative D, will not impact habitat for riparian obligates, since the new administrative site will be constructed out of the riparian zone and buffer areas (Lots 10 and 12, Figure 5) located in between the riparian and the paved roads that will be left undisturbed. Noise from excessively loud construction associated with the new administrative facilities may cause aural disturbance, but the presence of a buffer area located in between this and the riparian minimize this potential.

Cumulative Effects

Riparian Species

Of all southwestern habitats, riparian areas contain the most diverse assortment of species, therefore are among the most essential. Many rare species such as the southwestern willow flycatcher, narrow-headed garter snake, western yellow-billed cuckoo, common black hawk and obsolete viceroy butterfly depend on riparian areas for nearly all their survival needs. Approximately 80% of all vertebrate species use these habitats to satisfy specific life requirements (Grahame and Sisk 2002). Despite their importance, riparian areas have historically experienced the most degradation. Only one to four percent of the west's native riparian woodlands remain intact after years of poor watershed and riparian condition and the resulting change in basic hydrologic function. Currently, riparian woodlands comprise less than one percent of the Coconino National Forest.

Activities, other than those proposed, occurring in riparian areas at the Verde administrative site include: maintenance of utility lines; road and bridge maintenance; recreation and livestock grazing. All these activities can affect wildlife and plant habitat through the loss, destruction, or modification of riparian vegetation. More specifically, activities within the riparian area results in: loss of soil-stabilizing ground cover; soil compaction; decreased amount of grasses, forbs, shrubs, and recruitment trees; increased potential for invasion of exotic weeds; decreased infiltration of water during rain events; increase rates of run off; increased sedimentation into streams; increase of contaminants into streams; and decreased water quality. Trails, roads, and recreation sites within the riparian corridor fragments habitat, disrupts wildlife movement, and reduces the amount of unaltered habitat. All of these activities impact riparian conditions, which consequently degrade wildlife and plant habitat.

Activities within the riparian zone may result in aural and visual disturbance to wildlife species, particularly during critical periods such as breeding, roosting, and feeding. Disturbance can result in increased physiological stress, nest, roost, or site abandonment, flushing of birds from eggs, premature fledging of young from nests, and reduction in the amount of suitable nesting and foraging areas.

Activities occurring in the uplands can also have an indirect effect on riparian habitat when degraded upland conditions contribute to increased water runoff, increased soil deposition, decreased water quality, and eventually exacerbated flood conditions.

All alternatives provide for similar levels of riparian habitat protection although the method by which protection is achieved differs. Under alternatives A, C, and D, all of the riparian habitat would remain under the jurisdiction of the Forest Service. Alternatives A and D would allow for an onsite Forest Service presence which may allow for greater control of public access and recreation. Alternative C would retain an in-holding of federal land that includes the habitat but there would be no onsite presence to assist in enforcing habitat protection. Alternative B would sell all acreage, but restrictions to protect special status species would be a requirement of the sale and enforcement of those restrictions would be up to the new land owner or another designated party.

Upland Species

In addition to proposed activities, there are many activities that occur in the uplands of the Verde administrative site that contribute to cumulative effects to species and their habitat. Other activities include: personal use activities; maintenance of utility lines; road maintenance; recreation, flood control ditch, and livestock grazing. All these activities can visually and aurally affect wildlife species as well as cause destruction or modification to wildlife and plant habitat.

The presence of people, vehicles, and equipment at the Verde site can result in aural and visual disturbance to wildlife species, particularly during critical periods such as breeding, roosting, and feeding. Disturbance that occurs frequently and over a period of time can result in increased physiological stress, nest, roost, or site abandonment, flushing of birds from eggs, premature fledging of young from nests, and reduction in the amount of suitable nesting and foraging areas.

In addition to direct disturbance to wildlife species, these other activities can affect wildlife habitat when activities reduce the amount of soil-stabilizing ground cover, compact soil, reduce the amount of grasses, forbs, shrubs, and recruitment trees; increase the potential for invasion of exotic weeds; all of which contributes to decreased infiltration of water during rain events and increase rates of water and soil run off.

