

**Proposed Action**  
**Arizona National Scenic Trail Reroute**  
**Hay Meadow Trailhead to Gooseberry Springs Trailhead**  
**Mogollon Rim Ranger District**  
**Coconino National Forest**

## **Background**

The Arizona National Scenic Trail (AZNST) is one of 11 National Scenic Trails in the United States. Designated by an act of Congress through the National Trails System Act of 2009, the AZNST extends approximately 807 miles across the state of Arizona from the Mexico international border to the Arizona-Utah border. The Act directs National Scenic Trails be 'so located as to provide for maximum outdoor recreation potential and for the conservation and enjoyment of the nationally significant scenic, historic, natural, or cultural qualities of the areas through which such trails may pass' (sec 3.(a)2).

The Coconino National Forest (CNF) section of the AZNST offers some of the best scenery that the trail has to offer as the trail winds its way from the Mogollon Rim to the San Francisco Peaks north of Flagstaff. The AZNST contains 106 miles on the CNF, 45 of which are on the Mogollon Rim Ranger District (MRRD). The MRRD has pockets of natural beauty such as General Springs Canyon and stands of pine, aspen, and fir trees. This section of the AZNST through the MRRD is mostly flat. Forest roads bisect the trail on the southern section of the district. On the northern section of the district, the designated trail is located on nearly 18 miles of existing forest roads. Although much of the scenery and terrain is attractive, the trail is co-located with roads that are open to motorized vehicle use. The existence of a substantial portion of the AZNST on roads lessens the aesthetic qualities of the trail and conflicts with the National Scenic Trails System Act which prohibits use of motorized vehicles by the public along any national scenic trail {SEC. 7. [16USC1246](a)(1)}.

## **Project Location**

The project area is located within Coconino County and the Mogollon Rim Ranger District of the Coconino National Forest (Figures 1 and 2). The project area is generally defined on the north by the Mogollon Rim Ranger District Boundary, the Forest Boundary on the east, State Highway 87 on the south, and Forest Highway 3 (Lake Mary Road) on the west (Figure 2). More detailed project maps showing the reroute and existing trail are shown in Figures 3-6.

## **Project Purpose**

The purpose of the AZNST Reroute Project from Hay Meadow to Gooseberry Trailhead is to locate and reroute the trail off of existing roads and provide necessary improvements to the trail to enhance the visual aesthetics and improve the user experience for hikers, mountain bikers, and horseback riders on the national trail. By removing the current alignment from Forest Roads to a non-motorized single-track, the trail will be more sustainable and more desirable to use and easier to maintain.

## **Needs for Change**

### **Consistency with the Forest Plan and National Scenic Trails Act**

The Coconino National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) directs the AZNST ‘to be a non-motorized pathway’ (USDA Forest Service 1987). The Forest Plan states:

“This trail will be a non-motorized pathway. The route will use public lands to ensure public access; use existing trails, where use of the trail as part of the Arizona Trail does not cause substantial negative impacts; allow day-long, weekend, or week-long travel segments; accommodate hikers, equestrians, cross-country skiers, and back-country bicyclists where physically possible and where management permits; provide representation of the various life zones, geologic features, native vegetation, wildlife, cultural resources and resource management practices of the Coconino National Forest; be in harmony with other federal, state, and local government entities, and private landowners; and allow for continued production of outputs from forest resources as stated in the Forest Land Management Plan. Final trail location, design, construction, and signing to be accomplished by Forest staff and private sector/volunteer partnerships” (Forest Plan Replacement Page 52).

The National Trails System Act (NTSA) also states “The use of motorized vehicles by the general public along any national scenic trail shall be prohibited” {SEC. 7. [16USC1246](a)(1)}.

Currently 18 miles of the AZNST shares a route with forest system roads open to motor vehicles. There is a need to change the locations of these sections of the AZNST off of roads and to provide a high quality experience with scenic views for hikers, mountain bikers, and horseback riders in order to better achieve the desired recreation setting and resource management goals provided in the Forest Plan and the National Trails System Act.

### **Increase User Safety and Improve Wet Weather Conditions**

The existing AZNST from Highway 87 to FH3 is 31.2 miles, approximately 18 miles of which is on roads open to motorized use. Though the motor vehicle use on these roads is not particularly high, trail users still have to take the motorized use into consideration when planning their trips. The condition of the roads is such that the trail is not sustainable as single-track, and water runoff is not properly diverted or drained off roads. Motorized use of the trail on the roads in wet weather causes surface rutting and water ponding (Figure 7). Currently, use of the AZNST by hikers, mountain bikers, and horseback riders on the existing forest roads can be difficult as surface conditions can be extremely muddy and uneven in wet weather. There is a need to reroute the AZNST off of roads to improve user safety by eliminating motorized use and to improve wet weather conditions of a properly located and drained single-track non-motorized trail.

