



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

Southwestern
Region

August 2013



Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI), Decision Notice and Non-significant Plan Amendment

Payson Ranger District Administrative Site Sale and Facilities

Tonto National Forest, Gila County, Arizona



The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability, and where applicable, sex, marital status, familial status, parental status, religion, sexual orientation, genetic information, political beliefs, reprisal, or because all or part of an individual's income is derived from any public assistance program. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (Braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TDD). To file a complaint of discrimination, write to USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Avenue, S.W., Washington, D.C. 20250-9410, or call (800) 795-3272 (voice) or (202) 720-6382 (TDD). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

Table of Contents

Finding..... 1
 A: Context 1
 B: Intensity Factors..... 3
 Decision and Rationale (36 CFR 220.7(c) (2))..... 7
 Decision..... 7
 Rationale for Choosing the Proposed Action 8
 Project Location..... 8
 Action to Be Implemented..... 8
 Forest Plan Design Criteria and Monitoring..... 9
 Other Alternatives Considered 9
 Public Involvement (36 CFR 220.7(c) (3)) 10
 Incorporated by Reference (36 CFR 220.7(c) (4)) 11
 Expected Implementation Date (36 CFR 215.9) 12
 Administrative Review (Appeal) Opportunities (36 CFR 215.11)..... 13
 Contact Information (36 CFR 220.7(c) (8)) 13

Figures

Figure 1. Payson Ranger District Administrative Site Sale and Facilities Project vicinity map 2

Tables

Table 1. Resource effects for the proposed action 4

Finding

After considering the environmental effects described in the environmental analysis and specialist reports, I have determined that the proposed action alternative (EA, pages 9-18) will not have significant effects on the quality of the human environment, considering the context and intensity of impacts (40 CFR 1508.27). Thus, an environmental impact statement will not be prepared.

Best Available Science. I am confident that the analysis of this project was conducted using the best available science. My conclusion is based on a review of the record that shows my staff conducted a thorough review of relevant scientific information, considered responsible opposing views, and acknowledged incomplete or unavailable information, scientific uncertainty, and risk. Please refer to the specialist reports in the project file for specific discussions of the science and methods used for analysis and for literature reviewed and referenced.

I base my finding on the following. The actions proposed in the Payson Ranger District Administrative Site Sale and Facilities Project (the Project) will not have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment considering the context and intensity of impacts (EA, pages 28-65); and individual specialist reports found in the project record). Each resource area defined the scope of analysis and cumulative effects boundaries to determine the context in which the environmental effects would occur. Based on the analysis of resource effects in the Project EA and project record information, I conclude that no significant effects would occur, because effects are mitigated by following project design features, best management practices, and Forest Plan standards, and by complying with all applicable Federal and state laws, agency regulations, and policies.