The no action alternative retains the most amount of upland habitat. Alternative D retains slightly more acreage of upland habitat than C and will result in an onsite presence that may ensure added habitat protection. Alternative B retains the least amount of upland habitat.

Soils & Water

Affected Environment

The soils within the proposed sale area have been mapped in 4 soil map units. A detailed description of the soil map units can be found in the Terrestrial Ecosystems Survey of the Coconino National Forest (TES, 1991).

The soils found on the floodplain of the Verde River have been mapped as Riverwash, map unit 33. This area is approximately 8 acres and supports riparian habitat vegetation. Riverwash is an unstable land type. It is subject to frequent flooding, erosion of old materials, and deposition of new sediment.

The soils found on an old terrace above the Verde River have been mapped in map unit 34. This area is approximately 62 acres in size and is dominated by Velvet Mesquite. The soils are deep, occur on 1 to 2 % slopes, have sandy surfaces, and have developed in mixed alluvium. They are subject to wind erosion.

The soils found in the remaining project area occupy Valley and Lowland Plains and have been mapped in map units 280 and 403. The area is approximately 143 acres in size and supports primarily Creosote, Velvet Mesquite, and Black Grama. The soils are deep, occur on 1 to 3 % slopes, have loamy surfaces, and have developed in alluvium and limestone parent material. These soils are typically calcareous throughout the soil profile.

The lower half of the western boundary of the proposed project area is the Verde River. The river borders the property for approximately 1/3 mile. The Verde River, originating in North Central Arizona, is free flowing generally to the southeast and south for approximately 150 miles until it enters Horseshoe Reservoir just north of Phoenix, Arizona. The median annual flow is 175 cubic feet per second measured at a U.S. Geological Survey gaging station near the proposed sale site.

The floodplain occurs in a linear strip paralleling the river along the western boundary. The floodplain is approximately 7.8 acres in size and currently supports dense riparian vegetation. The floodplain is controlled to the southeast by a bluff which is the border with the upland soil areas. Within the floodplain riparian area there is approximately 3.25 acres of wetland habitat.

The Ranger Station developed site receives domestic water from a well. Sewage disposal is through a septic system onsite.

Environmental Consequences

Alternative A - No Action

There would be no environmental effects to water and soil under the No Action alternative.

Alternative B -

The upland terrace and plains of the sale area, totaling approximately 205 acres of the total 213, may be developed into residential and commercial sites. The native vegetation could be removed and landscaping installed similar to the surrounding areas of development.

The affected parcels in the proposed sale area are located in Yavapai County. Yavapai County qualifies for and participates in the Federal Flood Insurance Program. This program requires private landowners obtaining necessary flood insurance to comply with local land use and floodplain regulations. Adherence to local land use regulations, therefore meets the Forest goals of Executive Order 11988 concerning protection of the affected floodplains totaling approximately 8 acres.

The Verde River reach in question is listed as meandering on the property description. The meandering notation restricts the construction of structures on the floodplain. This would likely preclude any effects from occupation on the floodplain.

Water quality is dependent on a healthy, functioning riparian habitat along the stream corridor. Riparian vegetation provides bank stability and serves to filter out sediment and contaminants before entering the stream. Any future uses after sale that result in the loss of riparian vegetation would result in negative effects to water quality from sediment and contaminant delivery. These uses would include vegetation conversions and vegetation loss due to grazing from livestock.

The change in land use for the approximately 205 acres of uplands proposed for sale could result in more dense development than there is currently with the Ranger Station facilities. The development with residential and commercial sites would result in a greater demand for domestic water and sewer facilities than there is presently. The additional water demand could be realized by the development of underground sources such as wells or the addition onto the local water company supply. The additional sewer demand could be met through the installation of individual septic systems or the addition onto the local sewer treatment facilities. The construction of septic systems would occur per local, county, and state regulation and would not result in any impact to local water quality.

Alternative C

The upland terrace and plains of the sale area, totaling approximately 189 acres, may be developed into residential and commercial sites. The native vegetation could be removed and landscaping installed similar to the surrounding areas of development.

The approximate 8 acres of floodplain area along the Verde River would remain in federal ownership. Therefore there would be no effect to floodplains and wetlands.