### **Improve Gate Location, Condition, Specifications, and Use**

During field work scouting for the trail reroute, many fences were found to be down on the ground and in disrepair with wire being rusted and broken. This section of trail also passes through multiple active grazing allotments, rangeland fences, and gates. Existing gates are falling apart and need to be relocated, repaired or completely redesigned. The current gates at many locations where the trail crosses a fence line are either primitive wire stock gates or no longer function properly (Figures 8 and 9). The new relocated trail crosses fence lines without any gate at all. There is a need to repair and replace existing gates along the AZNST and install new gates on the rerouted sections designed and engineered to provide easy, safe, and maintenance free access for hikers, bicyclists and equestrians (Figure 10).

Several new gates may have a bicycle rollover (Figure 11). The new gates would prevent livestock from bisecting the fence line and prohibit motor vehicle access.

### **Remove Old Signage and Decommission Segments of the AZNST**

Trail signs and delineation markers along the existing trail on roads would not be needed with the rerouted trail location. Small sections of the existing trail near roads or trailheads would also not be needed. There is a need to remove unneeded trail signs and delineation markers and decommission parts of the trail that are off of roads and will no longer be used.

### **Relocate the Pine Springs Trailhead**

The existing Pine Springs Trailhead is approximately ½ mile from proposed new trail crossing of Forest System Road (FSR) 294 (Figure 12). The existing trailhead is located at the junction of FSR 294 and FSR 135. Roads at this location are unsurfaced, and mud is deep in wet weather, very rutted in dry weather. There is a need to move the trailhead to move toward desired conditions that support a non-motorized, safe user experience. The reroute of the AZNST will bypass the current location of the Pine Springs Trailhead sign. There is a need to relocate the Pine Springs Trailhead sign and register box along the new alignment of the AZNST at FSR 294.

### **Construct Kiosks, a Hitch Rail and Add Surfacing Material at the Gooseberry Springs Trailhead**

The existing trailhead is located on FSR 92 near FH3. The current trailhead includes a trail register box and an AZNST sign and is popular with hikers, mountain bikers, and equestrian users (Figure 13). There is no place to tie up horses at the trailhead parking area. The trailhead lacks interpretative signage about the area or the AZNST. The existing parking area becomes rutted and muddy in wet weather. There is a need to install a three panel educational kiosk illustrating forest wildlife, local history, and the AZNST at the Gooseberry Springs Trailhead and to install a hitching rail for horses. In addition there is a need to add aggregate surfacing to the existing parking area which will benefit trail user parking of vehicles and trailers.

### **Construct a Share the Trail Kiosk at the Gooseberry Springs and Hay Meadow Trailheads**

The Gooseberry Springs Trailhead is located on FSR 92 near FH3 and Hay Meadow Trailhead on FSR 138 near State Highway 87 (Figures 13 and 14). The two trailheads lack interpretative signage about trail use and safety. There is a need to construct a single panel “Share the Trail Kiosk” with the purpose of explaining the importance of trail etiquette and safety for equestrians, hikers, and mountain bikers. Advice for shared use trails will include how to respect, communicate, and yield appropriately to other trail users.

## **Proposed Action**

The proposed action is to reroute and relocate approximately 18 miles of the alignment of the AZNST. The Coconino National Forest, Mogollon Rim Ranger District will relocate segments of the AZNST from forest roads, and shift segments of the AZNST alignment to single-track that meets the desired condition identified in the forest plan. Additionally, work will be done to make improvements to the existing Hay Meadow, Pine Springs, and Gooseberry Springs Trailheads and move toward the desired conditions in

the Forest Plan. Improvements or repair/replacement will also be made to existing gates where the AZNST passes through and new gates will be installed if needed.

The following Proposed Action has been developed to meet the projects purpose and need. The Proposed Action consists of the following components:

**1. New Construction and Alignment of the Arizona National Scenic Trail.**

Construct approximately 18 miles of trail designed for pack and stock. This will provide a quality non-motorized trail experience through the project area. The new alignment will blend with the terrain by taking advantage of the natural topography and vegetation. A combination of machine and hand crew construction is preferred. Machine construction will be conducted outside of Mexican Spotted Owl (MSO) and northern goshawk breeding seasons where the new alignment passes in or near Protected Activity Centers (PACs) for MSO or post-fledgling family areas (PFAs) for northern goshawk. The new alignment and construction will avoid any archeological or heritage sites.

**2. Removing signage and delineation of the AZNST along Forest System Roads.**

Remove existing trail-related signage and delineation along Forest System Roads where the trail is decommissioned. Remove trail signage from FSRs: 9727H, 93D, 93, 697, 93J, 6082, 93A, 294, 135D, and 92A. Signage will likely be removed from other “closed” but signed roads. Removing AZNST signage along portions of the decommissioned trail where the trail follows FSRs will avoid confusion.