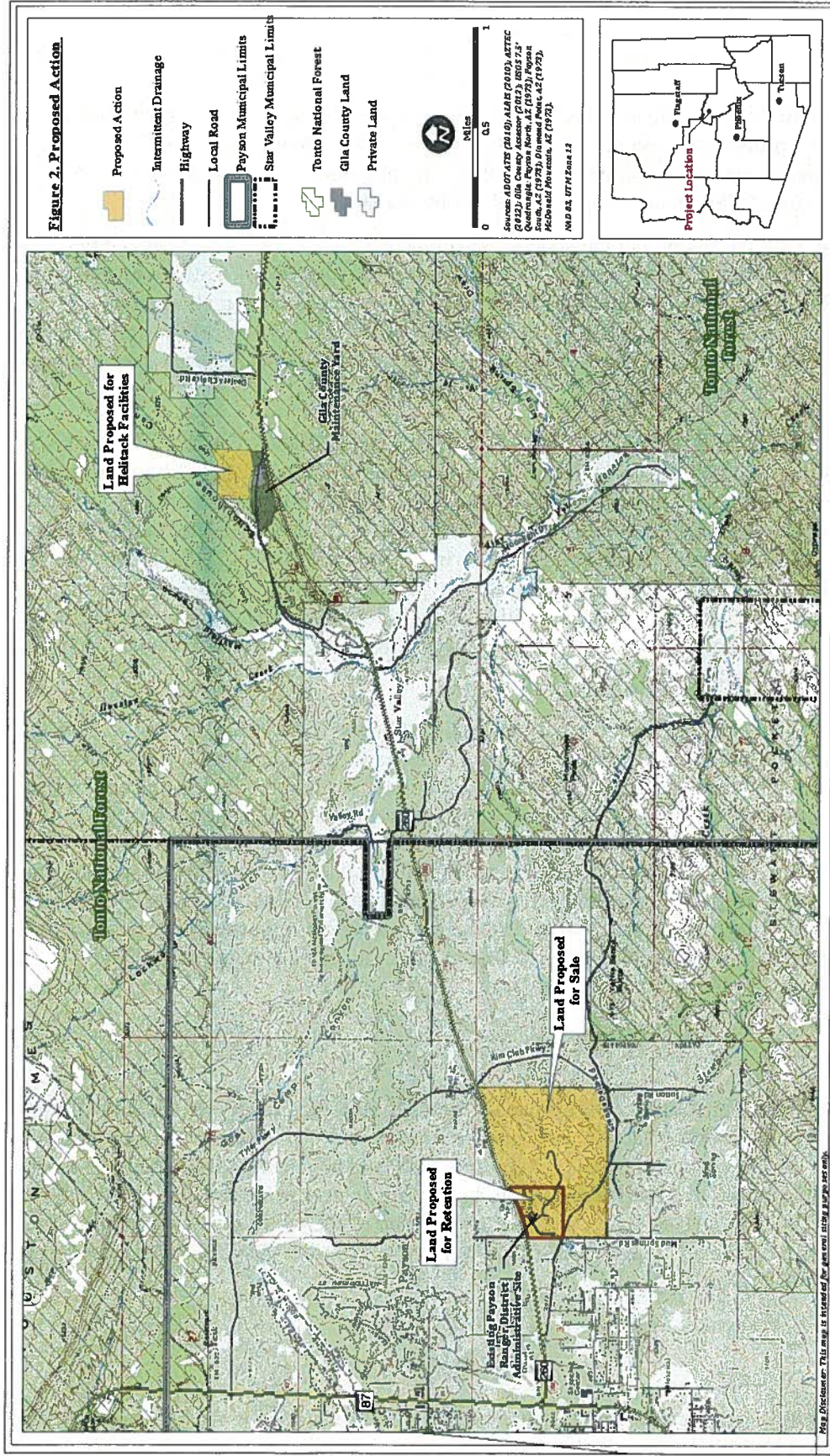
The Land and Resource Management Plan for the Tonto National Forest (USDA Forest Service 1985, as amended) (Forest Plan) has defined management area and prescription area direction. The analyses of effects summarized in the EA (pages 28-65) and detailed in the specialist reports describe effects that are both beneficial and adverse. Although some effects would occur as a result of this land sale and consolidating land ownership for facility improvements, there would be no significant irreversible resource commitments or irretrievable loss of wildlife habitat, soil productivity, or water quality beyond those previously disclosed in the final environmental impact statement (FEIS) for the Forest Plan¹ and as such is not considered significant. While both beneficial and adverse effects are important, they are not significant, in either context or intensity, to the degree that an environmental impact statement is warranted for this Project.

A: Context

The context of the Payson Ranger District Administrative Site Sale and Facilities Project is limited to the local area encompassed by the proposed action and lands in close proximity to the construction of new facilities (figure 1). The project proposes to sell 253 acres of NFS land adjacent to the 43 acres retained for the proposed new administrative facilities in Payson. In addition, a new fire management helitack facility would be constructed on NFS land adjacent to the north end of the Gila County maintenance yard on East Highway 260 (approximately 1 mile east of Star Valley and 4.5 miles east of Payson). No other private or public lands would be affected.

¹1985. Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Tonto National Forest. Land and Resource Management Plan (as amended), Tonto National Forest, Payson, AZ, 271 p.

Payson Ranger District Administrative Site Sale and Facilities Project



The short-term, long-term, and cumulative effects are documented in the EA (pages 28-65). The scale of the project is not indicative of significant effects beyond those already considered in the FEIS for the Forest Plan (1985). Numerous sales of NFS lands have occurred across the country. Short-term impacts during construction activities would occur; there would be long-term potential for providing quality administrative facilities that provide improved services to the public, in addition to meeting administrative service needs.

B: Intensity Factors

B.1: Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse

If no action is taken at this time, the purpose and need and objectives for the project to sell 253 acres of NFS land, and construct new administrative facilities and a new fire management helitack facility would not be accomplished. The current administrative facilities would remain: these facilities are inadequate and outdated for ranger district staffing and fire organization and storage needs, and do not meet current standards, including Americans with Disabilities Act and Architectural Barriers Act Accessibility Guidelines (EA, pages v, 1, 3 and 21).

