

**File Code:** 1950-1

**Date:** July 11, 2003

Dear Participant,

The Mormon Lake Ranger District of the Coconino National Forest is proposing a project called the Munds Park Roads and Trails System. There are several elements of the project that may be of interest to you as neighbors and users of the area.

This project proposal is for a Multi-Use Roads and Trails system that will offer motorized and non-motorized trail/road opportunities on Forest Service lands immediately adjacent to the community of Munds Park. The purpose of this roads and trails system is to provide quality experiences for recreationists visiting the forest surrounding the Munds Park area while maintaining forest resources.

Our concern is that as the community of Munds Park has grown, as well as recreational use in general, the forest area adjacent to the community is suffering resource impacts and degraded quality of recreational experiences. A managed, well-designed road and trail system to meet motorized and non-motorized uses will greatly reduce these impacts and help to restore and maintain the forest character that makes the area desirable for these activities. Our intent is to provide the best access that minimizes the impacts to the resources, private property, and residents, while providing reasonable recreational access and experiences. The *Proposed Action* and associated maps describe the details and background for how we have arrived at this proposal.

Through this cover letter, I also want to briefly explain legal all-terrain vehicle (ATV) use on National Forest System lands (Arizona). This project proposes a system of designated trails for ATV use that also connect to Forest System roads. Many Forest System roads are maintained to a public road standard thus requiring the ATV to be licensed through the Arizona Department of Transportation. In order to be considered a licensed vehicle and be lawful to operate on public roads, the ATV must have a license plate issued through the Department of Motor Vehicles that begins with the letters "MC", the owner must carry proof of registration and insurance, and the driver must possess a valid driver's license. Examples of Forest System roads in the Munds Park area upon which these requirements must be met are: Forest Road (FR) 700, FR 78A, FR 133, and FR240, including the paved section known to the community as Pinewood Boulevard.

To enable us to consider and analyze the potential environmental effects of the *Proposed Action*, I am asking you whether you have any environmental concerns about the project. I have enclosed a copy of the *Proposed Action* along with a location map for your review and comment. I am inviting your input on this project in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). Specifically, I would like you to identify any environmental issues you have on the *Proposed Action*. Your comments, along with

continuing interdisciplinary discussion between Forest Service resource specialists (i.e. recreation, roads, wildlife, heritage, trails) will also be used to determine the level of environmental analysis. Written comments are most helpful to us. Comments should be specific to this *Proposed Action* and associated project area boundary. Also, if you are making a comment expressing a concern, it is most helpful if you can suggest other options or alternatives to consider. This will help us to continue the collaborative effort with the community and other users, and aid in our goal to develop a system that protects the National Forest resources, while providing quality recreational access and experiences with the least impact on the Community. Please provide your comments to me by August 15, 2003. If you provide comments to this *proposed action*, you will continue to receive the NEPA documentation. In the event that you choose not to comment, but would like a copy of the final decision, please contact Alvin Brown, Team Leader.

Our timeline is to solicit public comment and work on the environmental analysis through the summer. The earliest I would make a decision would be this fall.

This project was listed in the Coconino National Forest *Schedule of Proposed Actions* (SOPA), which was sent to a mailing list of over 500 addresses.

Comments received in response to this solicitation, including names and addresses of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record on this project and will be available for public inspection. Comments submitted anonymously will be accepted and considered; however, those who submit anonymous comments will not have standing to appeal the subsequent decision under 36 CFR parts 215 or 217, if NEPA documentation results in an appealable decision. Additionally, pursuant to 7 CFR 1.27(d), any persons may request the agency to withhold a submission from the public record by showing how the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) permits such confidentiality. Persons requesting such confidentiality should be aware that, under the FOIA, confidentiality may be granted in only limited circumstances, such as to protect trade secrets. The Forest Service will inform the requester of the agency's decision regarding the request for confidentiality, and where the request is denied; the agency will return the submission and notify the requester that the comments may be resubmitted with or without name and address within seven days.

We appreciate your interest and continuing cooperation with our Forest management programs. Should you have any questions, or need additional information, please contact Alvin Brown, Team Leader at 526-0866 or me at 214-2433. I look forward to hearing from you by August 15<sup>th</sup>.

