

# Proposed Arizona Trail

## San Francisco Peaks and Dry Lake Hills

### Proposed Action

- Construct and/or Designate the Arizona Trail corridor from Sandy Seep to Kelly Tank (see map). This segment is approximately 31.0 miles. The estimates below show the different types of trail designation.
  - 16.4 miles of current Forest Service System Trail (Dry Lake Hills and Fort Valley Areas) – 4.4 miles of this trail will also have motorcycle use.
  - 1.2 miles of social trail<sup>1</sup> would be converted to Forest Service System Trail.
  - 1.3 miles of two track roads located within a previously designated motorized closure area.
  - 1.5 miles of roads currently open to vehicles that would be closed to vehicles and converted to nonmotorized trail.
  - 10.6 miles of new single-track construction.
- This analysis applies to a corridor that is one-quarter mile wide. The proposed Arizona Trail route would be a 24-inch tread located within the corridor based on the on-the-ground layout.
- The primary seasonal use of the proposed Arizona Trail route would be mid-May through mid-October. The route may also be signed as a cross-country ski trail.
- Amend the Forest Plan to apply the current Forest Plan language as written for the Arizona Trail on the Blue Ridge, Long Valley, and Mormon Lake Districts to the segments of trail located on the Peaks Ranger District (Fisher Point to the Forest boundary).
- Use the Buffalo Park and Sandy Seep Trailheads. Construct a new trailhead at Kelly Tank.
- Use Kelly Tank, Alfa Fia Tank, and Shultz Tank as water sources for trail use. Other tanks or springs would not be managed for trail use.
- Implement the Design Features (listed below) that include camping restrictions; group size limits; livestock gate design; surveys of 3 sensitive plant species, Mexican spotted owls, and raptors; signing; trail layout at the forest edge, and noxious weed control.

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<sup>1</sup> A social trail is a non Forest Service system trail that is created by forest users

## **Purpose and Need: Why Here? Why Now?**

The Arizona Trail is a long-distance trail traversing Arizona from its Mexico to Utah borders. Three state planning documents reflect the widespread support for construction of the Arizona Trail. The development of each of these documents included extensive public contact and involvement: the Arizona Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP), the 1994 Arizona State Trails Plan, and the 1995 Arizona Trail Management Guide. In addition, the Land Management Plan (Forest Plan) of the Coconino National Forest identifies the Arizona Trail as a priority for completion.

The Forest Service has reinforced the vision to complete the Arizona Trail by entering into a Memorandum of Understanding with the Arizona Trail Association and an Intergovernmental Agreement with Arizona State Parks. Much of the Arizona Trail has been completed across the state. The segment discussed here is one of the last remaining large connections. Currently, segments of the Trail are completed or are scheduled for construction in the Peaks and Mormon Lake Ranger Districts.

Cultural values of Native American tribes were a prominent factor that helped the team choose this proposed action. In addition, this proposed action maintains wilderness values by avoiding the Kachina Peaks Wilderness.

Other concerns include the many Protected Activity Centers (PACs) for Mexican spotted owls in the area. This proposed action avoids some owl PACs and passes through others.

One goal of the proposed Arizona Trail route is to provide a quality high elevation experience with scenic views for hikers, mountain bikers, and horseback riders. A designated trail corridor would provide planned, well-engineered trail routes. Constructing a trail would provide opportunities for long distance use on the entire Arizona Trail, shorter trips, and other daytime use. Currently, some social trail use occurs along the proposed route, especially in the Shultz Pass Road and Fort Valley areas. A light concentration of hiking occurs on social trails on the slopes of San Francisco Mountain near Hart Prairie. These trail routes would serve as a collector to channel hiking use to a well-designed Arizona Trail route.

## **Forest Plan**

The Forest Plan identifies the Arizona Trail as a priority for completion and describes the segments on the Blue Ridge and Mormon Lake Districts. However, the same Forest Plan directions (written below) also describe the objectives for this proposed portion of the Arizona Trail.

The Forest Plan states... "This trail will be a non-motorized pathway.<sup>2</sup> The route will use public lands to ensure public access; use existing trails, where use of the trail as part of the Arizona Trail does not cause substantial negative impacts; allow day-long, weekend, or week-long travel segments; accommodate hikers, equestrians, cross-country skiers, and back-country bicyclists where physically possible and where management permits; provide representation of the various life zones, geologic features, native vegetation, wildlife, cultural resources and resource management practices of the Coconino National Forest; be in harmony with other federal, state, and local government entities, and private landowners; and allow for continued production of outputs from forest resources as stated in the Forest Land Management Plan. Final trail location, design, construction, and signing to be accomplished by Forest staff and private sector/volunteer partnerships".

This proposed action meets the intent, standards, and guidelines of the Forest Plan as it is currently written and no changes are needed. The inclusion of this segment of the trail will be an amendment to the Plan.