The change in zoning for the approximate 189 acres of uplands proposed for sale could result in more dense development than there is currently with the Forest facilities. The development with residential and commercial sites would result in a greater demand for domestic water and sewer facilities than there is presently. The additional water demand could be realized by the development of underground sources such as wells or the addition onto the local water company supply. The additional sewer demand could be met through the installation of individual septic systems or the addition onto the local sewer treatment facilities. The construction of septic systems would occur per local, county, and state regulation and would not result in any impact to local water quality.

Alternative D

The upland terrace and plains of the area to be sold, totaling approximately 175 acres, may be developed into residential and commercial sites. The native vegetation could be removed and landscaping installed similar to the surrounding areas of development.

The approximate 8 acres of floodplain area along the Verde River would remain in federal ownership. Therefore there would be no effect to floodplains and wetlands.

The change in land use for the approximate 175 acres of uplands proposed for sale could result in more dense development than there is currently with the ranger station facilities. The development with residential and commercial sites would result in a greater demand for domestic water and sewer facilities than there is presently. The additional water demand could be realized by the development of underground sources such as wells or the addition onto the local water

company supply. The additional sewer demand could be met through the installation of individual septic systems or the addition onto the local sewer treatment facilities. The construction of septic systems would occur per local, county, and state regulation and would not result in any impact to local water quality.

Forest facilities consisting of office and warehouse/shop space would be constructed on a portion of the retained land area. The new construction would result in a demand for domestic water and sewer facilities that may exceed the current use at the existing site. Additional water demand could be realized by the existing water well or the addition onto the local water company supply. Additional sewer demand could be met through the installation of a septic system or the addition onto the local sewer treatment facilities. The construction of a septic system would occur per local, county, and state regulation and would not result in any impact to local water quality.

Cumulative Effects

Future uses after sale of the parcel that result in the loss of riparian vegetation along the river would result in negative effects to water quality from sediment and contaminant delivery. This would be cumulative additive effect to water quality from those type uses that have occurred in the past, at present, and will foreseeably occur in the future along the river corridor.

The potential development of residential and commercial sites could result in an additional demand on local water supply and sewer facilities. The Camp Verde area is presently developing at a high growth rate and is projected to continue into the future. There could be a cumulative additive effect to local water supply and sewer from development at the proposed sale area.

Air Quality

Affected Environment:

Air quality is determined by the ambient concentrations of pollutants that are known to have harmful effects. The Environmental Protection Agency has established National Ambient Air Quality Standards for six criteria pollutants: carbon monoxide, nitrogen dioxide, particulate matter (PM10), ozone, sulfur dioxide, and lead. Yavapai County is in attainment for all criteria pollutants.

Ambient air quality over the proposed sale areas is very good with few exceptions. In the fall and winter, inversions may occur trapping pollutants from wood burning and other local pollutants in the Verde Valley. Also periodic high winds can contribute to temporary increases in levels of atmospheric dust.

Environmental Consequences:

Alternative A - No Action

There would be no environmental effects to air quality under the No Action alternative.

Alternative B

Potential development at the proposed sale areas would result in construction activities. During construction, sources of air pollution would occur from fugitive dust as result of soil disturbance and from tailpipe emissions associated with vehicles. These sources of air pollution would be temporary and occur primarily during the period of active construction.

Alternative C

Same as Alternative B.

Alternative D

Same as Alternative B.

Cumulative Effects:

The localized short term effect to air quality from development activities would not be cumulatively additive to any air quality impact occurring in the region at present or within the future.

Cultural Resources (Issue 2)

Existing Condition

The Verde Administrative Site is undeveloped except for the southwestern portion adjacent to both sides of SR 260 and east of the Verde River. The Verde Administrative Site consists of five structures on the north side of SR 260, and two structures and seven storage sheds on the south side of SR 260, and adjacent parking areas. The structures of the Verde Ranger Station were evaluated (McKie 2004) and determined ineligible for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Place (CNF Project No. 2003-62-B).

