

**DECISION NOTICE**  
**VERDE TRAILS AND ACCESS PLAN**  
**U.S. FOREST SERVICE**  
**VERDE RANGER DISTRICT**  
**PRESCOTT NATIONAL FOREST**  
**YAVAPAI COUNTY, ARIZONA**

**DECISION**

Based upon my review of the Verde Trails and Access Plan Environmental Assessment (EA), I have decided to implement the Proposed Action, which will improve trail connectivity, trail opportunities and forest access on the Verde District by constructing 121.6 miles of new non-motorized trails, 4 miles of motorized trails, 30 dispersed staging areas, improve Grief Hill Trailhead and West Mingus Avenue Staging Area and authorize 2 designated dispersed recreation areas. The project will also decommission 20 miles of exiting trails, 9.5 miles of existing National Forest System roads, and two user-created staging areas.

As a result of informal consultation with US Fish and Wildlife Service, no new trails will be constructed within one-half mile of the Verde River and no new trails (motorized and non-motorized) will be constructed within the two Protected Activity Centers (PACs) for the Mexican spotted owl within the action area. In compliance with the guidelines in the Recovery Plan for the Mexican spotted owl, First Revision (USFWS 2012), 6.39 miles of non-motorized trails will not be constructed.

A majority of the 125.6 miles of proposed trail alignments and 30 staging areas were not field verified; this decision authorizes the concept of the shown alignments and locations. The final alignment and locations will be determined through implementation of the Best Management Practices (BMPs) listed in the Environmental Assessment, incorporating cultural, watershed, wildlife, and other resource concerns before construction. An adaptive management strategy will be employed in case changes in social or environmental conditions, or recreation use patterns, necessitate additional mitigations.

As described in the EA, a variety of trail construction methods may be used. The feasibility/effectiveness of utilizing mechanized constructions methods will be evaluated prior to construction with respect to best management practices/resource protection measures described in the EA.

Adaptive management will also be used to guide the prioritization and construction of trails associated with this decision. As an example, if trails authorized in this decision become irrelevant or unimportant to the community or the Forest Service, or they are determined to have negative affects to resources, they will not be constructed. Conversely, if trails authorized in this decision have overwhelming support from communities and partners a shift in priorities may occur.

Staging areas will be generally one acre in size and initially be defined using boulders, aggregate surfacing, and information kiosks. Although basic development is planned initially, this decision will allow management flexibility to address changing social or environmental conditions. Additional amenities such as ramadas, picnic tables, BBQ grills, and vault toilets may be added at key staging areas based on changing public use and resource needs.

Phased construction is anticipated to occur over a period of ten years and will occur based on Forest Service and community priorities. Community/Partner support and funding will be a critical consideration for implementing projects as well as the Prescott NF's capacity to support, implement, and oversee the projects.

The West Mingus Avenue and Grief Hill Designated Dispersed Recreation Areas (DRA) will be implemented as described to ensure public safety and mitigate resource impacts. Following this decision, a forest order will be developed to define boundaries and prohibitions for these DRA areas. Prohibitions will include camping, camp fires and recreational shooting. Recreational facilities such as trailheads/staging areas will be designated as day use only. The West Mingus Avenue forest order is expected to be implemented in autumn of 2018. The Grief Hill order is anticipated to be developed and implemented within one to five years or when trail construction activities begin.

## **DECISION RATIONALE**

Starting in 2008, the Prescott NF engaged individuals, local trail user groups, and various local governments in developing a recreation strategy for Central Arizona that focuses efforts on building and maintaining sustainable recreation infrastructure. Beginning in 2010, the Verde Front Trails Committee worked collaboratively with the Forest Service to further develop sustainable trail proposals to meet the need for additional non-motorized trails and access.

Sustainable recreation evaluates the social, economic, and environmental implications of a project, and favors proposals that create resiliency in these three core areas. This project fits within the Prescott National Forest's sustainable recreation goals by providing improved access and opportunities for trail users on the forest while addressing social, economic, and environmental factors. It is economically sustainable because we anticipate construction and maintenance to be completed primarily by volunteers and grant funding. Additionally, creating



more access points and trail loop opportunities will enhance the draw to this community and facilitate potential event opportunities. Creation of a well-designed trail system makes this project environmentally sustainable by significantly reducing soil erosion and providing for more effective and efficient long-term management of trail use on the Verde Ranger District while restoring the natural ecosystem. This project is socially sustainable as it is the culmination of a collaborative process developed and supported by diverse recreation user groups; is intended to reduce trail user conflicts by providing more opportunity and spreading out use across a larger, more connected trail system, thus improving the quality of life for local residents and other visitors.

The Verde Trails and Access Plan EA documents the environmental analysis and conclusions upon which this decision is based. No specific “No Action” alternative was analyzed under the assumption that no action would maintain the status quo of recreation opportunities and trends.

## **PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT**

This action was originally listed as a proposal on the Prescott National Forest Schedule of Proposed Actions beginning in January 2017 and updated periodically during the analysis. People were invited to review and comment on the proposal at two open meetings on May 24 and 25 2017 that were hosted at the Camp Verde Library and Yavapai College Verde Valley Campus. The EA lists agencies and people consulted on pages 45 and 46.

Fifteen responses were received during the scoping period for this project and helped inform the development of the proposed action. Some comments and suggestions were incorporated into the Environmental Assessment (EA) as project design features or mitigations. No comments on the proposed action were received from Native American groups during the scoping period.

## **FINDINGS REQUIRED BY OTHER LAWS AND REGULATIONS**

This decision is consistent with the 2015 Land and Resource Management Plan for the Prescott National Forest. This project fits with that plan in the following ways: Both motorized and non-motorized trail systems consist of interconnecting loops, as well as trails that connect communities or other non-Prescott NF destinations. Motorized and non-motorized opportunities are generally separated. Visitors and citizen use of trails that provide opportunities for their desired experiences, and “unofficial” trails are not evident. Trailheads provide parking and access to trails where there is a critical need. (Forest Plan, pg. 115).

A Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) and EA were considered. I determined these actions will not have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment, and an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) will not be prepared.

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## **ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW OPPORTUNITIES**

This project was subject to a pre-decisional objection process as described in 36 CFR 218. The objection period began on March 23, 2018 and ended on May 7, 2018. No objections were received. This decision implements the Prescott National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan.

## **IMPLEMENTATION DATE**

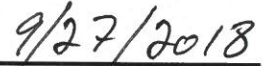
This project may be implemented any time following the date the final decision is signed. Implementation will occur over several years as funding and resources allow.

**Contact**

For additional information concerning this decision, contact: Gabrielle Kenton, Environmental Coordinator, at 928-443-8221, [gkenton@fs.fed.us](mailto:gkenton@fs.fed.us); or Tom Palmer, project lead, at 928-567-1114, [tpalmer01@fs.fed.us](mailto:tpalmer01@fs.fed.us).



Todd Willard  
Verde District Ranger



Date

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