### **Project Objectives**

- Plan and construct a non-motorized trail to the standards established in the Forest Service Trails Handbook and Arizona Trail Management Guide. Provide hiking, equestrian, and mountain biking opportunities.
- Identify and/or construct, as needed, Arizona Trail support features such as trailheads, water sources, and locations to replenish supplies of food and other essential items.
- Identify a trail route that provides a high quality recreational experience and that provides a portion of the Arizona Trail.
- Identify a trail route that represents a balance between recreation demands and cultural values of Native American tribes. Take steps to mitigate negative effects to culturally sensitive areas.
- Identify an Arizona Trail route that balances recreational uses with the protection of wildlife habitat. Take steps to mitigate negative effects to threatened, endangered, and sensitive species. Strive for positive human/wildlife habitat interactions.
- Interpret unique landscape features along the Arizona Trail route to foster understanding and help protect features, such as, dendroglyphs<sup>3</sup>, wildfire areas, and historic railroads.

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<sup>2</sup> This proposal includes 4.4 miles of single-track trail that supports motorcycles as well as hikers, mountain bike and horse riders. This difference from the Forest Plan is allowed under Forest Service planning regulations, as long as it is analyzed and documented in a NEPA analysis and decision.

<sup>3</sup> A dendroglyph is a historic carving on a tree, primarily aspen in this vicinity.

## **Design Features and Coordinating Requirements**

The following items are part of the proposed trail design and management

- **Close social trails that intersect the Arizona Trail route**
- **Limit camping to designated sites in the Dry Lake Hills and prohibit camping within Mexican spotted owl PACs. Inform and enforce the Statewide no camping within ¼ mile of open water rule.**
- **Install self-closing gates** at allotment fence crossings in conjunction with arched above-ground cattle guards if needed, i.e., for cattle using a pasture.
- **Maintain the current motorized closure** in the vicinity of Domingo Tank north to Bismarck Lake.
- **Design trail width** to approximately 24".
- **Cut trees** as needed for the proposed Arizona Trail route construction. Where possible, avoid cutting snags, pine or fir trees greater than 9 inches diameter, or oak trees larger than 5 inches diameter at root collar.
- **Conduct pre-construction surveys for Forest Service sensitive plant species** (*Astragalus rusbyi*, *Helenium arizonicum*, *Penstemon nudiflorus*).
  - Conduct surveys in potential habitat along the route prior to Arizona Trail construction. The surveys would provide for optimum detection and protection of sensitive plants. Personnel involved in the trail construction would be trained in the identification of these plants to expedite survey efforts.
- **Lay out the trail to minimize impacts to sensitive plants or significant archeological features. As needed, a biologist/botanist or an archaeologist would be consulted to verify plants or features and to monitor trail rerouting.**
- **Conduct pre-construction and annual surveys for noxious weeds and Implement Best Management Practices as identified in the *Coconino National Forest Noxious Weed Strategy*.**
  - Prior to final Arizona Trail construction, crews would be trained to identify noxious weed species. Should populations be found, workers would consult with District wildlife and recreation staff to determine a course of action. During Trail work within a noxious weed population, vehicles and clothing would be cleaned prior to entering or leaving the area to prevent the spreading of seed.
  - Annually search for and eradicate noxious weeds along the trail route
  - Require pellets for horse feed
- **Design trail to pass in and out of the forest edge** (the place where meadows meet the tree line), to lessen impacts to turkey, deer and other wildlife.
- **Survey Mexican spotted owl restricted habitat within ½ mile of the proposed Arizona Trail route.** For one year, the Forest Service would conduct surveys of

Mexican spotted owl in restricted habitat areas within ½ mile of the Trail. This would occur in the year prior to or during the year of trail construction.

- **Generally accept reputable outfitter/guide activities** on the Trail that consist of small groups that make repetitive trips such as mountain biking or horseback riding conducted by outfitter/guides.
- **Approve recreation events on a case-by-case basis using the guidelines below.** Events such as duathlons or 10K races could occur for short, specified durations of time. Each outfitter/guide and event activity would be reviewed and approved under separate guidelines. When considering activities, refer to the table below for timing restrictions and group size. Different segments of Trail have different group size and timing restrictions recommended depending on wildlife habitat needs.

| <b>Segment of Trail</b>   | <b>Group Size</b> | <b>Timing</b>                                 |
|---|-------------------|---|
| Segment in goshawk Post Fledgling Family Area (PFA)                           | No Limit          | No restrictions                               |
| Segment in ponderosa pine outside of goshawk PFA and Mexican spotted owl PAC. | No Limit          | No restrictions                               |
| Segment in the Mexican spotted owl PACs.                                      | 12                | Group size limit enforced March 1 – August 31 |

- **Encourage Arizona Trail users to keep pets on a leash or under voice control.**
- **Leave slash piles and downed logs intact to maintain habitat for the prey of raptors.**
- **Do not conduct Arizona Trail construction during the Mexican spotted owl breeding season (3/1 –through 8/31) within Mexican spotted owl PACs.**
- **Place signs and other interpretative tools at historic railroad grades and dendroglyph sites for information and protection purposes.**
- **Follow the Archaeological Clearance Report** for this project. The Report documents the archaeological inventory, results of consultations with the Tribes, and compliance with the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended. The Report would contain site-specific protection measures for implementation, including monitoring requirements.
- **Implement Best Management Practices for protection of water quality.**

## **Decision Making**

Gene Waldrip, Peaks District Ranger of the Coconino National Forest, is the Forest Service official responsible for deciding whether or not to construct this segment of the Arizona Trail in this project area as proposed, or in an alternative location or manner