**3. Decommission unneeded segments of the AZNST.**

Approximately ¼ mile of existing trail will be decommissioned near the Pine Springs Trailhead to link to the new trail construction and alignment. Approximately ¼ mile of existing trail will be decommissioned north of FSR 6048 to link new trail construction and alignment.

**4. Repair, replace, or construct existing range fence lines and gates where new construction and alignment of the AZNST occurs.**

Repair or replace approximately 15 gates as needed at range fence line crossings for trail user access. Gate specifications will be large enough to allow passage of stock animals. Gates will be constructed from the same material used for the attached fence. In some instances metal gates may be used.

**5. Reconstruct the Pine Springs Trailhead adjacent to the new alignment of the AZNST.**

Relocate the Pine Springs Trailhead sign and register box to new trail alignment at FSR 294 near Bargaman Park. The sign will be placed at the trailhead to meet the needs of the user and management.

**6. Construct a kiosk and hitch rail at the Gooseberry Springs Trailhead.**

Install a three panel educational kiosk illustrating forest wildlife, local history, and the AZNST. Install a hitch rail for pack and stock users. Improve existing parking area with aggregate surfacing. The existing trail head is located on FSR 92 near FH3.

## **7. Construct a Share the Trail Kiosk at the Gooseberry Springs and Hay Meadow Trailheads.**

Construct a single panel kiosk at the Gooseberry Springs Trailhead located on FSR 92 near FH3 and Hay Meadow Trailhead on FSR 138 near State Highway 87. The purpose of the Share the Trail Kiosk is to explain the importance of trail etiquette and safety.

### **Reroute Segment Location and Design Objectives**

The following management objectives have been considered in locating the best corridors for the 18 miles of rerouted trail segments.

- Location that best meets statute and policy regarding location, maximum outdoor recreation potential, and providing for the conservation and enjoyment of the nationally significant resources, qualities, values, associated settings, and the primary uses of the AZNST.
- Maximizes potential for management corridor development and protection from the standpoint of land ownership, foreseeable future threats, incompatible uses, and valid existing rights.
- Ensures a trail location that meets agency sustainability specifications and maintenance requirements and blends with the environment in a cost-effective and environmentally responsible manner.
- Balances recreational uses with the protection of wildlife habitat. Takes steps to mitigate negative effects to threatened, endangered, and sensitive species. Strive for positive human/wildlife habitat interactions.

The following field review considerations were used to locate and design the proposed reroute corridors.

- Seek a scenic, predominately natural setting (FS – Scenery Management Objective of Very High or High).
- Use natural topography to reduce visual impacts by manmade features where possible.
- Accommodate primary uses (hiking, equestrian, and mountain bicycle use) on a single route.
- Provide a non-motorized setting with minimal interface with motorized traffic and the noise of motorized use, as well as with other conflicting uses.
- Minimize conflicts with riparian corridors, except at designated access points or crossing sites.
- Minimize conflicts with sensitive wildlife habitat locations.
- Replace or repair gates at fence crossings according to standards.
- Avoid or mitigate potentially unsafe trail building conditions.
- In designing the trail, strive for maximum sustainability and minimize future maintenance needs.
- Incorporate safe and accessible trailhead locations, where appropriate.
- Access to water sources.
- Cost and scheduling.

### **Proposed Design Features**

The Proposed Action is designed to comply with law, regulation, policy and Forest Plan standards and guidelines. Sustainable design features would be incorporated into the project to protect forest resources of recreation opportunity and experience, soil, water, scenery values, cultural resources,

wildlife and aquatic habitat, and rare plants. Mitigation measures and best management practices would be implemented to prevent the introduction and spread of invasive plants, to protect threatened, endangered and sensitive wildlife habitat and plant species, to protect heritage resources, and to protect public health and safety during project implementation. Specific design features include but are not limited to the following:

- Soil/Hydrology (provide surface drainage)
- Heritage/Archeology (avoid archeological sites)
- Wildlife (avoid disturbance of breeding MSO and northern goshawks to the extent possible)
- Botany (protect rare and sensitive plant species)
- Range (improvement to existing gates and construction of new gates)
- Safety (new trail alignment off existing roads)

Resource protection measures and project design features will be described in the decision document.

## **Partnerships**

The development of this Proposed Action has been an effort in collaboration. The Arizona Trail Association (ATA) has been involved in developing this proposed action by assisting with scouting reroute locations, and recognizing a need for the trail to be consistent with the Forest Plan and NSTA. The ATA, interested volunteers and partners will partner with the USFS Mogollon Rim Ranger District to implement the project.

## **National Environmental Policy Act Compliance**

It is anticipated that this proposal falls under Categorical Exclusion 36 CFR 220.6(e)(1) *Construction and reconstruction of trails*. “Categorical exclusion” means a category of actions that do not individually or cumulatively have a significant effect on the environment and therefore neither an Environmental Assessment nor an Environmental Impact Statement is required (FSH 1909.15, 30.3). With the proposed design features it anticipated that no extraordinary circumstances are present that would preclude use of the category.