Sincerely,

TERRI MARCERON  
District Ranger

Enclosure

## ***Munds Park Roads and Trails System Project***

Proposed Action

July 2003

### **A. INTRODUCTION**

**This document describes management actions proposed for the Munds Park Roads and Trails (Forest System roads and trails) Project. The project area is located approximately 28 miles south of Flagstaff, and encompasses an approximate one-mile to two mile radius around the Munds Park area. The project area is generally defined by Forest Road (FR) 700 on the north, and the rim of Munds Canyon and the T Six Mountain road on the south, extending south along Interstate 17 to the Little Antelope interchange. The western portion crosses the Interstate 17 near the Interstate 17 rest area. The eastern portion follows FR 240 from the north end of Casner Park, coursing north to Little Horse Park tank where it ties in with FR 700. The 9492D road coursing south from the FR 240, connecting back to the T Six Mountain Road, also defines the eastern boundary. (Figure 1)**

### **B. PROPOSED ACTION**

The Mormon Lake Ranger District of Coconino National Forest proposes the following:

A Multi-Use roads and trails system that will offer motorized and non-motorized opportunities immediately adjacent to the Community of Munds Park. This road and trail system is designed to designate roads and trails which provide quality access and recreation experiences adjacent to the Munds Park community. The proposed trail system is estimated at approximately 22 miles, of which approximately 6.5 miles are motorized and provide linkage into existing Forest Service roads, and 15.5 miles of which are non-motorized. The non-motorized trail system includes the existing Crystal Point Trail. The road system exists and no new roads will be constructed. Some existing roads are proposed for obliteration and or closure or road to trail conversion. (Figure 2)

**This system will specifically include the following:**

1. Two trailheads will provide parking. A new designated trailhead will accommodate approximately 10 vehicles with trailers, located approximately  $\frac{1}{4}$  mile north of Iron Springs Road on FR 9457Y. An existing designated trailhead on FS 240, just east of Munds Park on the Forest near the east end of Pinewood Blvd, accommodates approximately 20 vehicles with trailers. Both trailheads provide access to existing and proposed Forest System roads and trails, which service motorized (ATV,

motorcycle, snowmobile, some passenger vehicle) and non-motorized (foot, mountain bike, equestrian) uses.

2. Trail designated access points are located at Janice Place, Redwood Drive, and O'dell Lake (See Map). The O'dell lake trail access point is via county road Lake Meadow Drive. These designations indicate access points at the end of County roads adjacent to National Forest System lands where trails access begins. They are not intended to be trailhead or parking areas, but only indicate trail system accessibility.
3. Trail access at the Janice Place location will be multi-use, including, off highway vehicle motorized use by ATV's and motorcycles, foot, equestrian, and mountain bike user access. The recreation trail accessed at this location is designed for ATV use, with a 50" tread, and will not be designated or maintained as a FS road for passenger vehicles and the existing gate will be re-designed to prevent entry by vehicles larger than ATV's. No trailhead is being proposed at this location. There is limited parking on FS land outside the fence/gate, within the County right of way at this access point. There will be no parking inside the fence/gate. This access point is focused on providing access for users to either walk, bike, or ride licensed ATV/motorcycle's to this trail. While some parking is available, users requiring parking will be encouraged through signing to use the trailhead access at FS Rd. 240 or the trailhead at the 9457Y road. Vehicles with trailers will not be allowed to park at this location.

Trail access at the Redwood Drive and Lake Meadow Drive (O'dell Lake) locations provide trail access from the end of these county roads. These points provide access to the non-motorized trails in these areas. There is no parking at these locations either on the forest or the county roads, as these are not intended to be trailheads and only indicate trail system accessibility for those walking or biking to the gate. As in the discussion above, those users requiring parking will be directed to use the trailheads. The loop portion of the trail at O'dell Lake will be hiking only for .7 miles. No mechanized equipment, such as mountain bikes, will be allowed on the loop to minimize disturbance to adjacent wildlife habitat.

4. Eight miles of new trail construction, of which approximately 1.0 mile is new construction for motorized trail, and approximately 7.0 miles is new construction for non-motorized trails. This will result in a total system of approximately 3.0 miles of class 2 trail and approximately 19 miles of class 3 trails, with linkages to forest roads for long distance travel beyond the project boundary. The .7 miles of trail loop at O'dell Lake will begin as a class 3 trail. However, it is intended that as funding becomes available that this trail could be upgraded to a class 4 interpretive trail. Class 2 trail is defined as simple/minor development of a discernible, continuous trail, but narrow and rough, made of native materials, with occasional obstacles, all in a natural, essentially un-modified environment – typically a Semi-Primitive Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) setting. ROS is a classification system used in visual management where various settings are described ranging from highly developed such as Urban to very undeveloped such as Primitive. The Forest Plan helps guide

what ROS objectives we have for forest areas and management actions should be in compliance with those guidelines. Class 3 trail is defined as developed and improved trail with an obvious and continuous tread, unhindered one-lane travel, typically made of native materials, with infrequent obstacles and vegetation is cleared outside of the trailway, all in a natural, primarily un-modified environment – typically a Semi-Primitive to Roaded Natural ROS setting. Class 4 trail is defined as highly developed trail, with a wide tread relatively smooth; trail width may consistently accommodate two-lane traffic; trail is made of native or imported materials, and maybe hardened; structures are frequent and substantial, including trail bridges, and trailside amenities may be present; there is a variety of signs present, including information signs and Trail Universal Access information at trailheads, all in what may be a modified environment with an ROS classification of Roaded Natural to Rural setting.

