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# QUANTIFYING COURT-RELATED TRAVEL BURDEN IN COCONINO COUNTY COMMUNITIES

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## Funding Statement

This report was produced as part of the Rural County Alternative Prosecution and Diversion Program Grant (RCAPD). The RCAPD was awarded to the Coconino County Attorney's Office by the Arizona Criminal Justice Commission (ACJC). The goal of RCAPD is to identify and eliminate barriers to compliance for individuals in the criminal justice system to reduce recidivism and improve community health.

## Executive Summary

Travel distances required for individuals to appear in court vary based upon residence location. In Coconino County, where communities and resources are spread out, many individuals must travel more than 150 miles round-trip to attend their court hearings. To quantify court access at a community level, the total round-trip distance between each individual's community and the city of their court hearing was calculated and summed by residence community. This metric, referred to as the Community Travel Burden, quantifies which communities would have the greatest potential benefit from increased court access. Communities with the highest Community Travel Burden values were Tuba City, Page, Tonalea, Flagstaff, and Kaibeto. Communities with high values were generally clustered in the northeastern region of the County, indicating a need for increased court access in this region. Initiatives such as remote hearings, Travel Court, and addition of remote court pods can help close the gap in court access in rural communities.

## Background

Coconino County is a large and predominantly rural area with limited public transportation services, making travel to court potentially burdensome for many residents. This analysis seeks to quantify the distances individuals travel for court and identifies communities that could benefit most from efforts to reduce travel to court. Access to courts is essential for complying with legal obligations. Missing hearings or failing to meet court-ordered requirements can result in Failure to Appear (FTA) or Failure to Comply (FTC) warrants, which may carry long-term consequences and accumulating fees. Ensuring residents can effectively access the court system is therefore a key component of a functional and responsive justice process.

## Methods

### Data Source

This analysis uses court data provided by the Arizona Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC). Courts under AOC jurisdiction regularly submit case information, which the AOC compiles into a standardized format. For this analysis, the dataset was restricted to cases filed in 2023, which represented the most recent full year of available data. The dataset included variables such as filing date, party type, party address, court name, and charges filed. Only records in which the party was identified as a defendant and in which charges were associated with the case were retained. Additionally, only cases filed in a court within Coconino County were used. Tribal courts, which operate outside the jurisdiction of the Arizona Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC), were not included in this analysis.

### Address Processing

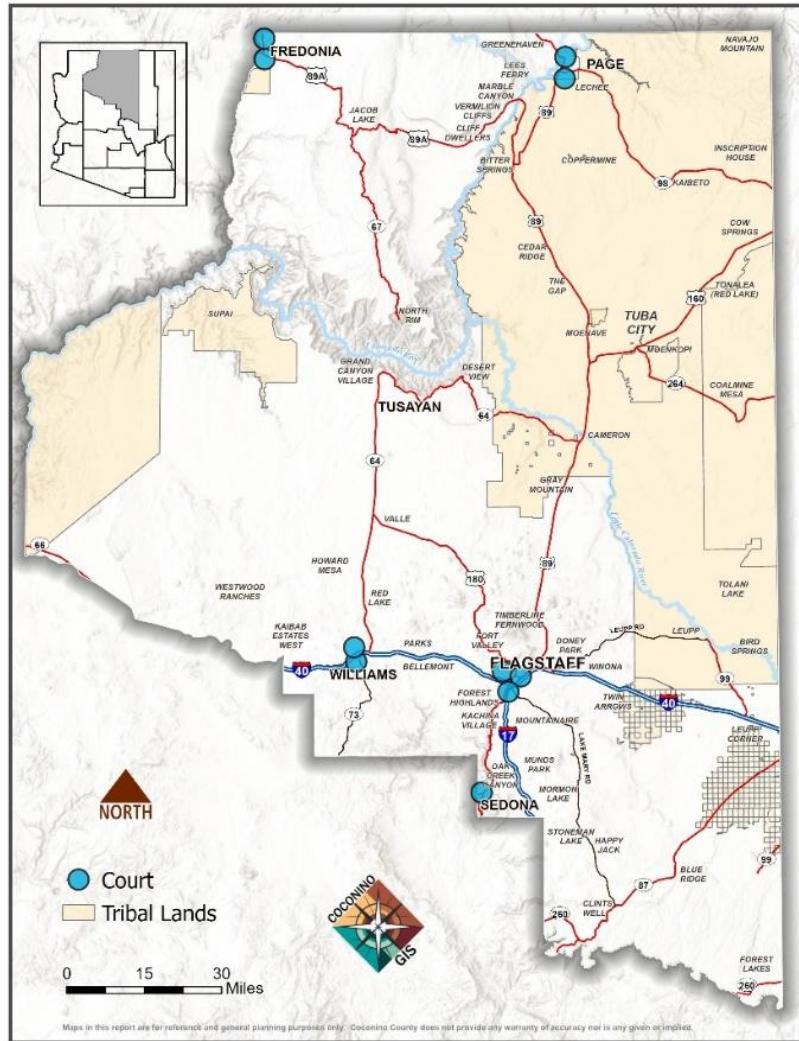
Defendants' address information was used if it could be reasonably interpreted; cases with missing or unclear data were excluded. If multiple addresses were listed for an individual, the first address on file was used. Address formats varied widely, ranging from full street addresses to descriptive references such as "15 miles east of" a town, milepost, or landmark—a format common in tribal areas where the U.S. Postal Service does not provide standard street addressing. Some uncertainty in address accuracy is expected, particularly for individuals experiencing housing instability. The dataset was restricted to addresses located within Coconino County. This filtering also removed records with missing or unidentifiable residence information.