## **Decision to be Made**

The Mogollon Rim Ranger District is the Responsible Official for this project. The decision to be made is whether or not to approve the Proposed Action, another alternative, or develop another design that meets the purpose and need and moves the area towards the desired condition, or to not implement a project at this time.

## **Contact Person**

Project Leader: Brady VanDragt, Recreation Planner, Mogollon Rim Ranger District (928-477-5052) or email: [bvandragt@fs.fed.us](mailto:bvandragt@fs.fed.us)

## **Web Site Information**

Use this link to go to the current projects planning site for information about the project.

<https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=50810>



ARIZONA NATIONAL SCENIC TRAIL REROUTE PROJECT  
HAY MEADOW TRAILHEAD TO GOOSEBERRY SPRINGS TRAILHEAD  
MOGOLLON RIM RANGER DISTRICT  
COCONINO NATIONAL FOREST

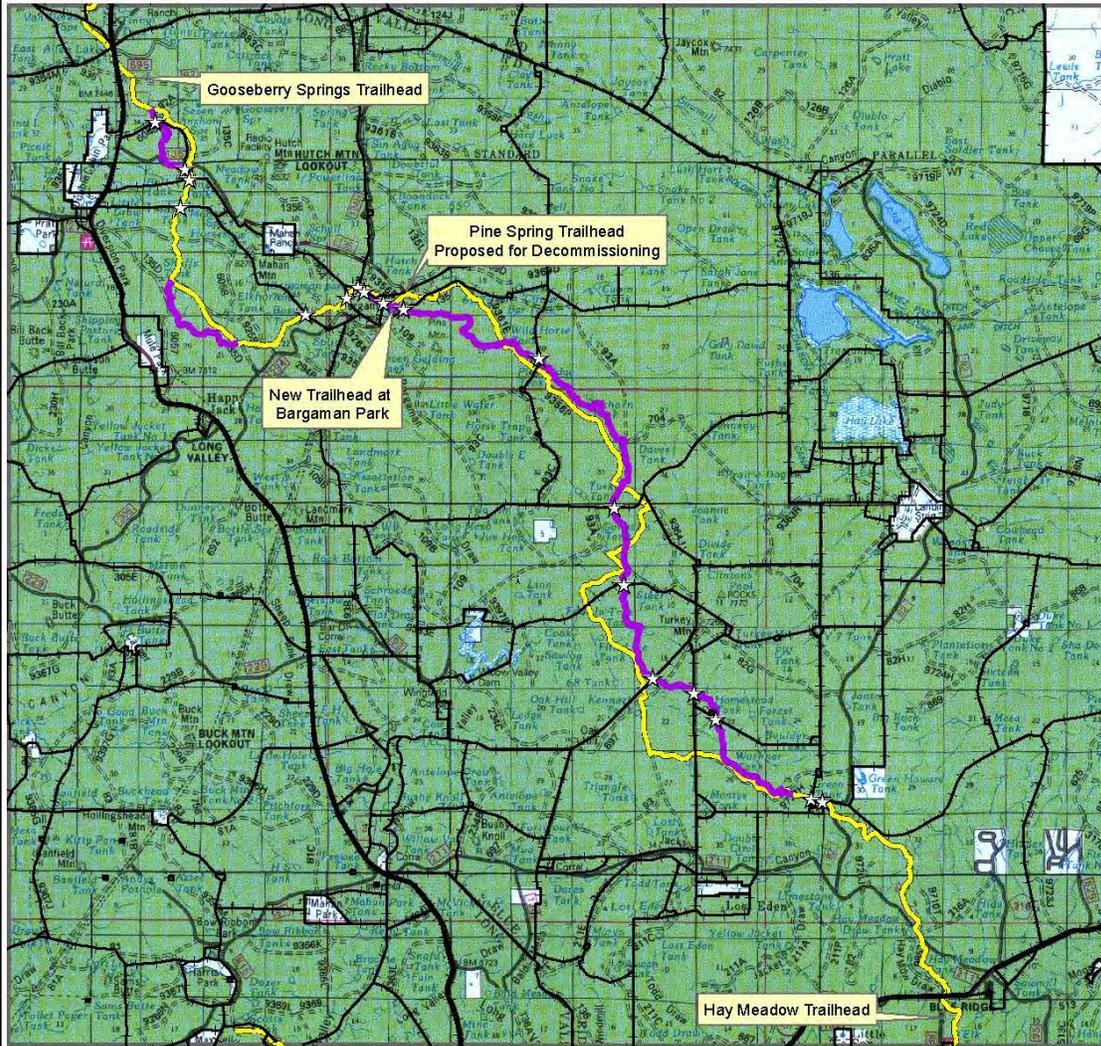


B. VanDragt 2-8-2017

Figure 1. Vicinity Map

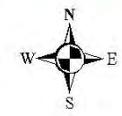
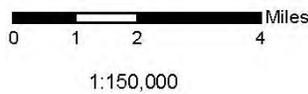


