

DRAFT

Roles and Contributions of the Carson National Forest

High elevation lakes and meadows, diverse ecosystems extending from high desert to alpine tundra, deeply carved canyons where rivers and streams originate as headwaters of the upper Rio Grande, and rust red hills near Abiquiu describe the Carson NF. The Carson NF represents the abundant resources, scenic beauty, and intrigue that attracted Native Americans, early Spanish explorers and settlers, and travelers from other parts of the North America to find and experience the American Southwest. This diversity of landscape and the people who have settled in the area help frame the roles and contributions of the Carson National Forest.

Vegetation: The Carson NF's topography consists of two distinct mountain ranges, high plateaus or mesas, canyons, valleys, and normally dry arroyos. The Carson NF's landscape is generally mountainous, with numerous perennial streams, most draining into the Rio Grande. Small lakes, alpine valleys, meadows, aspen groves, and spruce-fir forests highlight the area. The Carson NF comprises some of the most productive and important watersheds and provides an important component for biological diversity in the landscape of the southwestern United States. Over 1,000 species of plants and animals occur on the Carson NF and it contributes over 40 percent of the waters that flow into the Rio Grande from northern New Mexico and southern Colorado.

Water: The Carson NF is a significant contributor to the water resources for the many small communities adjacent to the forest as well as many downstream communities along the Rio Grande. The Carson has approximately 1,044 miles of perennial streams that together contribute 40.3 percent of the total runoff in the Rio Chama and Upper Rio Grande sub-basins. The Carson NF lands also provide a significant amount of water for ground recharge within these two sub-basins. These two sub-basins are home to the majority of the population in Rio Arriba and Taos Counties. Within the assessment area, water demands come from agricultural needs, mining, drinking and domestic usage, recreation, and habitat for fish and wildlife.

Cultural and Traditional Resources: The Carson NF is used by 16 federally recognized tribes, 18 land grants, over 800 acequias, and many small, native Hispanic communities with historic, cultural, and social connections to the forest. Forest Service lands contribute the the traditional uses important these people and communities with long family histories in the area. The important traditional uses the forest contributes to include firewood for heating and cooking, latillas and vigas, opportunity for hunting and fishing, forage for livestock grazing, medicinal plants and herbs, pinon nuts, family recreation opportunities, and water for acequias. Many important sacred sites to American Indian tribes are located on the forest.

Recreation: The demand for recreation uses and opportunity has increased in the last 20 years. Recreation related activities provide the greatest economic contribution for local communities. The four ski areas, Taos Ski Valley, Sipapu Ski and Summer Resort, Red River Ski and Summer Area, and Enchanted Forest Cross-country and Snowshoe Area, are significant contributors to the local economy drawing almost 450,000 visitors a year. In addition the Carson NF draws another 550,000 visitors a year for hunting, fishing, mountain biking, hiking, camping, and motorized recreation.

Wildlife Diversity: The diversity of wildlife found on the Carson NF provides enjoyment and aesthetic value for the photographer, bird watcher, nature lover, hiker, camper, and hunter. The Carson NF is home to large mammals including mule deer (*Odocoileus hemionus*), elk (*Cervus elaphus*), bighorn sheep (*Ovis canadensis*), pronghorn (*Antilocapra americana*), mountain lion (*Puma concolor*), black bear (*Ursus americanus*), and many other species. Its waters provide home to native fishes such as Rio Grande cutthroat trout, Rio Grande sucker, and Rio Grande chub. The Carson NF has many wildernesses, roadless areas, calving areas, and winter area that provide protection to numerous animals, plants, and birds from human disturbances.