



Decision Memo

Arizona National Scenic Trail Temporal Gulch Re-Route Project

USDA Forest Service Nogales and Sierra Vista Ranger Districts Santa Cruz County, Arizona

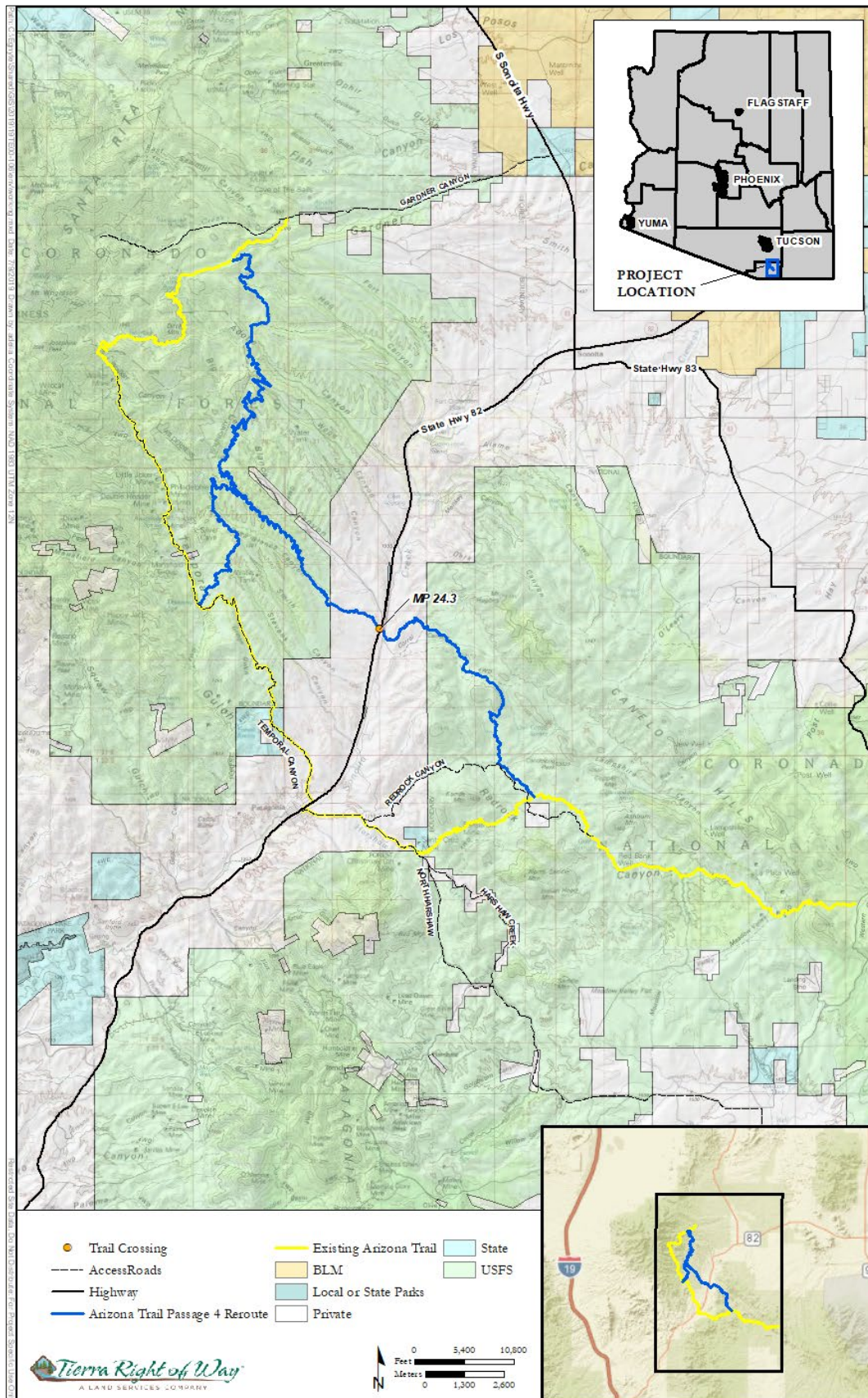
Background

The proposed action is to approve the relocation of a portion of the Arizona National Scenic Trail (AZNST) as administered by the USDA Forest Service as designated by the Congress of the United States of America. The purpose of the proposed action, consistent with law, regulation and policy applicable to the administration of National Scenic Trails and the 2018 Coronado National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan, is to allow for the relocation of the AZNST from its current alignment along heavily-traveled paved and dirt roads by constructing approximately 32.0 miles of sustainably built trail within the Sierra Vista and Nogales Ranger Districts (total length of new trail along the proposed alignment is 29.2 miles, with 2.8 miles across private lands adjacent to SR 82), in southeastern Arizona. The primary need for the proposed action is to address a public safety concern while minimizing Forest user conflict and to put the trail in compliance with the National Trails System Act by separating motorized and non-motorized uses within this portion of the Sierra Vista and Nogales Ranger Districts.

Proposed Trail Construction Lengths by Land Management

Land Management	Length
CNF, Nogales RD	27.2 km (16.9 miles)
CNF, Nogales RD (Connector)	9.5 km (5.9 miles)
CNF, Sierra Vista RD	10.3 km (6.4 miles)
Private, Wildlife Corridors, LLC (west side of SR 82)	2.0 km (1.3 miles)
Private, Hudbay Minerals (east side of SR 82)	2.4 km (1.5 miles)
Total	51.4 km (32.0 miles)

Key: CNF = Coronado National Forest; RD = Ranger District; SR = State Route.



Decision

I have decided to authorize the new alignment and construction of 32.0 miles of the Arizona National Scenic Trail within the Sierra Vista and Nogales Ranger Districts on the Coronado National Forest. Authorization is contingent upon Arizona Trail Association (ATA) securing access rights from private land owners impacted by the trail alignment.

The proposed construction would be facilitated by the ATA, and ongoing maintenance would be supported by the ATA and their trail stewardship program. Trail construction would be done during daylight hours, by hand and/or a mini-excavator, utilizing a combination of volunteer trail work events and paid youth conservation corps workers. Construction of the project is anticipated to take up to three years, depending on federal, state, and private fund availability, and avoiding the hot weather of summer.

