

2.3 LAND USE

This section discusses existing generalized land use patterns throughout the three focus areas. Existing land use data were collected through analysis of aerial photography and review of existing studies and plans. Existing land uses within the study area consist mainly of undeveloped/open space lands with cities/towns interspersed throughout the area. These urbanized areas include residential, commercial, military, and industrial areas as well as numerous airports. Low-density rural residences are prevalent throughout the study area.

2.3.1 Existing Land Use

Mogollon Rim Focus Area

This focus area consists of Navajo County, Apache County, and Gila County. There are eight major cities/towns including the towns of Snowflake, Taylor, Pinetop-Lakeside and the City of Show Low in Navajo County; the towns of Springerville and Eager and the City of St. Johns in Apache County; and the Town of Payson in Gila County. These areas typically have dense populations resulting in various forms of development including commercial, employment, residential, and mixed uses.

Three national parks occur within the Focus Area: (1) Apache Sitgreaves National Forest, (2) Petrified Forest National Park, and (3) Tonto National Forest. The Apache Sitgreaves National Forest stretches over portions of all three counties within the Focus Area. The large amount of forest land supports a range of land uses and activities including timber production and recreational opportunities such as hiking, camping, and fishing. A large section of Petrified Forest National Park, which contains one of the world's largest and most colorful concentrations of petrified wood, is located in the northern portion of the study area. The park covers 93,533 acres, with elevations ranging from 5,300 to 6,235 feet. A section of US 180 passes through the park's southern boundary (Arizona State Parks, 2008).

Two state parks are located within this focus area: Lyman Lake State Park and the Fool Hollow Lake Recreation Area. Located along US 180 11 miles south of St. Johns, the 1,200-acre Lyman Lake State Park features camping, water activities, and hiking. The lake is replenished by snowmelt from the slopes of Baldy Peak and Escudilla Mountain, the second and third highest mountains in Arizona. The 800-acre Fool Hollow Lake Recreation Area is located northwest of Show Low, between the SR 61, SR 77, and SR 260 conjunction. The recreation area falls within the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forest and offers year-round opportunities for camping, fishing, boating, and wildlife viewing.

Industrial uses within the focus area range from coal-fired power plants, power generating stations, and utility transmission lines. The main industrial use in this focus area is Arizona's only pulp and paper mill, the Snowflake Paper Mill, is located on a 640-acre site 15 miles west of Snowflake and Taylor and Precision Pine and Timber maintains a sawmill in the Heber area.

This Focus Area also includes aviation uses such as the Payson Airport, Show Low Municipal Airport, Taylor Airport, St. Johns Industrial Airpark, and Springerville Municipal Field (Arizona Department of Commerce 2007). Detailed information about aviation is in Section 2.2.7.

Copper Country Focus Area

Within the Copper Country Focus Area, there are four counties: (1) Gila County, (2) Pinal County, (3) Graham County, and (4) Greenlee County. The towns of Pima, Thatcher, and Safford (located next to state route 70) are located in Graham County, and the towns of Clifton and Duncan are located in Greenlee County.

There are four federally designated wilderness areas in the Copper Country Focus Area: (1) North Santa Teresa, located immediately south of Santa Teresa Mountains in Graham County; (2) Redfield Canyon, (3) Fishnooks, and (4) Needles Eye. The Apache-Sitgreaves and Coronado national forests are also located within the Focus Area. Given the number of wilderness areas and national parks in this focus area, there are large areas of undeveloped/open space and many primitive recreational opportunities. Also within this focus area is Roper Lake State Park located within in the Town of Safford. Recreational activities at the park include hiking, camping, fishing, and natural hot springs that are open to the public (Arizona State Parks 2008).

Industrial uses within the Focus Area occur near Clifton where the Morenci Mine forms a large part of the town's local economy and the Safford Mine located in Safford (Arizona Department of Commerce 2008). Both mines include copper mining operations.

This Focus Area also includes aviation uses such as the Safford Airport, Greenlee County Municipal Airport, and the Nogales International Airport (Arizona Department of Commerce 2008). Detailed information about aviation is in Section 2.2.7.