Addresses were geocoded using ESRI's World Geocoding Service to convert available information into latitude and longitude coordinates for mapping. Next, each address was summarized to the community level according to the community it was located within or the nearest community if the address fell between localities. Aggregating addresses to the community level provided a consistent level of geographic detail across all records. The list of communities used for this process includes U.S. Census-designated places, Chapter House locations, and additional communities that were common in the dataset.

Because addresses are summarized to the community level, the distance analyses in this report focus on travel between communities (out-of-town travel) and do not consider travel that may be required to attend court in the same city as the defendant's residence. The travel distances estimated in this report represent approximate burdens based on the location of the defendant's community of residence.

### Court Cases in Coconino County

Coconino County, located in north-central Arizona, is the second-largest county in the contiguous United States, spanning more than 18,600 square miles. The county's vast geography, diverse landscapes, and varied communities create significant challenges for ensuring access to court services across its rural areas. There are 10 courts within Coconino County, distributed across five cities (Map 1).



Court data provided by the AOC for 2023 filings was used to better understand where defendants live within the County and the travel burden they face when accessing court services. Cases were aggregated by court (Table 1) for all defendants residing in Coconino County. Table 1 displays the total number of 2023 cases by court for Coconino County residents.

**Table 1.** Cases by court for Coconino County residents.

Court Name	Locality	Number of Cases <sup>1</sup>
Coconino County Superior Court	Flagstaff	649
Flagstaff Justice Court	Flagstaff	3,077
Flagstaff Municipal Court	Flagstaff	3,661
Fredonia Justice Court	Fredonia	75
Fredonia Municipal Court	Fredonia	49
Page Justice Court	Page	588
Page Municipal Court	Page	748
Sedona Municipal Court	Sedona	198
Williams Justice Court	Williams	329
Williams Municipal Court	Williams	177

<sup>1</sup>. Administrative Office of the Courts data –court location and number of court cases filed in 2023 in each the 10 courts considered in this report.

## Court Cases by Community

Understanding where defendants live can be used to identify how court involvement varies across communities. Table 2 presents the top ten communities with the highest number of court cases. In general, case counts correspond with population size. Flagstaff, Page, and Tuba City—the three most populous communities within Coconino County—have the three highest number of cases. Tonalea is an exception to this pattern and has the 6<sup>th</sup> highest number of cases despite having a very low population (275). Supplemental information about case counts by community and court is given in Table A1.

**Table 2.** Total cases by community of residence (top 10).

Rank	Community Name	Community Description	Number of Cases <sup>1</sup>	Community Population <sup>2</sup>	Cases Per Capita (Rate per 1,000)
1	Flagstaff	Incorporated City	5,053	76,333	66.2
2	Page	Incorporated City	1,048	7,407	141.5
3	Tuba City	Navajo Nation	496	8,265	60.0
4	Doney Park	Unincorporated Community	341	5,947	57.3
5	Williams	Incorporated City	280	3,322	84.3
6	Tonalea	Navajo Nation	253	275	920.0
7	Kaibeto	Navajo Nation	238	1,679	141.8
8	Kachina Village	Unincorporated Community	235	3,212	73.2
9	Leupp	Navajo Nation	172	1,027	167.5
10	Timberline-Fernwood	Unincorporated Community	169	2,326	72.7