Under the proposed action, potential adverse impacts would be minimized or eliminated by implementing project design features (EA, pages 16-18). Some short-term adverse effects to some resources, including visitor experience, recreation, watershed, and animal species may result from ground and noise disturbance and changes to some habitat conditions. However, Forest Plan standards and project-specific resource protection measures have been designed to protect and improve resource conditions (EA, pages 19-21).

The proposed action will adversely affect cultural resources on the proposed land to convey. A Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) was signed on July 26, 2013 by the Forest Supervisor and the State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO), and a Treatment Plan for data recovery excavations has been developed in consultation with State Historic Preservation Office and the Tribes to resolve the adverse effect. As part of that consultation, an ethnohistoric study has been undertaken by the Hopi Tribe to specifically identify their concerns with the proposed action that they may also be addressed by the data recovery effort.

The land proposed for retention would not be consistent with the assigned "retention" VQO (visual quality objective) since human activities are evident to the casual forest visitor. A non-significant Forest Plan amendment would be required to revise the VQO maps to change the VQO two classification levels below "retention" to "modification." This would be more typical of administrative sites and developed areas and more consistent with "urban" ROS class. The new facilities would adhere to project design features. Potential adverse effects of this project are expected to be within thresholds that historically have not resulted in impacts that would be considered significant, even when considered separately from the beneficial effects that would occur.

Beneficial effects have not been used to offset or compensate for potential adverse effects. Beneficial effects would occur by improving public services and facilities at the Payson Ranger Station through the development of a modern and spatially sufficient building. Visitor contacts would also be improved with restroom facilities, adequate parking, and improved access to Forest staff. In addition, the sale of a portion of this land is desirable to consolidate land ownership patterns around the town of Payson. Long-term effects would be beneficial and include improved visitor and public facilities and services along SR 260 in Payson and Star Valley. Table 1 displays the indicators used to compare the resource effects of implementing the proposed action.

Table 1. Resource effects for the proposed action

Effects Indicator	Proposed Action
Vegetation	The Forest Plan and Agency direction includes conducting noxious weed assessments prior to ground-disturbing actions and reducing the risk of introducing or spreading noxious weeds. Field visits were conducted in April, May, and August, 2012. No invasive or noxious weeds were observed.
Noise	Helicopter noise within the project area would occur; however, the effects would be minor and short in duration because they would occur only during helicopter operation. There would be no helicopter noise at night and all predicted noise increases would be within established thresholds. Minor cumulative effects are anticipated in combination with other past, present, and future projects, but these actions would also be subject to Federal, state, and local regulations to reduce substantial cumulative effects from noise.
Lightning	Lighting levels would increase on the land proposed for helitack facilities, but this increase is expected to be minor. Light would not likely be visible from nearby residences, would adhere to project design features, and if feasible; would follow the Town of Star Valley’s dark sky ordinance. Lighting would not measurably change on land proposed for retention because new Forest Service facilities would use minimal lighting, would adhere to project design features and if feasible; the Town of Payson’s facility design guidelines.
Land Use and Economics	The land proposed for helitack facilities or the land proposed for retention would be unlikely to negatively impact adjacent residential property values. The configuration and type of facilities envisioned for the land proposed for retention would be consistent with what exists on the administrative site today. The facilities envisioned for the land proposed for helitack facilities would be situated over 0.5 mile from any residential development, and each residential property currently bordering undeveloped Forest lands would still have this buffer.
Cultural Resources	The proposed action will adversely affect cultural resources on NFS land. Therefore, a Memorandum of Agreement has been implemented, and a treatment plan to resolve the adverse effect through data recovery excavation has been approved in consultation with State Historic Preservation Office and the Tribes
Visitor Experience	Only minor effects to overall recreational use, experience, or access in the project area would occur. Long-term, moderate beneficial effects would result with improved visitor facilities and services on the land proposed for retention. Short-term effects during the construction period would be minimized with implementation of project design features (chapter 2).
Visual Quality	Land proposed for helitack facilities would comply with the assigned visual quality objective (VQOs) of “partial retention” and new facilities would adhere to project design features. Land proposed for retention would not be consistent with the assigned “retention” VQO since human activities are evident to the casual Forest visitor. A Forest Plan amendment would be required to revise the VQO maps to change the VQO two classification levels below “retention” to “modification.” This would be more typical of administrative sites and developed areas and more consistent with “urban” ROS class. New facilities would adhere to project design features.
Air Quality	The proposed action is likely to cause direct and indirect effects to air quality within the project area. However, the effects are minor and short term in nature, would occur during the construction period only, and would be minimized by implementation of project design features.

