

Southwest Strategy

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The Southwest Strategy is a commitment by federal agencies involved in natural resources management to work in collaboration with each other, the public, and tribal, state, and local governments. The federal agencies participating in the Southwest Strategy recognize and respect the jurisdictional authority of the Governors and sovereign tribal nations of Arizona and New Mexico. The goal of the strategy is to maintain and restore the cultural, economic, and environmental quality of life in Arizona and New Mexico. The strategy will address community development and natural resources conservation and management within the jurisdictions of the involved federal agencies. It will proceed in a manner that is scientifically based, legally defensible, and implementable.

Why would the Southwest Strategy be needed? The management of federal lands has become increasingly complex in recent years. Arizona and New Mexico have large expanses of public and tribal lands intermingled with private lands, fast growing metropolitan centers, scarce water resources, unique cultural resources, diverse and fragile ecosystems with numerous endangered species, and many competing demands on public lands and water resources. Agencies, tribes, and the public need to work better together in a comprehensive, rather than piecemeal, effort. How will this effort be done? A collaborative problem solving approach will be used to address natural resources issues. Collaboration is not an end in itself, but is a means to achieve more consistent and responsive service to the public. It is also an agreement to continue talking despite differences and changing circumstances.

What is happening regarding the use of the Southwest Strategy?

-Federal agencies have greatly improved interagency communication and collaboration. A number of internal interagency teams are addressing issues of immediate concern to federal agencies in the Southwest, such as community development, Endangered Species Act Section 7 streamlining, legal issues, and communications.

What is planned to happen in the future of the Southwest Strategy?

-The public and the federal agencies will jointly design processes for future collaboration. State, Tribal, and local governments, nongovernmental organizations, the private sector, and interested individuals will be encouraged to participate. A few contacts have already been made as interested groups have sought information about the Southwest Strategy, such as Arizona's and New Mexico's Soil and Water Conservation Districts, the Arizona Resource Advisory Council, and the Verde Watershed Association.

- The participants will use the new processes to develop a comprehensive strategy to manage natural resources in a manner that Maintains and restores the cultural, economic, and environmental quality of life in the Southwest.

How are the federal agencies organized today to proceed with the Southwest Strategy?

- Work Groups are being established to address specific immediate federal issues in the Southwest. Some work groups are designed to help get the strategy started. Others are charged with developing ways to solve immediate to short-term issues which were primarily federal issues. Some of the groups only have a short-term life span, while others may have a broader participation by the public. The Regional Implementation Team (RIT) provides guidance direction, and monitoring of these groups.