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Comments: Although my involvement with the Tonto National Forest spans nearly 50 years (dating back to the Roadless Area Review and Evaluation project in 1972), my comments here will be very brief.

The Tonto is a very unusual National Forest because it is, for the most part, not a forest at all - it's a desert. It wasn't established for the protection and management of timber, it was established for the protection and management of a watershed. Except for the belt of ponderosa forest along the northern edge of the Forest, from Payson to Young, timber production has never been a primary use of the Forest. Over time, that use has become even less important as it has been replaced by recreational use and heritage tourism. Ranching, also once an important use of the land, has also vastly decreased in value relative to more modern land uses that are not based on resource extraction or material production. The Tonto is now the Phoenix metropolitan area's backyard, and as such it is one of our country's most in-demand recreational and scenic areas. The Forest also continues to serve its original function as a watershed management unit, providing a degree of unified control over the Salt/Verde River system that provides our cities, farms, and industries with water.

In short, with localized and relatively minor exceptions, the Forest's value is not in commodity production or economic development projects, but in the wise management of watersheds and the accommodation of diverse urban-based recreationists. This is, of course, a very simplistic overview but it has the advantage of being true. That is the nature of the Tonto as it exists today, and a new land use management plan must recognize these realities.

I support Alternative C - "Natural Resources Predominant" - as the best path toward protecting watersheds and water quality, restoring biotic communities (riparian, desert, range, and forest) to the most desirable conditions, and providing opportunities for low-impact forms of recreation (sight-seeing, hiking, hunting, camping, picnicking, visiting cultural and historic sites, horseback riding, wildlife observation, etc.). Extractive economic activities, where not grandfathered in, should be minimized or avoided; ranching should focus on range restoration and sustainability; fire should play its natural role but be controlled to prevent unnatural extremes of biotic and watershed degradation; and destructive forms of recreation including illegal use of off-road vehicles, careless and unsafe target shooting, and the theft and vandalism of natural and cultural resources, should be banned and strictly enforced. New or expanded Wilderness Areas and other special-management units should be established where appropriate to protect, preserve, and restore watershed, riparian, natural, and low-impact recreational values. These goals must be supported by appropriate funding, staffing, monitoring, and enforcement powers. Alternative C provides for the best possible future for the Tonto National Forest, with the greatest possible benefit for the people of Arizona.

As a personal comment, any proposed new wilderness areas should include Lime Creek, a little-known jewel of riparian habitat and spectacular scenery northeast of Carefree, and the Horse Mesa and Black Cross Butte/Mesquite Canyon areas between the Apache Trail and the Salt River lakes. The Wood Canyon area southwest of Superior is also an undervalued area that contains significant natural and cultural values on lands adjacent to the existing BLM White Canyon Wilderness Area. Many other new wilderness areas, and expansions of existing wilderness areas, should also be considered.

As a final note, I endorse and fully support the more detailed comments that are being provided to you by the Sierra Club's Grand Canyon Chapter and the Center for Biological Diversity.