For specific details by resource, see EA, pages 28-65.

B.2: The degree to which the proposed action affects public health or safety

By following the project design features (EA, pages 16-18), public health and safety would be protected. Prior to any demolition of structures, a certified building inspector would sample all materials suspect of containing asbestos or lead-based paint within structures. Any regulated asbestos would be removed and a National Emissions Standards for Hazardous Air Pollutants notification would be submitted to Arizona Department of Environmental Quality. Painted surfaces would be tested for lead prior to disturbance and treated accordingly. In addition, the new helitack facility would include provisions for appropriate refueling of helicopters on site to ensure all appropriate safety measures are in place to store fuel and

minimize spillage. To ensure proper drainage and protection of ephemeral water ways, and to minimize soil movement and run-off containing hazardous substances such as fuels and oils, an approved list of best management practices (in consultation with the Forest hydrologist) during Forest Service facility engineering design and construction would be implemented.

B.3: Unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, parklands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas

There are unique historic and cultural sites present within the project area. All Tribes with affiliation to the area have been consulted and their concerns identified. A Memorandum of Agreement between the Tonto National Forest and the State Historic Preservation Officer was signed on July 26, 2013, that clearly describes mitigation measures for all effected eligible cultural resource sites (EA, pages 45-47, 54-55). In addition, an approved Treatment Plan for data recovery excavations has been developed in consultation with State Historic Preservation Office and the Tribes to resolve the adverse effect and address Tribal concerns. All fieldwork directed by the treatment plan will be completed prior to the sale of the National Forest System land.

There are no other known unique characteristics associated with the project. There are no parks, prime farmland, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers or ecologically critical areas within the project area.

B.4: Degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial

It is not anticipated that the land proposed for helitack facilities or the land proposed for retention would negatively impact adjacent residential property values. The configuration and type of facilities envisioned for the land proposed for retention would be consistent with what exists on the administrative site today. The facilities envisioned for the land proposed for helitack facilities would be situated over 0.5 mile from any residential development, and each residential property currently bordering undeveloped Forest lands would still have this buffer.

The land proposed for sale would be transferred out of Federal ownership and we assume that this land would change from undeveloped land to developed land. Prior to any future changes in zoning and eventual construction of facilities, opportunities for public involvement would be afforded through the town of Payson. The town of Payson 2003 General Plan Update encourages compatible development that preserves the property values within and adjacent to the respective SR 260 Growth Corridor. These effects were discussed in chapter 3 of the EA, pages 35-43.

B.5: Degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks

The impacts from building new facilities and selling 253 acres can be predicted and have been disclosed in the Environmental Assessment. The Forest Service as an agency has considerable experience with this type of activity. Monitoring would be conducted to achieve desired conditions (EA, pages 28-65).

B.6: Degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration

The Arizona National Forest Improvement Act of 2000, Public Law 106-458 gave the Tonto National Forest authority to sell this parcel of land. Similar actions have been completed on other National Forest

System lands using existing laws and regulations granting this activity and establishing the process to complete these actions. Activities proposed in this project are site specific to this project (EA, pages 1-5, 9-15).

B.7: Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts

The interdisciplinary team designed the proposed action so that site-specific adverse cumulative effects to sensitive resources would be unlikely. Long-term impacts would be positive by improving public services and facilities at the Payson Ranger Station through the development of a modern and spatially sufficient building. The proposed action would protect the Payson Ranger District Administrative Site Sale and Facilities Project area's watershed, plants, wildlife, visual quality, and other sensitive resources.

The cumulative effects from past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future forest actions on this project have been considered in the document (EA, pages 28-65) and in the biological evaluation (Rybcznski 2012a) and in the specialists reports prepared for this project (they are incorporated by reference). Based on the extensive resource survey work completed during the planning process and the way in which the project is designed, resources in the analysis area are expected to be protected during implementation and improved and sustained in the long term. Resource protection measures, best management practices, and other project-specific design features of the proposed action are listed in the Payson Ranger District Administrative Site Sale and Facilities Project (table 1, pages 16-18). For specific details by resource, see EA, pages 28-65.