This action is categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental impact statement (EIS) or an environmental assessment (EA). The applicable category of actions is identified in agency procedures as 36 CFR 220.6(e)(1), "*Construction and reconstruction of trails*". This category of action is applicable because the action is to construct 32.0 new miles of the existing AZNST to re-route the trail away from heavily trafficked roads.

I find that there are no extraordinary circumstances that would warrant further analysis and documentation in an EA or EIS. I took into account resource conditions identified in agency procedures that should be considered in determining whether extraordinary circumstances might exist:

- ♦ **Federally listed threatened or endangered species or designated critical habitat, species proposed for Federal listing or proposed critical habitat, or Forest Service sensitive species** – A Biological Evaluation was completed for the project (Tierra Right of Way Services, Ltd., December 2019). A letter of concurrence was received from U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services (AESO/SE 02EAAZ00-2019-0507) on March 23, 2020 in agreement that this project may affect, but is not likely to adversely affect the jaguar, its critical habitat, or ocelot. All work will be conducted during daylight hours using hand and/or mini excavator through volunteer trail work events and paid youth conservation corps workers. No significant negative impacts to Forest Service Sensitive Species or species included within the Migratory Bird Treaty Act or Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act are expected. The trail was routed around sensitive habitats such as riparian areas.
- ♦ **Flood plains, wetlands, or municipal watersheds** – No impact because they have been avoided by on-the-ground siting of the trail.
- ♦ **Congressionally designated areas such as wilderness, wilderness study areas, or national recreation areas** – No impact because they are not present within the project area.
- ♦ **Inventoried roadless areas or potential wilderness areas** – No impact because they are not present within the project area.
- ♦ **Research natural areas** – No impact because they are not present within the project area.

