

Draft Inventory Criteria for the Tonto National Forest Wilderness Recommendation Process

Introduction

When revising the Forest Plan, the Tonto National Forest is required to identify and evaluate lands that may or may not be suitable for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System (NWPS) and determine whether to recommend to Congress any such lands for wilderness. A description of this process can be found in [Chapter 70 of the Forest Service Land Management Planning Handbook 1909.12](#). This process includes the following four steps:

1. **Inventory:** Identify and inventory all lands that may or may not be suitable for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System using a given set of criteria.
2. **Evaluation:** Evaluate the wilderness characteristics of each inventoried area using a given set of criteria and assign a ranking of high, moderate, low, or no for its wilderness character.
3. **Analysis:** The forest supervisor will determine which areas to further analyze through the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process.
4. **Recommendation:** The Forest Supervisor will decide which areas, if any, to recommend to Congress for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System (NWPS).

Lands evaluated and analyzed through this process and the resulting NEPA analysis are only preliminary administrative recommendations. Congress has reserved the authority to make final decisions on wilderness designation.

More information on wilderness areas and the wilderness recommendation process can be found on the plan revision website www.tontoplan.org.

Step 1: Inventory

The primary function of the inventory step is to identify all lands on the Tonto National Forest that will be evaluated for wilderness characteristics as defined in the [Wilderness Act of 1964](#). The inventory is intended to be broad and inclusive, based on the inventory criteria identified in the Forest Service Handbook (*FSH 1909.12 Chapter 70, Section 71.2; 71.21 thru 71.22b*) and further defined by the Tonto National Forest through resource specialists and public engagement. This document outlines the draft inventory criteria that was developed.

The intent of the inventory step is to identify lands that might have wilderness characteristics, and to allow for public input and feedback on the inventoried areas. Inclusion in the inventory is not a designation that conveys or requires a particular kind of management; rather, inclusion in the inventory means an area will go on to be evaluated for wilderness characteristics in step 2 of this process.

The inventory step has a given set of criteria—size, roads, and other improvements—which are explained and identified in the following sections. This criteria is applied to all the lands on the forest using Geographic Information Systems (GIS) which will result in an Inventory Map. The inventory map will be released for public review using a collaborative mapping tool called Story Maps. This tool allows the public to provide input, based on the criteria, of all the lands included in the inventory step.

Following the final Inventory map, all areas included based on the inventory criteria will then be evaluated.

The draft evaluation criteria identified in the Forest Service Handbook (FSH 1909.12 Chapter 70, Section 72.1) and further defined by the interdisciplinary team and public engagement can be found [here](#).

Inventory Criteria

Chapter 70, Sections 71.21 thru 71.22b, of the Forest Service Land Management Planning Handbook 1909.12 outlines criteria for what should and should not be included in the inventoried areas. There are two broad categories of criteria: 1) size and 2) improvements. The “improvements” category includes 1) roads and 2) substantially noticeable improvements. These criteria, and draft definitions further defined by the Tonto National Forest and public engagement, are outlined in the following sections.

Size

Areas to be included in the inventory must be federal lands and must meet one of the following size criteria:

1. The area contains 5,000 acres or more.
2. The area contains less than 5,000 acres but is of sufficient size as to make practicable its preservation and use in an unimpaired condition, including but not limited to areas adjacent to an existing wilderness, administratively recommended wilderness, wilderness study area, or wilderness inventory of other Federal ownership.

For areas less than 5,000 acres that are not adjacent to the above, the Forest Supervisor will need to consider and determine whether such areas could be managed as recommended wilderness and preserved in an unimpaired condition based on factors such as topography.

Improvements

Improvements are things that show evidence of human activities such as roads, structures, or past management activities. The presence of such improvements does not necessarily eliminate areas for consideration in the inventory; however, certain improvements may be removed from lands at the inventory stage if they are substantially noticeable.

Road Improvements Criteria

[Chapter 70 of the Forest Service Land Management Planning Handbook 1909.12](#) outlines criteria for what road improvements should and should not be included in the inventoried areas. A forest road is defined as a road wholly or partly within or adjacent to and serving the National Forest System that the Forest Service determines is necessary for the protection, administration, and utilization of the System and the use and development of its resources (36 CFR 212.1). The Tonto National Forest has further defined these criteria in Table 1.

