



Comments
Tonto National Forest Land Management Plan
Assessment Report and Need for Change
November 4, 2016

Assessment Report:

Topics that were not fully addressed in the draft Tonto National Forest (TNF) Assessment report (August 2016) include:

- The important characteristics of quality fish and wildlife habitat for major fish and game species such as elk, deer, sheep, turkey, quail, native and non-native sportfish (e.g., vegetation type, composition and diversity, security cover, access to water, instream flow levels, water quality needs, etc.).
- The current status of the existing conditions in comparison to the important habitat characteristics identified above.
- The location and desired attributes of migrations corridors for big game.
- The species and areas that sportsmen value most for hunting and fishing. The recently released Arizona Sportsmen's Values Map database is available [here](#).
- The economic importance and contribution of hunting and fishing to local economies and communities
- The specific contributions of sportsmen volunteers and the Arizona Game and Fish Department (AGFD) to improve wildlife habitat and engage youth in hunting and fishing

Need for Change

The new TNF Land Management Plan should:

Category A: Ecological Sustainability

1. Minimize the risk of catastrophic wild fires through forest thinning (i.e., 4FRI) and aggressive use of control burns. These actions are needed to restore forest ecosystems so they will be resilient and meet the habitat needs for a diversity of native plants, fish and wildlife
2. Provide direction for controlling/reducing/reversing the spread of nonnative invasive species
3. Include desired forest conditions and related management practices that maintains/enhances wildlife linkage, movement and migratory corridors
4. Adjust plan direction to accommodate climate change impacts

Category B: Social, cultural and Economic Sustainability

1. Recognize and enhance the role of the TNF in supporting local economies through service based outdoor recreation activities (e.g., hunting and fishing) and responsible, sustainable commodity production (e.g., timber, livestock)
2. Address how volunteers will be effectively utilized in forest and fish and wildlife management and citizen science/monitoring

Category C: Forest Wide Management

1. Address how Issues concerning overuse and human impacts will be managed consistent with available staff and budgets (these impacts will only get worse as the Phoenix metro area continues grow and spiral upward)
2. Address how critical shortfalls in funding and staffing that are needed to adaptively manage the forest and increasing recreational use/abuse will be addressed. This should include innovative funding solutions if adequate Federal funding is not provided by Congress
3. Include strategies for managing Wilderness Areas that maintains and protects wilderness values while providing flexibility to protect and manage fish and wildlife. Examples of needed management flexibility includes allowing for aquatic resource management (e.g., physical removal of noxious weeds, application of chemicals for weed or fish removal), construction or reconstruction and maintenance of habitat structures, allowing for wildlife water development/maintenance sometimes by limited use of motorized vehicle or helicopter.
4. Include a sportsmen “vision” for the TNF that protects backcountry lands, provides reasonable access, restores streams and native trout population, enhances fish and wildlife habitat, provides and protects functioning wildlife corridors, etc. (Sportsmen would welcome the opportunity to create such a vision for inclusion in the new TNF Plan).
5. Incorporate the principles of adaptive management into forest planning and management.
6. Provide consistent direction of use of motorized big game retrieval (MBGR) and dispersed camping across national forests in Arizona
7. Align the Tonto NF Plan with the AGFD strategic plans
8. Provide recreational shooting opportunities consistent with resource protection and visitor safety
9. Promote the use of volunteers to conduct citizen science/monitoring and to enhance and/or restore fish and wildlife habitat
10. Provide increased law enforcement and education to address irresponsible target shooting, OHV damage and unauthorized trails and similar problems. These problems will continue to get worse until the Forest Service and other agencies make it a priority to address these problems.

These comments are supported by the following organizations:

1. Arizona Elk Society, Steve Clark
2. Arizona Sportsmen for Wildlife Conservation, Jim Unmacht
3. Arizona Trout Unlimited—State Council, Steve LaFalce
4. Arizona Trout Unlimited--Gila Chapter, Joe Miller
5. Arizona Chapter, National Wild Turkey Federation, Steve Sams
6. Backcountry Hunter and Anglers, Tim Brass
7. Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership, John Hamill