The proposed land sale area is irregular in shape and 213 acres in size. Prior projects had resulted in 153 acres previously surveyed, 67 acres newly surveyed and 11 acres resurveyed which resulted in the location of seven archaeological sites within the Camp Verde Administrative Site. Three sites had been identified and tested by previous projects. All three had been determined ineligible and removed from management consideration (Stebbins et al 1981, Hoffman 1999, Hall 2001). One site identified by previous projects had been tested within the ADOT right-of-way and was determined potentially eligible for the portion of the site outside the right-of-way within the Forest Service administrative compound (Hall 2001). Three newly recorded sites required testing to determine eligibility (Martine 2004). The four sites that required further investigation are described below.

AR-034-04-01-1004

Prehistoric site (AR-03-04-01-1004) is located on the southern portion of the 220acre administrative site parcel (Hoffman and Adams 1998). The site was documented as partially located within the ADOT corridor for SR 260 and that portion was investigated as a result of the

SR 260 Expansion Project in Camp Verde (Hall 2001). For the current project, several test trenches were placed on the southernmost edge of the site boundary, within the Forest Service compound, to determine if the subsurface deposits continued beyond that which was investigated by ADOT. One pit house structure, a related feature, and site boundaries were located during the trenching. Further investigation revealed no other features or pit houses and that the site boundaries had been determined (Martine and Pilles 2004). Under the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) and implementing regulations (36 Code of Federal Regulations 800) the effects of data recovery are considered adverse, however important information was recovered as a result of the data recovery effort and will be reported to the State Historic Preservation Office as soon as analysis is complete. Because the entirety of the pit house and the related feature were excavated and no other features or significant surface or subsurface cultural deposit remains the site is no longer eligible for the National Register.

AR-03-04-01-1230

Site AR-03-04-01-1230 is a sparse scatter of historic and prehistoric artifacts (Martine 2004). Once surface distributions were ascertained it became evident that sites AR-03-04-01-1230 and AR-03-04-01-1231 were actually one single site, separated only by recent arroyo cutting and erosion. Subsurface testing revealed that the site has been considerably disturbed by historic and recent activities. No features were found and subsurface artifacts were very sparse. Testing, surface collection, and recording have determined that there is no significant surface or subsurface deposit and the site is considered ineligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places.

AR-03-04-01-1231

Site AR-03-04-01-1231 is interpreted as generalized residential trash from the 1880's -1920's that was likely brought from a single unknown source in three separate episodes (Martine 2004). Without a known or likely provenience, the three trash deposit loci have little information potential and only a small number of interesting historic artifacts. Although prehistoric materials are also present, they occur in low numbers and are non-diagnostic artifact types that represent a very generalized prehistoric presence on the Verde River terrace. Testing, surface collection, and recording have determined that there is no significant surface or subsurface deposit and the site is not considered eligible for National Register.

AR-03-04-01-1232

Site AR-03-04-01-1232 is a sparse scatter of historic and prehistoric artifacts (Martine 2004). No features were found and subsurface artifacts were very sparse. Testing, surface collection, and recording have determined that there is no significant surface or subsurface deposit and the site is considered ineligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places.

Environmental Consequences

The methodology for assessing impacts to historic resources is based on the procedures outlined for cultural resources. This methodology includes: 1) establishing an Area of Potential Effect; 2) assessing the background information regarding historic properties within this area and conducting any necessary surveys, inventories, and resource evaluations; 3) comparing the location of the impact area with that of resources listed, eligible, or potentially eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places; 4) identifying the extent and type of effects; 5)

assessing those effects according to procedures established in the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation's regulations; and 6) considering ways to avoid, reduce, or mitigate adverse effects.

Archaeological resources are typically considered eligible for inclusion in the Nation Register of Historic Places under Criterion d of 36 Code of Federal Regulations Part 60, for the information they have or may be likely to yield. Any change in the physical attributes of an archaeological site is considered irreparable, adverse, and permanent. Adverse impacts to archaeological resources most often occur as a result of earthmoving activities within an archaeological site, soil compaction or increased erosion, unauthorized surface collection, or vandalism. Beneficial impacts to archaeological resources can occur when ongoing impacts, which would otherwise continue to degrade archaeological resources, are reduced or arrested due to changes in visitor use patterns or management practices in the vicinity of archaeological resources. Direct impacts can occur as a result of grading, trenching, or other activities that damage the structure of an archaeological site. Indirect impacts can occur as a result of increasing visitor or management actions in the vicinity of an archaeological site, leading to such occurrences as artifact collection, accelerated soil compaction, or erosion.