# Arizona National Scenic Trail Re-Route Project Hay Meadow Trailhead to Gooseberry Springs Trailhead Mogollon Rim Ranger District Coconino National Forest



**Legend**

- Proposed Reroutes
- Existing Trail
- Proposed New Gates
- Fence, Barbed Wire

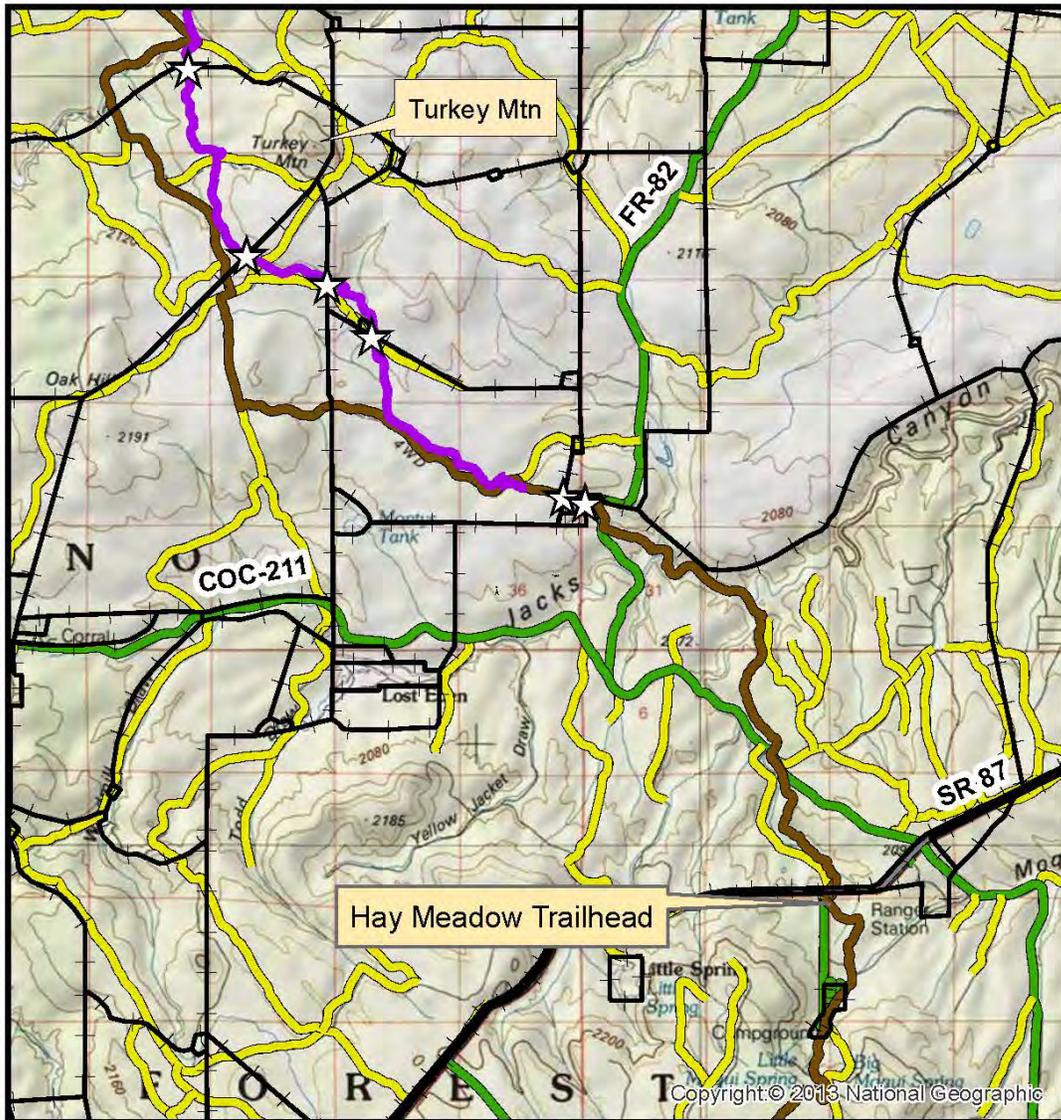


B. VanDragt 2-8-2017

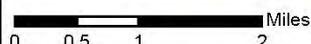
Figure 2. Project Location Map



# Arizona National Scenic Trail Re-Route Project Hay Meadow to Turkey Mtn Reroutes Mogollon Rim Ranger District Coconino National Forest