- ♦ **American Indians and Alaska Native religious or cultural sites** – A Class III Cultural Resources Survey was conducted (Tierra Right of Way Services, Ltd., July 2019) and one Traditional Cultural Property (TCP) within the project area was identified. The Ce:wi Duag TCP, or Long Mountain, refers to the Santa Rita Mountains as a whole, but for the purposes of the current project area, only the portion of the proposed trail re-route that falls within the Madrean Evergreen Woodland biotic community, or essentially nearly all of the trail north of SR 82, is located within the Ce:wi Duag TCP. The Santa Rita Mountains are culturally significant to several groups in the Southwest. The Santa Rita Mountains are a source of plant, animal, and mineral materials considered vital to the traditional lifeways of several Tribes.

The proposed trail re-route could potentially give Native American groups greater access to natural resources along the eastern edge of the Ce:wi Duag. The trail does not impact known springs or seeps and will have minimal impact on vegetation and other natural resources. As the proposed trail re-route has largely been placed on side slopes, it similarly has very minimal impact on high points and drainages, areas that are likely important to Native American groups. The proposed trail re-route has also been moved away from known archaeological sites, so it will have no impact on those resources. No further treatment is recommended for the TCP.

- ♦ **Archaeological sites, or historic properties or areas** – A Class III Cultural Resources Survey was conducted (Tierra Right of Way Services, Ltd., July 2019). The project will have no impact because the trail was routed around any sensitive cultural areas. The report was approved by the Forest Archaeologist and Forest Supervisor on September 28, 2019 (AR03-05-02-924). Under the *First Amended Programmatic Agreement Regarding Historic Property Protection and Responsibilities* among the Arizona State Historic Preservation Officer and Forest Service Region 3, no additional consultation is required.

Public Involvement

This action was originally listed as a proposal on the Coronado National Forest Schedule of Proposed Actions (SOPA) <https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=54755> on September 30, 2018 and was updated periodically during the analysis. Scoping letters were sent to interested parties and relevant public agencies. Scoping letters were also distributed to 12 local Native American tribes to solicit comments. During the 30-day scoping period, responses were received from five private individuals and the Arizona Game and Fish Department (AGFD). The private responses were generally supportive of the action to re-route a portion of the trail and some offered minor alternative route suggestions. AGFD had several concerns including access to/from the trail and how it relates maintaining motorized access through the private lands and that the re-routed section of trail would share a designated wildlife corridor under SR 82. ATA is working with all agencies and private entities for appropriate permits and easements for construction of this reroute.

Findings Required by Other Laws and Regulations

This decision is consistent with the 2018 Coronado National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan. The project was designed in conformance with land management plan direction for the Nogales and Sierra Vista Ranger District and will help achieve the desired conditions established for the Santa Rita Ecosystem Management Area, Huachuca Ecosystem Management Area, Arizona National Scenic Trail, and Recreation.



The project is consistent with all other Federal, State, and/or local laws or requirements for the protection of the environmental and cultural resources. This decision is fully consistent with the: National Environmental Policy Act (1969), National Forest Land Management Act (1976), Endangered Species Act (1973), National Historic Preservation Act (1966), Clean Water Act (1972), and all other relevant laws and regulations under which the Forest Service operates.

Administrative Review Opportunities

This decision is not subject to the pre-decisional administrative review process per 36 CFR 218.20. **36 CFR § 218.23 - Proposed projects and activities not subject to legal notice and opportunity to comment.** *The legal notice and opportunity to comment procedures of this subpart do not apply to: (a) Any project or activity categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental assessment or environmental impact statement.*

Implementation Date

This Decision may be implemented immediately upon signature. This decision will be published on the Coronado National Forest SOPA website.

Contact

For additional information concerning this decision, contact: Emily Reynolds, NEPA Planner, Supervisors Office, 300 West Congress Street, Tucson, AZ 85701.

Kerwin S. Dewberry
Forest Supervisor, Coronado National Forest

Date



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