The intensity of impact to an archaeological resource would depend on the potential of the resource to yield important information, as well as the extent of the physical disturbance or degradation. For example, major earthmoving at an archaeological site with low data potential might result in a minor adverse impact. Negligible impacts would be barely perceptible and not measurable and would usually be confined to archaeological sites with low data potential. Minor impacts would be perceptible and measurable and would remain localized and confined to archaeological sites with low to moderate data potential. Moderate impacts would be sufficient to cause noticeable change and would generally involve one or more archaeological sites with moderate to high data potential. Major impacts would result in substantial and highly noticeable changes involving archaeological sites with high data potential.

For archaeological resources, mitigation includes avoiding sites through project design or recovering information that makes the sites eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places.

Alternative A (No Action)

Under Alternative A, no specific actions would be taken to change the existing conditions. The Verde Administrative Site would continue to operate as they do today with minimal degradation due to Forest Service and visitor use, routine maintenance, and natural processes.

- Archaeological sites AR-03-04-01-1230, -1231, and -1232. Long-term adverse impact. These three sites have been determined ineligible and testing has exhausted their data potential.
- Archaeological site AR-03-04-01-1004. Long-term adverse impact. The site was determined through testing to have significant data potential.

Under this alternative, site mitigation has already occurred to the documented sites at this location. No further action would be taken.

Cumulative Impacts

Cumulative impacts to archaeological resources discussed herein are based on analysis of past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions in the Camp Verde project area, in combination with potential effects of this alternative.

The archaeological resources of the Verde Administrative Site are the result of thousands of years of human occupation. Archaeological resources have been affected by past actions in the area and since the Forest Service first occupied the site. Archaeological site AR-03-04-01-1004 has been impacted by testing and data recovery. Sites AR-03-04-01-1230, -1231, and -1232 have been impacted by testing. There have been long-term adverse effects to the sites however, no new affects to archaeological resources are anticipated in relation to Alternative A.

Section 106 Summary for Alternative A. For purposes of assessing effects to historic properties under the National Historic Preservation Act and implementing regulations (36 Code of Federal Regulations 800), the effects are considered either adverse or not adverse, or there is no effect. Three previously uninvestigated prehistoric/historic sites, and one partially investigated prehistoric site are located within the project area. In accordance with Forest Service policies and procedures, the Forest Service would continue to protect cultural resources to the greatest extent allowable under present funding and staffing levels. Disturbance of identified historic properties resources would be avoided wherever possible, but in instances where avoidance or preservation could not be achieved, appropriate mitigation would be/has been carried out under the provisions of the implementing regulations.

Alternative B

Under Alternative B, the Forest Service is proposing to sell the Verde administrative site in response to the long standing issue of Verde Valley Forest Service offices located in areas that do not best serve the National Forest or public purposes and limited funding for administrative site facilities construction.

- Archaeological sites AR-03-04-01-1230, -1231, and -1232. Long-term adverse impact. These three sites have been determined ineligible and testing has exhausted their data potential.
- Archaeological site AR-03-04-01-1004. Long-term adverse impact. The site was determined through testing to have significant data potential. Because the site would be transferred out of federal control with the sale of the property, this was followed by data recovery which exhausted its data potential and was then determined ineligible.

Cumulative Effects

Archaeological resources are located within the Verde Administrative Site project area.

Prehistoric sites AR-03-04-01-1004 and AR-03-04-01-1230, -1231, and -1232 will not be further affected by the sale of the Verde Administrative site since mitigation for the site is already complete. However, sale of the Verde Administrative Site will result in a change of usage. Identified possible development under the adopted Camp Verde General Plan includes: regional commercial and services, open space, residential use, and public use. Since no cultural resources will be affected by the change in usage, Alternative B will result in no cumulative effects at the Verde Administrative Site.

Section 106 Summary for Alternative B. For purposes of assessing effects to historic properties under the National Historic Preservation Act and implementing regulations (36 Code of Federal Regulations 800), the effects are considered either adverse or not adverse, or there is no effect. Four archaeological sites are located within the project area. Alternative B will result in no cumulative effects to archaeological resources at the Verde Administrative Site.