B.8: Degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources

The action will be mitigated (EA, page 16-18) to resolve adverse effects on districts, sites, highways, structures, or other objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. Fourteen cultural resource sites are located in the parcel. Eight are eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places of which six will require treatment; the other two have been previously documented. Two are ineligible. The remaining four sites require archaeological testing to determine if they are eligible for listing. A Memorandum of Agreement between the Tonto National Forest and the State Historic Preservation Officer was signed on July 26, 2013 that will guide the implementation of the approved treatment plan for all affected eligible cultural resource sites within the area of potential effects prior to transferring land out of Federal ownership (EA, page 17, 53-55).

B.9: Degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species Act of 1973

There are no rare plants or federally listed threatened or endangered plant species known to occur or with the potential to occur in the project area (EA, page 50). There are no federally listed species or habitat for federally listed species present in the project area and no designated or proposed critical habitat within or near the project locations (EA, page 52).

B.10: Whether the action threatens a violation of Federal, state, or local law or other requirements imposed for protection of the environment

The action will not violate Federal, state, and local laws or requirements for the protection of the environment. All applicable laws and regulations were considered in the EA (pages 1, 16-18, 53). The action is consistent with:

The *Tonto National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan* (Forest Plan, USDA Forest Service 1985, as amended) prescribes construction or reconstruction of capital improvements to support fire, administrative, and other multifunctional activities and to maintain or upgrade these facilities to abate serious health hazards and/or prevent deterioration (USDA Forest Service 1985, replacement page 136 and 143).

The *Forest Service Facilities Management Strategy* (USDA Forest Service 1999) identified the need to reduce each Forest's deferred maintenance costs and take a corporate approach regarding the management of Forest Service facilities.

The *Arizona National Forest Improvement Act of 2000* (Public Law 106-458) authorizes the Forest Service to convey (sell or exchange) certain administrative sites in national forests in Arizona. The 296-acre Payson Administrative Site is specifically listed in this Act for conveyance.

The *Tonto National Forest Facilities Master Plan in 2002* (USDA Forest Service 2002) includes recommendations for the Payson Ranger District facilities. In May 2011, and February 2012, a more site-specific preliminary project analysis was prepared (USDA Forest Service 2011 and 2012) that included an in-depth evaluation of administrative needs and multiple options for how to address these needs.

Decision and Rationale

Decision

Based upon my review of the analysis of the proposed activities in the Payson Ranger District Administrative Site Sale and Facilities Project Environmental Assessment (EA), I have decided to implement the proposed action alternative as described on pages 9-18 of the EA.

This decision notice documents my decision and reasons for this decision. The Project's purpose and need for action provides the focus and scope for the proposed action and alternatives. Given the purpose and need, I have reviewed the alternatives and carefully considered the public comments received from the EA. Public feedback, the analysis disclosed in the EA, information contained in the project record, and management direction and policy considerations contributed collectively to determining the selected alternative.

The EA was conducted in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). The EA analyzes and discloses effects of a no-action alternative and the proposed action² to construct new facilities and sell 253 acres not needed for current or future Forest Service needs. It also described specific mitigation and monitoring requirements that will be implemented as part of the selected action. The EA is available for review at the Payson Ranger District office, 1009 E Hwy 260, Payson, AZ 85541,

² No alternatives to the proposed action were submitted or developed that met the purpose and need, therefore there is only a proposed action and no action alternative

the Tonto National Forest Supervisors Office, 2324 E. McDowell Rd, Phoenix, AZ 85006, and at http://www.fs.fed.us/nepa/nepa_project_exp.php?project=36893.

Rationale for Choosing the Proposed Action

The current Payson Ranger District facilities are comprised of six different offices and a warehouse, approximately 23 portable storage containers, and buildings and sheds scattered throughout the compound. The facilities are poorly configured, outdated, overcrowded and in need of substantial maintenance and repairs or replacement to bring them up to current standards. Parking is not adequate for the number of employees and visitors. Current facilities are not energy-efficient and are costly to heat and cool. Because the buildings are scattered throughout the compound it creates inefficient management and communication for employees and visitors. In addition, the current helitack facilities are currently located at the Payson Airport. The ranger district is paying approximately \$40,000 per year for modular office rental at the airport. The current site is not large enough to accommodate all of the current and future needs of the helitack facilities and equipment.