5. Inclusive within the 22 mile trail system is 3.9 miles of road to trail conversion. Road to trail conversion is accomplished by obliteration and /or rehabilitation of a road, while leaving a trail tread using a portion of the old roadbed. This is done where the location of a road is suitable for trail location, but for various reasons, the existing road is undesirable. Reasons may include factors such as resource damage, desired non-motorized use, road density, and enhanced user experience, etc.
6. Existing social trails (user-created routes) will be incorporated into the designed system where applicable and not causing resource damage. Remaining social routes will be rehabilitated as described in item 7 below. The numerous existing pedestrian access locations originating from private land along the north boundary of Munds Park will remain for non-motorized entry into the forest. This access will remain open and accessible, but a collector trail to the north of these access locations will be used to discourage the further proliferation of user-created routes. Some, if not all, of the user-created routes originating from these access locations will be returned to natural condition as the designed trail system is established. Access to the collector trail will be cross-country. People can still walk and hike through this area from the private and public access locations, but the numerous user created routes in this area will be returned to natural landscape. This rehabilitation work removes the so-called “spaghetti” network of user created trails. Public access points located at Mescalero Drive, Mountaineer Drive, Hillside Drive (east and west), Bowstring Road, and Winding Trail will remain open.
7. Obliteration and naturalization of redundant or excess system roads, social roads, and social trails that are excess to the proposed designed system, and causing resource damage. These are roads and trails that are not identified as part of the designated road or trail system for the Munds Park area. Currently there are approximately 7.9 miles of Level 2 system roads identified for obliteration or closure. In addition there are approximately 3.9 miles of road proposed for conversion to trail. A Level 2 road is characterized as a minimally maintained road suitable for high clearance vehicles. A variety of techniques may be used to obliterate or naturalize a road or trail, including ripping the entire roadbed or tread with a dozer and only ripping portions of the roadbed or tread. If natural healing is occurring and only sections of the route

present resource problems, blocking routes with obstructions may be used, where if use is discontinued the road bed or tread will heal naturally. Also gating will be used to close routes where there is a need for access for administrative purposes, but general motorized access is undesirable. Utility maintenance and fire access is a good example of administrative access need. This will be controlled through gating.

8. An area closure encompassing approximately 7500 acres prohibiting motorized use off designated roads and trails will be implemented in conjunction with the designated road and trail work. Closure to motorized cross-country travel will help make rehabilitation efforts more successful, help to keep the designated system intact, and help to prevent further proliferation of social roads and their associated resource concerns. (See Figure 1 for closure area location and boundary).
9. A closure order encompassing approximately 620 acres, prohibiting camping in the vicinity of Crystal Point for wildlife habitat protection. (See Figure 1 for closure area location and boundary).

### **C. PURPOSE AND NEED**

The following statements explain why this project is being proposed at this time.

As the Community of Munds Park has grown, as well as recreational use in general, the forest area adjacent to the community is experiencing resource impacts and degraded quality of recreational experiences. Soils, watershed, and wildlife impacts are occurring due to unplanned or “social” trail, and motorized trail and road use. Some Forest system roads are redundant or in bad repair causing similar impacts. In addition there are user conflicts associated with motorized and non-motorized trail use. A managed and designed road and trail system to meet motorized and non-motorized uses, including trailheads for parking, identified access points, and collector trails to reduce social trail proliferation will greatly reduce these impacts and help to restore and maintain the forest character that makes the area desirable for these activities. Our intent is to provide the best access that minimizes the impacts to the resources, housing and private property, and residents, while providing good recreational access.

Over the past 18 months or more, the Forest Service has been working with the Community of Munds Park to develop a system of roads and trails and take any other corrective actions necessary to address recreation management in the area. In January 2002, recreation staff from the Peaks and Mormon Lake Ranger Districts, in addition to representatives from Coconino County began meeting with representatives of the Munds Park community. One of the outcomes of these early meetings was that the community formed a non-profit group known as the Munds Park Trail Stewards, or MUTS, to continue to meet with the Forest Service and address the roads and trails needs and planning for the area. Since these early beginnings there have been many meetings between the MUTS group and the Forest Service, at times on a monthly basis. These meetings are open to the public and anyone interested has been invited to attend.

