Tonto National Forest Plan Revision
Needs to Change Meetings
Executive Summary

This summary provides an overview of community workshops convened by the Tonto National Forest in seven forest communities in September and October 2016. The meetings focused on the Forest Plan Revision and obtaining feedback on the Draft Assessment in order to create Needs to Change Statements[1]. A total of 142 participants attended the Needs To Change Community Meetings in Cave Creek, Globe, Mesa, Payson, Phoenix, Tonto Basin, and Young, Arizona.

Participants provided feedback on how the forest could change or improve work in three general categories: Ecological Sustainability; Social, Cultural and Economic Sustainability; and Forest-wide Management. All feedback was noted and compiled for the Tonto National Forest to use in developing needs to change statements. Full notes from each of the meetings is available on the plan revision website www.tontoplan.org.

The objectives for the community meetings were to provide an overview of the Plan Revision process (including Needs to Change), share findings of the Draft Assessment and discuss how it will guide development of the revised Plan. Participants were also informed about how to comment on the Draft Assessment and Needs to Change statements both during and after the meeting.

CATEGORY A: ECOLOGICAL SUSTAINABILITY

Topics that emerged from the Ecological Sustainability discussions included *watershed health, forest health, fire and fire management, invasive species, water resources protection, wildlife, grazing and rangeland management, climate change, science and monitoring, restoration, forest thinning,* and *preservation concerns*.

Most discussions across the communities centered on *watershed* and *forest health* characteristics, the danger of large fires and using fire as a management tool, and the protection of local water resources. Species and species management were prevalent topics across most meetings, this included wildlife species and invasive species (both terrestrial and aquatic); much of the *invasive species* conversations were tied to fire discussions and centered on post-fire vegetation.

CATEGORY B: SOCIAL, CULTURAL AND ECONOMIC SUSTAINABILITY

Topics that emerged from the Social, Cultural and Economic Sustainability discussions included *recreation, cultural resources, education, law enforcement, economics, events, multiple use, access, population and resource concerns, grazing, outreach, managed use, public involvement, communities, stewardship,* and *road maintenance*.

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[1] What is a needs to change statement? Needs to change help define the proposed action, purpose and need, and decision framework for the environmental analysis related to the planning process. They are statements about what in our current forest plan needs to change.

The topic of *recreation* - its impacts and sustainability, was actively discussed at every community workshop, many of these discussions also focused on safety for all recreation types and that there may need to be distinct areas for specific types of recreation (e.g. shooting). Discussions within the topic of *recreation* also addressed *access* and concerns surrounding limiting forest access to communities. *Access* was also addressed as a concern regarding *cultural resources* and the perception that with enhanced access vandalism or cultural resource degradation would increase. The topic of *enforcement* was raised as its own topic of concern and in many other contexts including *recreation*, *cultural resources*, *multiple use* and *population and resource concerns.*

Education and *outreach* were highly discussed at most meetings especially in the context of youth and how to get young people involved in public lands. There were also many conversations about the number of visitors to the Tonto National Forest that are not from neighboring communities and that some education needs to be directed at those people too.

CATEGORY C: FOREST-WIDE MANAGEMENT

Topics that emerged from Forest-wide Management discussions included *collaboration and partnerships, education, monitoring, Forest Service staffing and internal workings, Forest Plan components, technology, communication, enforcement, transparency, resource protection,* and *project management*.

While *Forest Service staffing and internal workings, communication* and *transparency* are listed as separate topics they were clearly intertwined when discussed at the community workshops. Workshops participants stated again and again that the Forest Service needs to better communicate within their agency as well as to the public, this was also brought up in the context of Forest Service turn-over in personnel and staff working on the forest. *Transparency* came up in most meetings especially regarding how the Forest Service uses comments from the public in decision making and how they can better acknowledge community input throughout the Forest Plan Revision process. The concept of the Forest Service maintaining working relationships and partnerships with existing volunteer groups was brought up at most meetings.

FOCUS AREAS AND CONCLUSIONS

Participants at each meeting were asked to indicate which topic they felt were the most important for the Tonto National Forest to focus on. The results showed that communities want the Forest Service to "emphasize on-going collaborative efforts and partnerships while striving to develop new long lasting relationships" above all else. This was also evident through the extent to which the discussions revolved around collaboration and partnerships and how the Forest Service could better be involved and foster these among user groups. The second most important theme that was voted for was "Maintain, improve, or restore ecosystems on the Tonto National Forest."

These meetings provided a great opportunity for the communities of the Tonto National Forest to voice their concerns and opinions about the forest resources and management. As mentioned in most meetings, it is important for the Tonto National Forest to take into consideration the comprehensive statements of the communities and work to incorporate them into a transparent and updated Forest Plan[i].

TIMELINE

The Final Forest Plan Revision Assessment will be approved in late December 2016 to early January 2017, and the Needs to Change document will be available for public viewing during that time.

APPENDIX

Draft Assessment Categories and Themes

Category A. Ecological Sustainability
- Theme 1. Maintain, improve, or restore ecosystems on the Tonto National Forest
- Theme 2. Provide for plant and animal habitat diversity, including at-risk species
- Theme 3. Increase resiliency of ecosystems and incorporate adaptive management
- Theme 4. Sustainably manage water resources

Category B. Social, Cultural and Economic Sustainability
- Theme 5. Facilitate accessible, sustainable, and diverse recreation opportunities to a growing public
- Theme 6. Preserve the unique cultural and historic character of the land while providing opportunities to engage with local heritage
- Theme 7. Ensure the sustainability of key ecosystem services and forest attributes that contribute to values associated with the forest
- Theme 8. Recognize and enhance the Tonto National Forest's role in contributing to local economies

Category C. Forest-wide Management
- Theme 9. Emphasize on-going collaborative efforts and partnerships while striving to develop new long lasting relationships.
- Theme 10. Develop a monitoring strategy that provides information for rapid responses to changing conditions
- Theme 11. Allow for adapting to fluctuations in forest budgets over the life of the plan when planning towards desired conditions.

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[i] All notes from the community meetings can be found here: http://www.tontoplan.org/public-involvement/needs-for-change