Alternative C

Under Alternative C, the Forest Service is proposing to sell most of the Verde administrative site in response to the long standing issue of Verde Valley Forest Service offices located in areas that do not best serve the National Forest or public purposes and limited funding for administrative site facilities construction. A portion (approximately 25 acres) would be retained to preserve the wetland and protect threatened and endangered species habitat along the Verde River.

- Archaeological site impacts as the same as described in Alternative B.

Cumulative Effects

Archaeological resources are located within the Verde Administrative Site project area and impacts are the same as described in Alternative B. Alternative C does not result in cumulative effects.

Section 106 Summary for Alternative C. For purposes of assessing effects to historic properties under the National Historic Preservation Act and implementing regulations (36 Code of Federal Regulations 800), the effects are considered either adverse or not adverse, or there is no effect. Four archaeological sites, one historic and prehistoric and three prehistoric sites are located within the project area. Alternative C will result in no cumulative effects at the Verde Administrative Site.

Alternative D

Under Alternative D, the Forest Service is proposing to retain a larger portion of the Verde administrative site and construct a new administrative site on this property. The river frontage area would be retained as in Alternative C and the existing developed ranger station area south of the ADOT easement as well as an additional approximately 5-1/2 acres east of the existing site. Three of the newly documented sites are within the potential sale area.

- Archaeological sites affected are the same as Alternative B and C.

Cumulative Effects

Archaeological resources are located within the Verde Administrative Site project area. Since no cultural resources will be affected by the change in usage, Alternative D will result in no cumulative effects at the Verde Administrative Site.

Section 106 Summary for Alternative D. For purposes of assessing effects to historic properties under the National Historic Preservation Act and implementing regulations (36 Code of Federal Regulations 800), the effects are considered either adverse or not adverse, or there is no effect. Three archaeological sites, one historic and prehistoric and two prehistoric are located within the project area. Alternative D will result in no cumulative effects at the Verde Administrative Site.

Environmental Justice

Existing Condition: Non-white residents make up approximately 11%, 15%, and 8% of the total populations of the project area, the Town of Camp Verde and Yavapai County. A portion of the Yavapai Apache Nation reservation in Camp Verde is located within 1/2 mile of the project site but on the opposite side of the Verde River.

Environmental Consequences: The project area is not adjacent to minority, low income or underrepresented parties that would be unduly affected by the action alternatives. In all alternatives there would be no direct, indirect or cumulative effect to minority, low income or underrepresented parties.

Scenic Quality

Existing Condition: The west side of the Verde Administrative site is mostly developed with a mix of office buildings, warehouse, parking, pasture, storage areas and modular structures. There is a park facility and trail located along the Verde River at White Bridge. State Route 260 and several other roads go through the property accessing adjacent private lands and areas of Camp Verde. The existing development at the administrative site is consistent with the surrounding level of development in an urban and residential setting, surrounded by commercial and residential development as well as the Verde River. The larger remainder of the property on east side is undeveloped except for fences and pasture uses. The existing visual quality objective along the highway is retention. However, this area does not contain unique landscape or specific scenic views other than along the Verde River itself with the riparian corridor. The site's existing condition meets the criteria for "partial retention" in the undeveloped area or "modification" in the administrative site where the facilities are located.

Environmental consequences:

Alternative A - No Action: The property would remain under current management and used as an administrative site. Additional development may occur within the existing developed ranger station site or remain as is depending on the ultimate decision on new Verde Ranger District facilities and their location. The parcel would continue not to meet partial retention in areas where the developed facilities are but meet objectives in the remaining area.

Alternative B: There would be a change from undeveloped land to developed land on the east side of the property. The area will likely be developed into residential homes and commercial development along the highway consistent with adjacent private property under current Camp Verde land use designations. The existing developed ranger station area would likely become further developed with similar uses to adjacent private lands. The area adjacent to the Verde River and north of the highway could also be developed and natural views of the river could be obscured by development. The White Bridge park area would likely remain as is for 25 years and therefore the Verde River views would remain as is for that time period. The area along the highway would change from a natural setting to developed setting with landscaping instead of existing natural vegetation. The area that would be sold would result in visual quality of modification for these areas.