Table 1. Road Improvements Criteria

Inventory Criteria Identified in Planning Handbook	Inventory Criteria Further Defined by Tonto National Forest
Roads	<p data-bbox="540 300 906 327"><u>Roads eliminated from inventory:</u></p> <ol data-bbox="561 331 1446 520" style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Permanently authorized roads for which a valid easement or interest has been properly recorded. 2. Forest roads maintained to levels 2, 3, 4, or 5 according to the Tonto National Forest’s Resource Access/Travel Management (RATM) Map. For Forest Service road maintenance level definitions, please see Guidelines for Roads Maintenance Levels. <p data-bbox="540 558 1438 648"><i>Note: Potentially eliminated roads will also have a buffer of approximately 100 feet on either side of the road centerline, to include room for the road width, right-of-way, and potential geospatial data inaccuracies.</i></p> <p data-bbox="540 686 1243 714"><u>Roads carried forward in inventory and considered in evaluation:</u></p> <ol data-bbox="561 718 1446 1192" style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Areas that contain forest roads maintained to level 1 (closed to all motor vehicles); 2. Level 2 roads that do not meet the exclusion criteria of 71.22a 2.(c). in Chapter 70 of the Forest Service Land Management Planning Handbook 1909.12; 3. Areas with any routes that are decommissioned, unauthorized or temporary, or forest roads that are identified for decommissioning in a previous decision document; 4. Areas with forest roads that will be reclassified to level 1 through a previous decision document; 5. Areas with historical wagon routes, historical mining routes, or other settlement era transportation routes considered part of the historical and cultural landscape of the area; 6. Areas with motorized trails or other user created routes. These are not considered roads and will be kept in the inventory and considered in evaluation.

Other Improvements Criteria

Chapter 70 of the Forest Service Land Management Planning Handbook 1909.12 outlines the required criteria for other improvements that should and should not be included in the inventoried areas. One such criterion allows the exclusion of improvements that are substantially noticeable to the area as a whole.

The term “substantially noticeable” is not directly defined in Chapter 70 of the Forest Service Land Management Planning Handbook. The following definition of “substantially noticeable” for the other improvements criteria was developed and refined through resource specialist and public engagement.

Substantially noticeable improvements to the forest landscape shall be those improvements that are judged by the ID team to negatively affect the predominantly natural appearance of the surrounding landscape due to any single or combination of the following traits:

- a. They are obtrusive in size, shape, or contour creating noticeable difference in the form, line, color, texture and/or pattern that contrasts with the surrounding natural landscape;
- b. They are reflective and/or of unnatural coloration (and cannot be easily made a natural coloration);

- c. They are not shielded from general view by location, or sheltered by landscape features and/or vegetation,
- d. They are not similar in type or appearance to improvements that exist in current Tonto National Forest Wilderness,
- e. They are highly concentrated in an area or widespread in the landscape, reflecting pervasive past human influence,
- f. They are not likely to appear more natural over time,
- g. And/or they do not contribute significantly to the historical character and cultural context of the area by their presence and preservation.

For each improvement that is substantially noticeable, a buffer will be added around the feature in GIS to account for its impact on the ground. These buffers include:

- 50 foot buffer around substantially noticeable improvements with an impact on the ground of less than one acre.
- 100 foot buffer around substantially noticeable improvements with an impact on the ground greater than 1 acre.
- 100 foot buffer on either side of the centerline on all linear improvements (for example: powerlines, pipelines, etc.) unless a larger right-of-way is associated with the improvement’s permit.
- 300 foot buffer around private property.

Not all improvements that are substantially noticeable will be eliminated during the inventory. For example, an improvement that fits the definition of substantially noticeable, but has a small footprint not impacting the larger area considered, will be retained in the inventory. Those substantially noticeable improvements not eliminated during inventory, as well as other improvements not considered substantially noticeable, will be considered during evaluation.

The Tonto National Forest further defines the criteria for substantially noticeable improvements in Table 2. The definitions and examples listed below will be considered when reviewing improvements, but field knowledge and subject matter expertise will also be used in final determinations on whether an improvement is included or eliminated from the inventory.

Table 2. Other Improvements Criteria

Inventory Criteria Identified in Planning Handbook	Inventory Criteria Further Defined by Tonto National Forest
Airstrips and Heliports	<p><u>‘Substantially noticeable’ improvements that may be eliminated from inventory:</u> Surfaced runways, landing pads, or heliports with permanent structures.</p> <p><u>Improvements carried forward in the inventory and considered in evaluation:</u> Any unsurfaced runways, landing pads, or heliports and without permanent structures.</p>