This decision will allow the construction of a new administrative office and associated facilities, fire facilities, and adequate storage. New fire management helitack facilities and a bunkhouse will be constructed on NFS lands adjacent to the north end of the Gila County maintenance yard approximately 4.5 miles east of Payson along Highway 260. To pay for construction of the proposed new administrative facilities, 253 acres of the current administrative site that is not needed for current or future Forest Service needs will be sold.

This alternative meets the purpose and need for increased safety, reduce operation and deferred maintenance costs, increase management efficiency, increase energy efficiency and improve public service for the Payson Ranger District facilities.

The proposed action alternative would require a non-significant amendment to the Tonto National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan in order to designate a new 31-acre Forest Service administrative site for new fire management helitack facilities on NFS land north of the Gila County maintenance yard, and revise the visual resource inventory (VQO) maps to change the land proposed for retention from a "retention" VQO to a "modification" VQO as defined in the Forest Plan, appendix J.

Project Location

Section 2, T.10N, R.10E; & Section 29, T.11N, R.11E

The Payson Ranger District administrative facilities are located at 1009 East State Highway 260 in Payson, Arizona, on the Tonto National Forest in Gila County. The existing helitack facility is separate from the main administrative complex and is located near the Payson Airport (figure 1). The new fire management helitack facility would be constructed on NFS land adjacent to the north end of the Gila County maintenance yard on East Highway 260 (approximately 1 mile east of Star Valley and 4.5 miles east of Payson).

Action to Be Implemented

This alternative would:

1. Construct a new administrative office and associated facilities, covered storage, and fire facilities on 43 acres of the current 296-acre administrative site in Payson. This is referred to in the EA as "land proposed for retention."

2. Construct new fire management helitack facilities on 31 acres (approximately 5 acres of construction and 26 acres around site) of NFS land adjacent to the north end of the Gila County maintenance yard approximately 4 to 5 miles east of Payson along Highway 260. The surrounding 26 acres would be included within the designated administrative site, but would not be developed as part of this project. This is referred to in the EA as “land proposed for helitack facilities.”
3. Sell 253 acres of the current administrative site that is not needed for current or future Forest Service needs to pay for construction of the proposed new administrative facilities. This is referred to in the EA as “land proposed for sale.”

Forest Plan Design Criteria and Monitoring

Project Design Criteria

Project-specific design features, such as Forest Plan standards and best management practices, are employed to protect resources during implementation of proposed activities (EA, table 1, pages 16-18).

Monitoring

Monitoring will be implemented for this project as described in the Tonto National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan, 1985 (as amended), chapter 5, Monitoring Plan.

Other Alternatives Considered

In addition to the selected alternative, I considered the no-action alternative. Under the no-action alternative, we would continue to use the Forest Plan and other agency direction to guide management of the project area. We would not sell any NFS land and no revenue would be created; the 296-acre parcel would stay in Federal ownership. We would not build any new Payson Ranger District administrative facilities because of the limited funding. A comparison of these alternatives can be found in chapter 2 of the EA on pages 19-21.

I did not choose this alternative because it did not meet the purpose and need for action or address project objectives as stated above.

Alternatives Considered but eliminated from Detailed Study

Three additional alternatives were considered during the planning process, but had not been included in the environmental assessment for detailed study (EA, pages 21-27).

Public Suggestions for Alternative Components

1. *Set aside an area for walks; we currently use the area south and north of Granite Dells and east of Mud Springs Road.*

This area is within the Land Proposed for Sale and specific design and layout for future facilities on the sold land is outside the scope of this project.

2. *Consider sharing parking as a means to reduce the total hardscape on the site.*

The specific design and layout for future facilities on land proposed for sale is outside the scope of this project. It is likely that the timing of the construction of new Forest Service facilities would be different

than the timing of potential development on sold land; therefore, it would be difficult to plan for shared parking. For this reason, this alternative component was dismissed from further detailed analysis.

3. *For the proposed helitack facility, consider using the same access road as is used for the county maintenance yard and not using Dealer's Choice Road.*

The proposed action for the fire facility near the county maintenance yard already includes using the same access road as the county and not using Dealer's Choice Road. It was determined that Dealer's Choice Road was not the most favorable access route to use. For this reason, this suggestion was dismissed from further detailed analysis.