Legend	
<span style="color: purple;">—</span>	Proposed Reroutes
☆	Proposed New Gates
<span style="color: brown;">—</span>	Existing Trail
+	Fence, Barbed Wire
Forest Road Status	
<span style="color: yellow;">—</span>	MVUM-open, all vehicles, yearlong
<span style="color: green;">—</span>	MVUM-open, hwy-legal vehicles, yearlong



1:75,000



B. VanDragt 2-8-2017

**Figure 3. AZNST Reroute Hay Meadow to Turkey Mtn**



**Arizona National Scenic Trail Re-Route Project  
Turkey Mtn To Pine Ridge Tank Reroutes  
Mogollon Rim Ranger District  
Coconino National Forest**

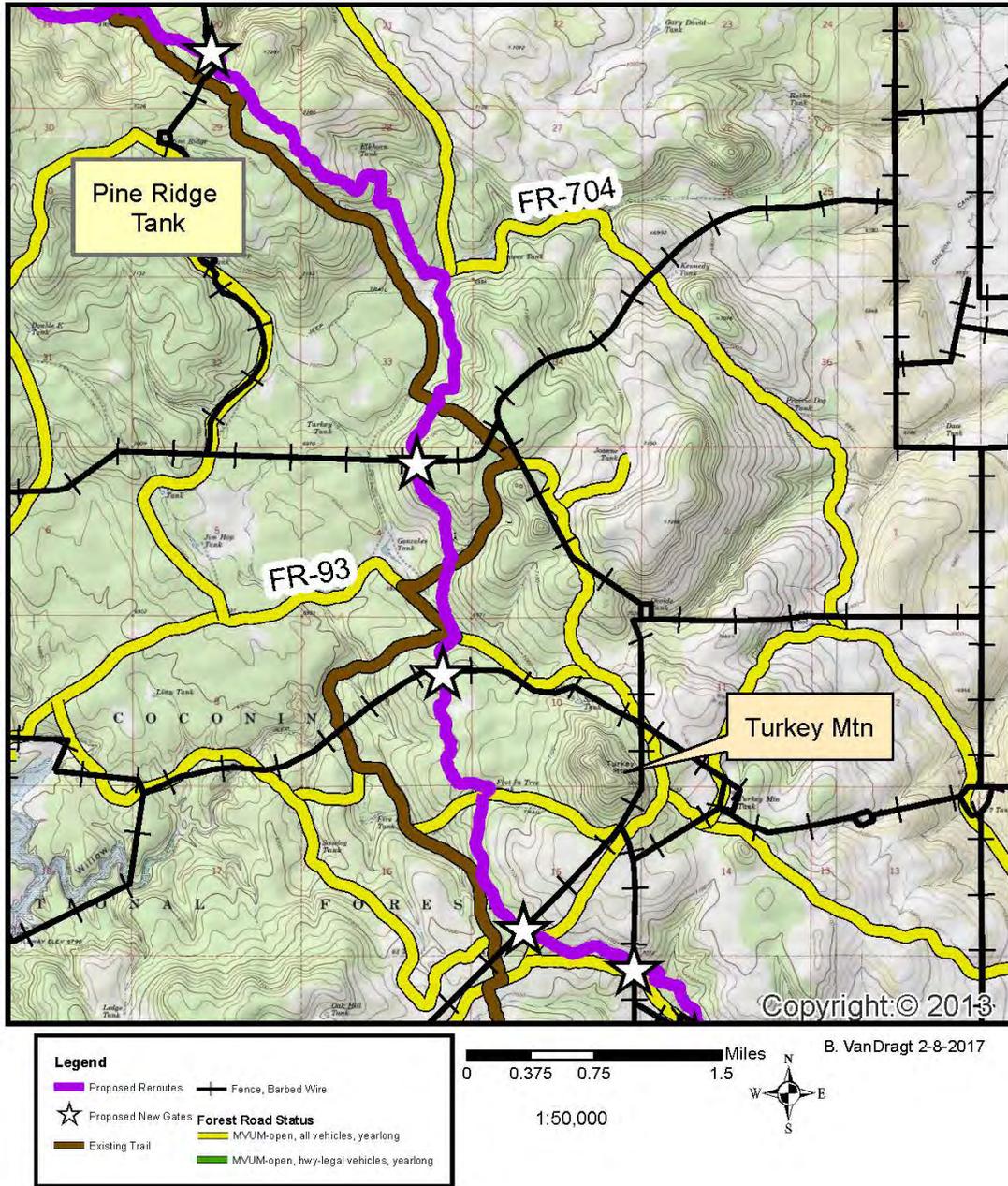
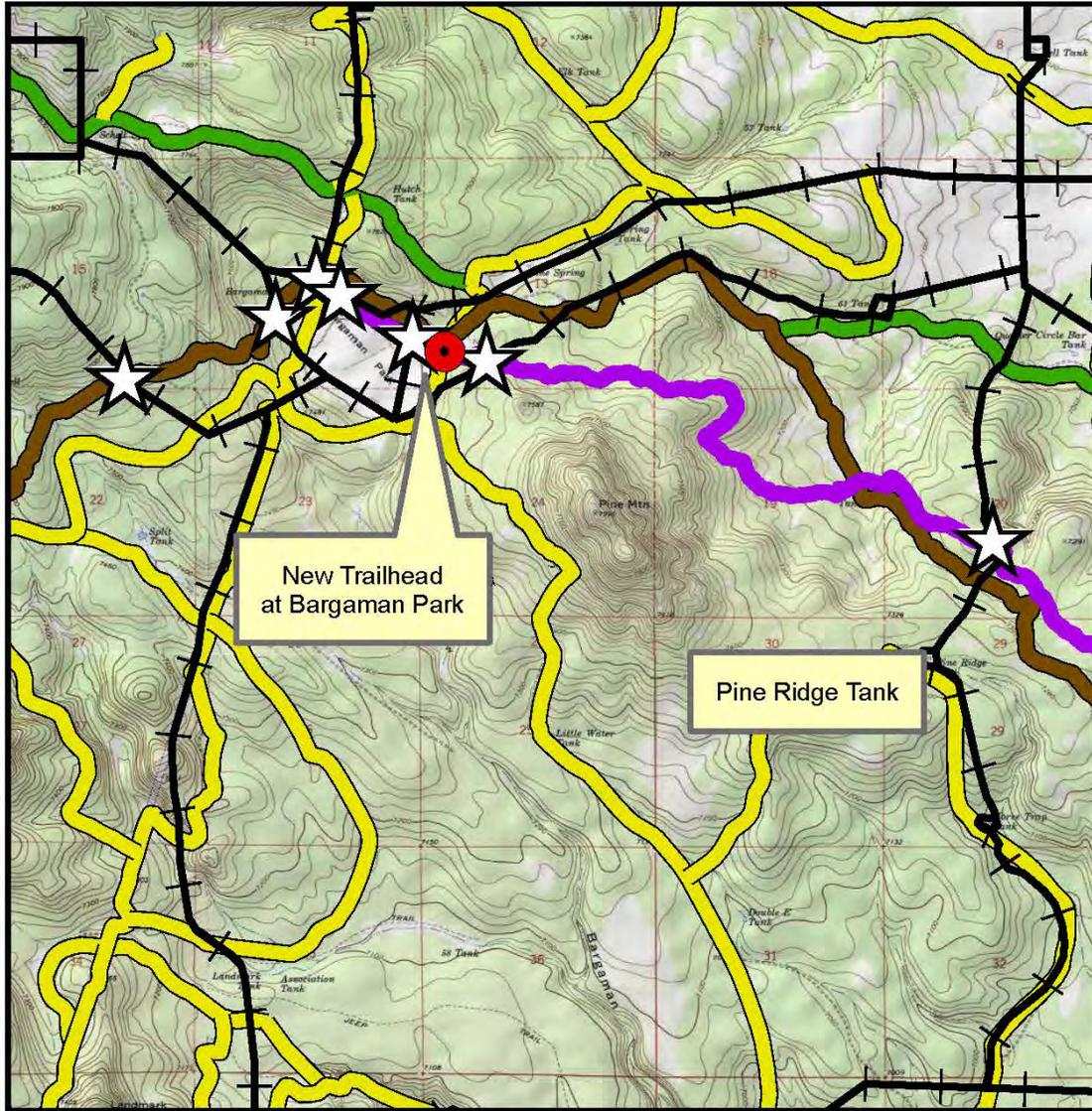