Alternative C – The area west of McCracken and Quarterhorse Lane and south of the ADOT drainage easement would remain in federal ownership. White Bridge Park area and access to the

Verde River including the natural views of the river would remain. The remaining larger portion of the property would likely be developed as described in Alternative B above and the natural setting in the undeveloped areas would include buildings and landscaping and other development per Town of Camp Verde processes and ordinances. However the Verde River would remain in natural appearing and a unique landform value. The visual quality would be reduced to modification except along the Verde River.

Alternative D – Under this alternative a larger area would remain in National Forest ownership and new Verde Administrative site facilities would be constructed adjacent to the highway in and around the existing facilities north of the highway. The remaining areas would be sold and development likely as described in Alternative C. Natural settings would change to more developed and landscaped settings. However no foreground natural scenic views or unique scenery would be impacted by this alternative. The Verde River would remain in natural appearing and a unique landform value where visual quality would remain in partial retention. The visual quality would be reduced to modification on the sale parcels. Development of the new administrative facilities in Alternative D may not result in as great a change from existing uses as with Alternative C and its potential higher density private development in the existing ranger station area.

Cumulative Effects – Under the action alternatives, development that could result from the sale of any portion of the property cumulatively changes more undeveloped land along the highway frontage into developed land, natural setting to developed setting. Existing development on three sides of the property and both sides of the highway includes the ADOT drainage easement/facility and highway projects, sanitary district improvements, residential development on private land. As areas continue to develop adjacent to this parcel, the less natural appearing areas are both within the private land and with National Forest management actions. Wild land setting and appearance will be reduced along the highway corridor for a distance beyond the ranger station as a result of sale and exchange projects around the administrative site as well as private land development.

Recreation Access (Issue 1)

Existing Condition: The property is split by the state highway and drainage easements and recreation use of the entire parcel is generally low. There is a developed recreation site on the southwest edge of the property that includes a parking area, ramada, trail and river access (White Bridge). These facilities were constructed using State Lake Improvement Funds (SLIF) and the park gets moderate use as a put in location for boats and as access to the river for other recreation use. Financing under SLIF requires that the improvements remain for public access for 25 years after construction. The last SLIF funds were used at this site in 2001. There is informal recreation use by equestrians and hikers on the remainder of the parcel that access other National Forest system trails. However there are not designated trails on the property except at the White Bridge park location.

Environmental Consequences -

Alternative A – No Action: Under this alternative, recreation would continue as currently managed. White Bridge Park would remain in place and managed as is, including public access to the river.

Alternative B- Under this alternative the entire parcel would be conveyed. Casual recreation use would likely be precluded by the future owner, except at White Bridge. The White Bridge Park would remain in place, including public access to the river, and be managed under a restriction either by the Forest Service or other public entity under the SLIF requirements. After the required time, the new owner could determine future use of the area as long as wetland and floodplain and other restrictions are complied with related threatened and endangered species (see Special Status Species section for effects.)

Alternative C - Under this alternative, the park area south of the highway and west of Quarterhorse Lane/McCracken Lane would be retained in National Forest ownership and this area would be managed similarly to Alternative A, except there would be no administrative presence near the White Bridge park since the Verde Ranger District would likely develop facilities at a different location. Allowed uses of the park area, including public access to the river, would not change from current management. However, informal recreation use of the remainder of the property would likely be precluded by the future buyer.

Alternative D – Under this alternative, the park area would remain in National Forest management and federal ownership as well as a larger piece of National Forest land to accommodate construction of new ranger station facilities. The Forest Service would retain management of the park similar to what occurs under Alternative A which allows public access to the river. Informal recreation use would likely be precluded on the remainder of the sale property as a result of future development.