Alternate Sites Considered for Payson Ranger Station Administrative Facilities and Helitack Facility

Five possible sites for the Payson Ranger District administrative site and the helitack facility were initially explored and considered during an April 2011 "Choosing by Advantages" process, as documented in the Preliminary Project Analysis (USDA Forest Service 2011). During this process, five factors (site visibility for public access, facility sustainability, public and employee safety and health, management efficiency, and positive and professional Agency image) were used along with estimated costs to evaluate and compare each possible site. The reasons we dismissed these sites from detailed analysis include: poor visibility, the requirement for acceleration and deceleration lanes due to current high-travel speeds, poor site location, and higher development costs. A detailed explanation is described in chapter 2.

Alternate Sites Considered for a Separate Helitack Facility

Four possible sites for a separate helitack facility were also initially explored and considered during the April 2011 "Choosing by Advantages" process, as documented in the Preliminary Project Analysis (USDA Forest Service 2011). The reasons we dismissed these sites from detailed analysis include: the Forest needing to purchase additional property, the Forest having to still rent space for the helicopter from the airport, and the response time to the helicopter is not adequate, and safety. A detailed explanation is described in chapter 2.

Public Involvement

The proposal was listed in the Schedule of Proposed Actions in October 2011, and updated periodically during the analysis. The scoping letter was mailed on September 14, 2011, with a detailed purpose and need and proposed action description to 182 interested and affected parties including private landowners, business owners, agencies, and organizations. This same information was mailed to nine American Indian Tribes on November 14, 2011. The information also was posted on the Tonto National Forest website. A public open house to provide project information and answer questions was held at the Best Western Motel in Payson on September 24, 2011. This meeting was attended by 71 people and 63 comment letters were received. Comments from the scoping and the open house were analyzed to identify issues. Three key issues of concern were identified: (1) a change in ambient noise levels that may have the potential to affect residents living nearby; (2) a change in lighting in the area that may have the potential to affect residents living nearby; and (3) constructing new facilities on currently undeveloped land may affect property values for residents living nearby (EA, pages 6-7). To address these concerns, the Forest Service created design criteria to minimize these issues (EA pages 9-18).

The archaeological survey report was submitted to the Arizona State Historic Preservation Officer for consultation under the review process required by Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act.

SHPO concurred with the findings and recommendations of the report on May 9, 2013, documentation of which is located in the project file. From this, a Treatment Plan was developed and further consultation carried out with SHPO that resulted in a Memorandum of Agreement between the Tonto National Forest and the State Historic Preservation Officer was signed on July 26, 2013.

Both the survey report and the Treatment Plan were also submitted to all affiliated Tribes for their review, documentation of which is located in the project file. In response to comments by the Hopi Tribe, an ethnohistoric study has been undertaken by the Tribe to specifically identify their concerns with the proposed action that they may also be addressed by the data recovery effort, the report for which was completed and submitted to the Forest on August 2, 2013.

The draft EA was completed and the Request for Comments Letter was sent out on December 11, 2012 to 182 interested and affected parties, including private landowners, business owners, agencies, and organizations. This same information was mailed to nine American Indian Tribes on December 14, 2012. Availability of the EA for a 30-day notice and comment period was advertised as a legal notice in the *Payson Roundup* newspaper on December 11, 2012, consistent with 36 CFR 215.5, and through publication on the Forest website. The comment period closed on January 11, 2013. Refer to appendix A-EA-Request for Comments Summary; for a list of commenters on the Draft EA, and the Forest Service consideration of these comments.

Incorporated by Reference

My decision incorporates by reference the following documents:

- A Cultural Resources Survey of Approximately 360 Acres for the Proposed Payson Ranger District Administration Site Sale and Helitack Base Construction, Tonto National Forest, Payson Ranger District, Gila County, Arizona (Langan 2012)
- Payson Administration Site Preliminary Data for Waters of the U.S. Report (MacIntosh 2012)
- Phase I Environmental Site Assessment: Payson Ranger District Administrative Site Sale (Hoppman 2012)
- Environmental Noise Report (Shu 2012)
- Small Project Biological Evaluation (Rybczynski and Wilcox 2012a)
- Migratory Bird Analysis (Rybczynski and Wilcox 2012b)
- Management Indicator Species Analysis (Rybczynski 2012c)
- Environmental Assessment for Payson Ranger District Administrative Site Sale and Facilities Outdoor Lighting Report (Lohide 2012)
- Scenery (Visual Quality) Report (Jones 2012)
- Groundwater & Water Rights Report (Loomis 2012)
- Recreation (Visitor Experience) Report (Hohl 2012)
- Lands and Special Uses Report (Hoffman 2012)
- Mineral Potential Reports (Harbour 2012a and 2012b)

- USDA Forest Service. 1984, as amended. Land and Resource Management Plan for the Tonto National Forest, Phoenix, AZ.
- US Forest Service. 1985. Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Tonto National Forest. Land and Resource Management Plan (as amended), Tonto National Forest, Payson, AZ, 271 p.