Throughout 2002 and 2003 the Forest Service and the MUTS Group have worked hard at collecting information on existing conditions, and identifying user types, needs, and desires. This work has included a roads and trails inventory that involved collecting GPS data on most of the identifiable trails and routes. The MUTS group worked with Northern Arizona University to conduct a survey of Munds Park residents in March of 2002. This data has been instrumental in helping to develop the Proposed Action. In the monthly MUTS meetings, roads and trails including location and types, access point, and trailheads have been discussed, with considerations of desired recreational experiences.

In addition to working closely with the community, the Forest Service is obligated to also do broader scale public involvement that includes larger local, regional, and even national notification and notice of intent. The project has been listed on the Schedule of Proposed Actions (SOPA) beginning in the fall of 2002, and in each quarterly update since then, which is distributed to 500 plus people. Also, the project was included in the Annual Consultation Letter to 13 Native American Indian Tribes.

**D. The following Design Features are incorporated into the Proposed Action:**

Avoid Impacts to Heritage Resources. Archaeological survey will be completed prior to project implementation. The project will be designed to avoid and/or minimize impacts to National Register eligible historic and prehistoric sites. Tribal consultation has been completed through SOPA outreach and Annual Consultation Letter to thirteen Native American Indian Tribes. Archaeological monitoring could occur during project activities. Project managers will receive information on site protection measures prior to implementation and all National Register eligible sites will be marked on the ground for avoidance. The project will be in compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act, and all other appropriate heritage resources legislation.

Maintain Habitat for Threatened, Endangered and Sensitive (TES) Species. Surveys are being conducted within the project area. Additional surveys for rare plants will be conducted prior to and in conjunction with implementation activity. Mitigation to protect any discovered plants will be done on an on-going basis.

Prevention and Control of Noxious Weeds. Prevent the introduction of noxious weeds and control any existing populations that become established as a result of this action. Equipment will be cleaned before entering the project area and after use in the project area. Noxious weed surveys will be conducted prior to road obliteration. Known populations will be avoided or treated. Treatment methods to reduce or stop the spread of noxious weeds will be based on site-specific circumstances.

Forest Plan Consistency. The Proposed Action is consistent with the 1987 Coconino Forest Plan including all forest plan amendments. The project will be designed in conformance with Forest Plan standards and incorporates appropriate forest plan

guidelines consistent with inclusive Management Areas 3, 6, 9, and 10, including appropriate management of the recreation, wildlife, and soils and watershed resources.

## **E. DECISION TO BE MADE**

The Mormon Lake District Ranger (Terri Marceron) is the Responsible Official and will make a decision whether or not to approve, as proposed, this project. The decision to be made will also determine the conditions to be included as part of the project. Conditions could include changing or adding to proposed action and/or the addition of mitigation measures based on resource information. The scope of this decision is specific to the Munds Park Roads and Trails System Project within the boundary area highlighted in the attached map. A decision on this project will depend upon the complexity of completing the environmental analysis including the review of public comments, however, the Mormon Lake District Ranger expects that a decision could be made as early as the fall of 2003. Implementation of the decision could begin by the spring of 2004 or earlier as weather and funding permits. Implementation will be phased-in based on funding and level of priority determined by the Forest Service in cooperation and coordination with the Munds Park Trail Stewards (MUTS). It is important to note that this will be a multi-year project. The District will coordinate with contributors to the greatest extent possible, however priority of implementation will also be guided by degree and magnitude of resource damage rehabilitation needs. Also, there are several different funding avenues for some of the jobs to be done that become available at various times. To take advantage of these dollars as they become available the District must stay flexible on what, where and when we undertake certain phases. For example, some of the road rehabilitation work can be done with non-recreation dollars and may be accomplished quicker than some of the trails work, where funds are often more limited. Availability and timing of money from grants will also be an important factor in the rate and location of implementation. The important thing to realize is that it may take up to 5 or more years to completely implement the system.

## **F. CONTACT PERSON**

For more information call or write to Terri Marceron, Mormon Lake District Ranger at Mormon Lake Ranger Station, 4373 S. Lake Mary Road, Flagstaff, AZ 86001, Phone Number, (928) 774-1147 OR call Alvin Brown, Project Team Leader, at (928) 526-0866.