Cochise-Santa Cruz Focus Area

Cochise County and Santa Cruz County make up this focus area. Major cities within Cochise County include the City of Nogales and the Town of Patagonia. Within Santa Cruz County are the cities of Benson, Bisbee, Sierra Vista, Tombstone, Douglas and Willcox; and the Town of Huachuca City. These areas have typical urbanized features and comprise a mixture of uses including residential, commercial, and mixed uses.

Open spaces within the Focus Area are the Coronado National Forest, Chiricahua National Monument, and the Dos Cabezas Mountains Wilderness Area. There are five state parks within the Focus Area: Tombstone Courthouse State Historic Park, Patagonia Lake State Park, Kartchner Caverns State Park, San Rafael Ranch State Natural Area, Tubac Presidio State Historic Park. Located in the City of Tombstone, the Tombstone Courthouse State Historic Park is a historic site open to the public. The Patagonia Lake State Park is located in the Town of Patagonia and features recreational activities including hiking, camping, and boating. The Kartchner Caverns State Park is located in the City of Benson and offers year-round opportunities for cave tours, camping, and hiking. The San Rafael Ranch State Natural Area, located 23 miles southeast of Patagonia, features historic buildings including ranches and barns as well as recreational activities including nature walks. Currently, it is not open to the public (Arizona State Parks 2008).

Fort Huachuca U.S. Army Installation (located west of the City of Sierra Vista) is the only focus area that has an active military site. Industrial uses occur throughout the Focus Area including railroad sites in Benson, commercial properties in Bisbee with light industrial uses, three industrial parks in Douglas (Cochise Industrial Park, Douglas IDA Park, and Phelps Dodge Industrial Park), an industrial park in Huachuca City, two industrial parks in Sierra Vista, and one industrial park in Willcox (Arizona Department of Commerce 2008).

This Focus Area also includes aviation uses such as the Sierra Vista Municipal Airport, Tombstone Municipal Airport, and the Cochise County Airport (Arizona Department of Commerce 2008). Detailed information about aviation is in Section 2.2.7.

2.3.2 Future Land Use

This section describes future land use based on existing land use patterns, county and city/town comprehensive plans, zoning maps, input obtained during stakeholder meetings, and other data where available. Some information in this section is based on comprehensive plan maps which are intended to set a general framework for development rather than establish a guide, and are not considered to be regulatory. Data regarding future land use are limited due to the uncertainty associated with future development, changing land ownership, and lack of accessible information.

The following summarizes generally foreseeable future growth character and identifies activity centers (cities or towns in most cases) within each of the three focus areas. Land development has historically followed highways, and future residential and commercial development within the focus areas would be expected to follow this same trend. Many planned developments would likely occur near existing activity centers, perhaps within unincorporated county jurisdiction, where State Trust Lands are sold to private interests, or where BLM land exchanges may occur.

Mogollon Rim Focus Area

The Mogollon Rim Focus Area includes portions of Apache, Gila, and Navajo Counties. The major cities and towns (activity centers) within the area include Eager, Heber/Overgaard, Payson, Pinetop-Lakeside, Show Low, Snowflake, Springerville, St. Johns. The area also includes lands of the White Mountain Apache and Zuni Tribes, and the Apache-Sitgreaves and Tonto National Forests.

While all three of the counties within this focus area have comprehensive plans, only Apache and Navajo counties have documentation regarding future land use, which are recorded on “character area” maps under generalized categories.

Future activity centers include the cities and towns listed above. No planned developments greater than 1,000 acres have been identified within this focus area. Future residential areas would likely be located near or adjacent to existing activity centers, along major highways and at major highway intersections. Per the Navajo and Apache County Character Area maps, large areas between Snowflake and Holbrook, and Springerville and St. Johns, would include a range of residential densities (referred to as Community Village and Rural Edge), likely combined with commercial development in core areas.

Future open space would likely remain stable or slightly increase or decrease in select areas due to national park expansion, residential and related development over time. Future commercial/office/employment and industrial areas would generally be located near activity centers and highways and would likely be associated with newly developed residential areas.

Future growth initiatives as they affect future land use in this focus area include an increase in residential areas near the major activity centers and increased commercial development to support the residential growth, and an increase in open space due to a potential 125,000 acre expansion of the Petrified Forest National Park, see Figure 2-7a.