Expected Implementation Date

If no appeal is received, implementation of this decision may occur on, but not before, 5 business days from the close of the appeal filing period. If an appeal is received, implementation may not occur for 15 business days following the date of appeal disposition.

Administrative Review (Appeal) Opportunities

This decision is subject to appeal pursuant to 36 CFR 215. Individuals or organizations who provided comment or otherwise expressed interest in the proposed action during the 30-day comment period may appeal. The appeal must be filed (regular mail, fax, email, hand-delivery, express delivery, or messenger service) with the appropriate Appeal Deciding Officer. Submit appeals to:

Cal Joyner, Appeal Deciding Officer
Attn: Appeals & Litigation
U.S. Forest Service, Southwestern Region
333 Broadway SE
Albuquerque, NM 87102

Appeals may be faxed to: 505-842-3800.

If hand delivered, the appeal must be received at the above address during business hours (Monday through Friday 8:00am to 4:30pm), excluding holidays. Electronic appeals may be submitted to: **appeals-southwestern-regional-office@fs.fed.us** (.doc, .rtf, .pdf, or .txt formats only). The appeal must have an identifiable name attached or verification of identity will be required. Names and addresses of appellants will become part of the public record. A scanned signature may serve as verification on electronic appeals.

Appeals, including attachments, must be in writing, fully consistent with 36 CFR 215.14, and filed (postmarked) within 45 days following the date this notice is published in the newspaper of record, the *Payson Roundup*. This publication date is the exclusive means for calculating the time to file an appeal. Those wishing to appeal this decision should not rely upon dates or timeframes provided by any other source.

Contact Information

For further information concerning the Project, contact Rebecca Hoffman during normal business hours at the address listed below:

Rebecca Hoffman
Lands and Special Uses Program Manager
Tonto National Forest
2324 E. McDowell Rd.
Phoenix, Arizona 85006
(602) 225-5257

NEIL BOSWORTH
Forest Supervisor
Tonto National Forest

Date

Administrative Review (Appeal) Opportunities

This decision is subject to appeal pursuant to 36 CFR 215. Individuals or organizations who provided comment or otherwise expressed interest in the proposed action during the 30-day comment period may appeal. The appeal must be filed (regular mail, fax, email, hand-delivery, express delivery, or messenger service) with the appropriate Appeal Deciding Officer. Submit appeals to:

Cal Joyner, Appeal Deciding Officer
Attn: Appeals & Litigation
U.S. Forest Service, Southwestern Region
333 Broadway SE
Albuquerque, NM 87102

Appeals may be faxed to: 505-842-3800.

If hand delivered, the appeal must be received at the above address during business hours (Monday through Friday 8:00am to 4:30pm), excluding holidays. Electronic appeals may be submitted to: **appeals-southwestern-regional-office@fs.fed.us** (.doc, .rtf, .pdf, or .txt formats only). The appeal must have an identifiable name attached or verification of identity will be required. Names and addresses of appellants will become part of the public record. A scanned signature may serve as verification on electronic appeals.

Appeals, including attachments, must be in writing, fully consistent with 36 CFR 215.14, and filed (postmarked) within 45 days following the date this notice is published in the newspaper of record, the *Payson Roundup*. This publication date is the exclusive means for calculating the time to file an appeal. Those wishing to appeal this decision should not rely upon dates or timeframes provided by any other source.

Contact Information

For further information concerning the Project, contact Rebecca Hoffman during normal business hours at the address listed below:

Rebecca Hoffman
Lands and Special Uses Program Manager
Tonto National Forest
2324 E. McDowell Rd.
Phoenix, Arizona 85006
(602) 225-5257



NEIL BOSWORTH
Forest Supervisor
Tonto National Forest

8/9/13
Date