Inventory Criteria Identified in Planning Handbook	Inventory Criteria Further Defined by Tonto National Forest
Vegetation treatments and Timber harvest areas	<p><u>'Substantially noticeable' improvements that may be eliminated from inventory:</u> Treatments in which there is a noticeable difference in form, line, canopy cover, and texture found in the surrounding natural landscape and vegetation regeneration is minimal. Concentrations of treatments that create an unnatural pattern across the landscape.</p> <p><u>Improvements carried forward in the inventory and considered in evaluation:</u> Vegetation treatments such as prescribed fire use and non-commercial fuels reduction treatments that are not substantially noticeable. Areas with legacy (closed) logging roads, fuelwood, or other thinned areas and other timber harvest areas where logging and prior road construction are not substantially noticeable.</p>
Permanently installed vertical structures, such as electronic installations that support television, radio, telephone, or cellular communications	<p><u>'Substantially noticeable' improvements that may be eliminated from inventory:</u> Vertical structures that have one or a combination of the following traits:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Require regular access (at least once a year) for maintenance, b. Have an associated ground disturbance of 1 acre or greater, c. Are taller than the surrounding tree or shrub height, d. And/or occur in a concentration. <p><u>Improvements carried forward in the inventory and considered in evaluation:</u> Permanently installed vertical structures in which the impacts on the ground, as well as their maintenance and access needs, are minimal (less than once a year) and not substantially noticeable.</p>
Areas of mining activity	<p><u>'Substantially noticeable' improvements that may be eliminated from inventory:</u> Areas of commercial open pit mining that have not undergone reclamation, active mining operations, tailing piles, and areas of active mine reclamation.</p> <p><u>Improvements carried forward in the inventory and considered in evaluation:</u> sand and gravel pits, permit rock collection areas, small mining claims, or historic mining evidence or structures, and other areas of mining activity where impacts are not substantially noticeable (as defined on page 3).</p>
Range improvement areas	<p><u>'Substantially noticeable' improvements that may be eliminated from inventory:</u> Range improvements that have one or a combination of the following traits:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Require regular access (at least once a year) for maintenance, b. Have an associated ground disturbance of 1 acre or greater, c. Are taller than the surrounding tree or shrub height, d. And/or occur in a concentration. <p><u>Improvements carried forward in the inventory and considered in evaluation:</u> fences, agricultural water pipelines, water troughs, earthen tanks, corrals, or trick tanks. All improvements that can be altered to appear more natural on the landscape will be carried forward to evaluation.</p>

Inventory Criteria Identified in Planning Handbook	Inventory Criteria Further Defined by Tonto National Forest
Recreation improvements	<p><u>'Substantially noticeable' improvements that may be eliminated from inventory:</u> Developed recreation sites (for example campgrounds, day-use areas, or interpretive sites of a permanent nature) or special use permit boundaries.</p> <p><u>Improvements carried forward in the inventory and considered in evaluation:</u> Areas with easily removable recreation developments that are not substantially noticeable as defined on page 3. For example: areas with dispersed camping sites and outfitter camps as they are temporary and easily removed. Areas with small bridges that contribute to primitive recreational uses. Existing non-motorized, mechanized (bike), or motorized trails, or any user created trails are included in the inventory. Trails are not considered to be a developed recreational improvement in the inventory criteria.</p>
Ground-return telephone lines, electric lines, and powerlines	<p><u>'Substantially noticeable' improvements that may be eliminated from inventory:</u> Powerlines or other utilities with cleared rights-of-way and permanent above ground pipelines over 6 inches in diameter (typically industrial grade pipelines).</p> <p><u>Improvements carried forward in the inventory and considered in evaluation:</u> ground return lines and electric lines if a right-of-way has not been cleared and pipelines under 6 inches in diameter.</p>
Watershed treatment areas (such as contouring, diking, channeling)	<p><u>'Substantially noticeable' improvements that may be eliminated from inventory:</u> Non-earthen dams, post-fire flood control improvements (i.e., filter dams made of non-natural materials), and terraced areas. Earthen dams may be eliminated if they are considered substantially noticeable to the area as a whole.</p> <p><u>Improvements carried forward in the inventory and considered in evaluation:</u> Earthen dams, other in-stream structures, historic watershed treatments, fish barriers, and other watershed improvements (including improvements for wildlife) that are not substantially noticeable.</p>
Structures, dwellings, and other relics of past occupation	<p><u>'Substantially noticeable' improvements that may be eliminated from inventory:</u> Concentrations of permanent building structures including administrative buildings and developed recreation improvement structures.</p> <p><u>Improvements carried forward in the inventory and considered in evaluation:</u> Areas with structures, dwellings and other relics of past occupation when they are considered part of the historical and cultural landscape of the area. For example: structures such as log cabins, split rail (post and log) fences, or orchards are considered positive cultural elements when looking at landscape character.</p>

Inventory Criteria Identified in Planning Handbook	Inventory Criteria Further Defined by Tonto National Forest
Lands adjacent to development or activities that impact opportunities for solitude.	<p><u>'Substantially noticeable' areas that may be eliminated from inventory: N/A</u></p> <p><u>Areas carried forward in the inventory and considered in evaluation:</u> Areas adjacent to development or activities will be included in the inventory. Boundaries will be extended to the edge of adjacent development defined by the ground disturbance footprint.</p>
Areas with improvements that have been proposed by the Forest Service for consideration as recommended wilderness as a result of a previous Forest planning process or that the Responsible Official merits for inclusion in the inventory that were proposed for consideration through public or intergovernmental participation opportunities	<p><u>'Substantially noticeable' areas that may be eliminated from inventory: N/A</u></p> <p><u>Areas carried forward in the inventory and considered in evaluation:</u> Include if identified.</p>