Cumulative Effects – Recreation opportunities and access along the river could be lost over the long term if Alternative B were selected and the future buyer would not agree to allow access to continue after the required SLIF term. Public river access is very limited in the Verde Valley and this would result in further loss of river access under Alternative B. The other alternatives do not change existing river access however there could be loss of informal recreation access along the east portion of the property to be sold under other alternatives. These opportunities are limited due the property’s proximity on three sides to existing developed private and State Trust land where there is no public access. A community park and trailhead is being proposed just east of this sale property and would likely result in development of a trail system on National Forest east of the sale property and more enhanced and formalized recreation opportunities at the park site instead of current informal use dispersed recreation use in this area.

Land Use and Public Service (Issue 4)

Existing Condition – The existing Verde Administrative Site is being used as the administrative site (i.e., offices, storage, warehouse and pasture) for the Verde Ranger District, Prescott National Forest. A large area of the 213 acre site is not actively used for administrative purposes but was identified and withdrawn from natural resource use as an administrative site in 1958 most likely to accommodate pasture land for administrative purposes. The property is split by State Route 260, an Arizona Department of Transportation drainage easement, and Town of Camp Verde Roads. There are various utilities that run through the property and provide services to the existing ranger station facilities as well as to adjacent landowners. Private land, (including the Verde River boundary) and State Trust land border the property on three sides. Private land development adjacent currently includes residential and commercial. The Town of Camp Verde Community Plan has designated land use for this property as primarily residential with some commercial land use along the highway corridor.

Visitor services are currently provided at the Verde Ranger Station office along State Route 260. The highway corridor adjacent to the ranger station has recently been widened to four lanes with added turn lanes. The existing Verde Ranger Station site has office facilities on both sides of the highway.

The Camp Verde General Plan has identified this area as a Growth Area. The land use designation for the property includes open space where the current White Bridge park and ADOT drainage easement are located, commercial along the highway corridor south of the drainage easement and residential north of the drainage easement.

Environmental consequences: Under Alternative A, the Verde Administrative Site would not be sold. Site management would likely remain the same as current management including providing visitor services at this site. If adequate funding were available, it is possible that the Verde Administrative site would move to a new location and the facilities would be abandoned. Under Alternative B and C, large areas or all of the site would be sold. Land use would be what would be allowed under the Camp Verde Town land use plan and development process, expected to be a mix of commercial and residential development. Under Alternative D, development on the property to be sold would be the same as Alternative B and C. However administrative facilities would remain on site as well as visitor services using improved administrative facilities. All Forest Service facilities would be on one side of the highway and all east of McCracken Road. Cumulatively land development would extend beyond the existing developed area north of highway 260 comparable to the private land in the vicinity. There would be a higher density of development in the area around the ranger station property in all action alternatives comparable to what is occurring within the adjacent community. Public service will be provided at whatever site is chosen for the ranger station. Visitor services can be provided adequately at any site identified as potential administrative sites.

Consistency with Forest Plans

The property is located within the Verde Valley Management Area (MA11) of the Coconino National Forest Plan. Emphasis for this management area include: management of antelope as a management indicator species and for visual quality objectives in accordance with standards and guidelines. The property is adjacent to land identified as base in exchange and has many characteristics (surrounded on three sides by existing non-federal lands) of lands that are appropriate for conveyance. It was not identified as base in exchange in 1987 due to the occupancy of the site by the Verde Ranger District. A portion the site is within the Riparian and Open Water Management Area. Alternatives are also consistent with standards and guidelines associated with both management areas and general forest plan direction.

In addition, direction in the Prescott National Forest Plan indicates a standard and guideline to construct/reconstruct FA&O facilities to support management and administration activities. The current Verde Ranger Station site that is now split by a 4-lane highway, contains mostly temporary trailer facilities for office space and is not adequate to provide quality administration and public information.

All alternatives are consistent with the direction on both the Coconino and Prescott National Forest Plans. Sale of administrative sites in order to obtain funding for construction of new administrative sites that better serve the public is consistent with forest plan direction by helping to implement the standard and guideline under General Administration that states "Maintain an

aggressive and pro-active public affairs program, Forest-wide, to establish and maintain informed consent for resource management objectives.”

Chapter 4 - Consultation and Coordination

The Forest Service consulted the following individuals, Federal, state and local agencies, tribes and non-Forest Service persons during the development of this environmental assessment:

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United States Fish and Wildlife Service
Bureau of Land Management

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