Figure 4. AZNST Reroute, Turkey Mtn to Pine Ridge Tank



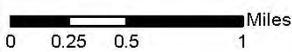
**Arizona National Scenic Trail Re-Route Project  
 Pine Ridge Tank to Bargaman Park Reroutes  
 Mogollon Rim Ranger District  
 Coconino National Forest**



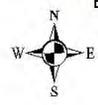
**Legend**

	Proposed Reroutes		Fence, Barbed Wire
	Proposed New Gates		MVUM-open, all vehicles, yearlong
	Existing Trail		MVUM-open, hwy-legal vehicles, yearlong
	Proposed New Trailhead		

**Forest Road Status**



1:40,000

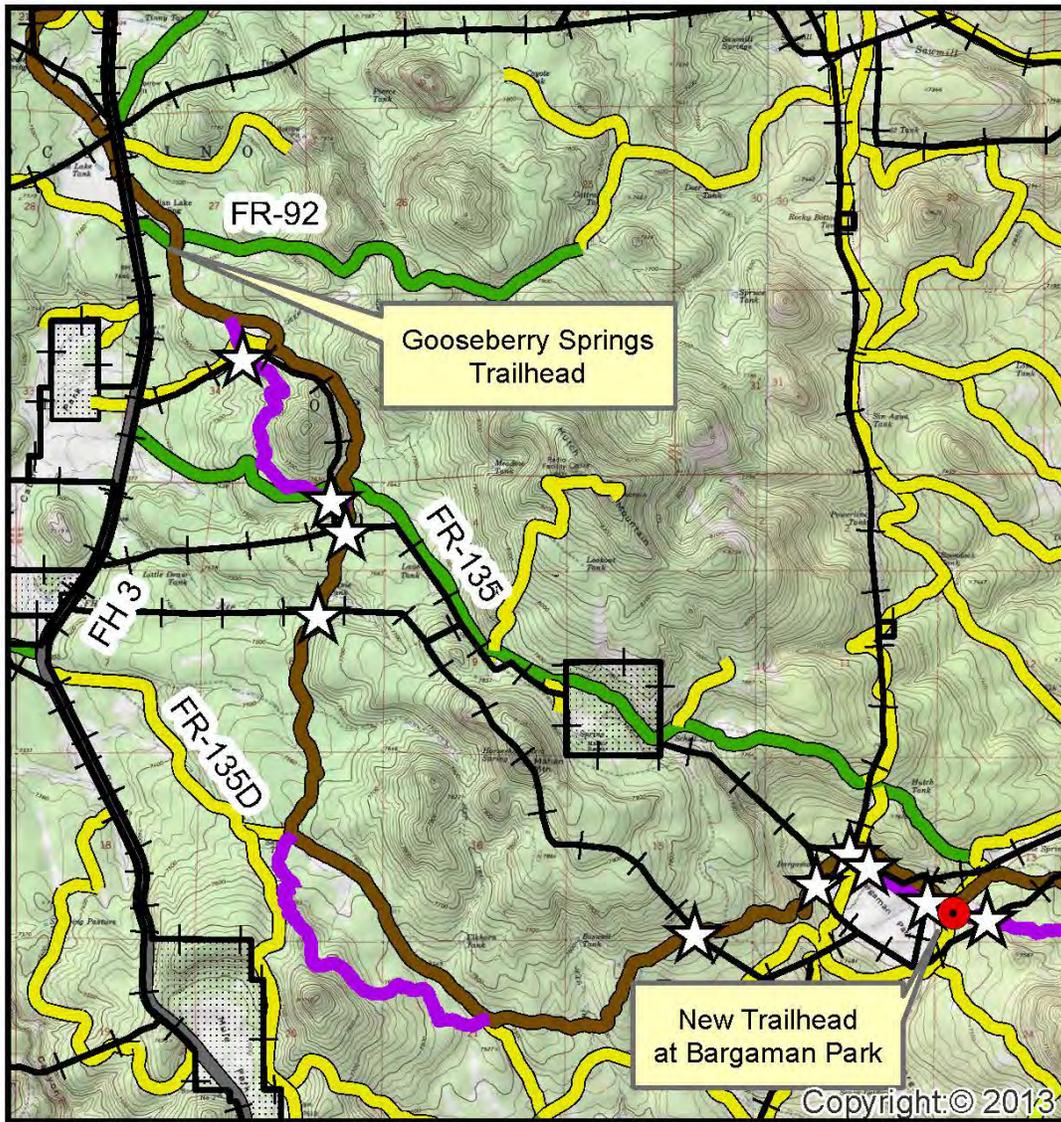


B. VanDragt 2-8-2017

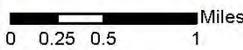
Figure 5. AZNST Reroute Pine Ridge Tank to Bargaman Pa



**Arizona National Scenic Trail Re-Route Project**  
**Proposed Bargaman Park Trailhead to**  
**Gooseberry Springs Trailhead Reroutes**  
**Mogollon Rim Ranger District**  
**Coconino National Forest**



<b>Legend</b>	
	Proposed Reroutes
	Proposed New Gates
	Existing Trail
	Proposed New Trailhead
	Fence, Barbed Wire
<b>Forest Road Status</b>	
	MVUM-open, all vehicles, yearlong
	MVUM-open, hwy-legal vehicles, yearlong



1:50,000



B. VanDragt 2-8-2017

Figure 6. AZNST Reroute Proposed Bargaman Park Trailhead to Gooseberry Springs Trailhead



**Figure 7. Typical existing road/trail location in Wet Conditions**



**Figure 8. Example of existing gates at AZNST fence crossings**



**Figure 9. Example of existing gates at AZNST fence crossings**



Figure 10. Example of a new proposed gate design



Figure 11. Example of desired gate with bicycle rollover bar



Figure 12. : Existing Pine Spring Trailhead



Figure 13. : Existing Gooseberry Springs Trailhead and Trail Register



Figure 14. Existing Hay Meadow Trailhead and Trail Register