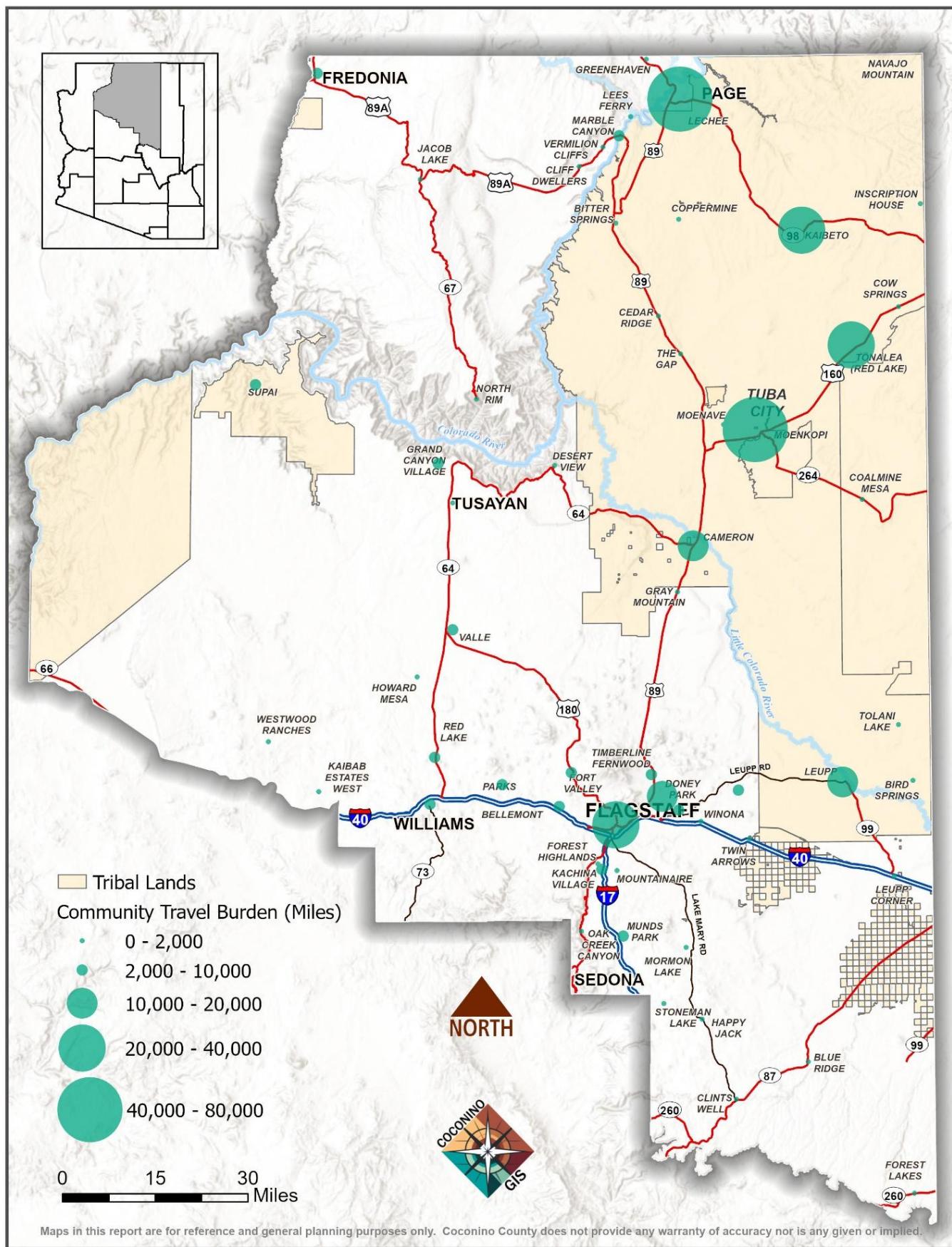
1. *Administrative Office of the Courts data – defendants' residence and court locations for court cases filed in 2023 in the 10 courts included in this report.*

2. *Data Source: US Census Bureau - 2019-2023 ACS 5-Year population estimates, shown for additional context. Note that the uncertainty in population estimates is generally higher for communities on tribal lands.*

## Community Travel Burden Analysis

Given Coconino County's large geographic area, travel distance is a major factor affecting access to court services. While the frequency of cases in Table 2 shows which communities account for the highest total volume of cases, it does not indicate where those cases were heard or how far residents must travel to attend court. To better understand which communities have the greatest total travel burden to attend court, an additional analysis was conducted that focused on travel distance. Using the same set of 2023 cases, each defendants' community of residence was compared with the locations where their case was filed. For all cases requiring travel to a court outside the community of residence, the two-way (round-trip) driving distance was calculated between the home community and the court location (Appendix Table A2). These distances were then summed for each community to estimate the total community travel burden for each community across Coconino County. This metric, referred to as the Community Travel Burden, is summarized in Equation A1 of the Appendix.

The Community Travel Burden metric helps identify which communities have the largest potential benefit from enhanced access initiatives such as mobile courts, remote hearing pods, or expanded virtual court options. Map 2 provides a countywide visualization of Community Travel Burden and Table 3 presents the ten communities with the highest values of Community Travel Burden and supplemental information.



**Map 2.** Community Travel Burden calculated for communities within Coconino County.

**Table 3.** Total round-trip miles to out-of-town cases by community of residence (top 10).

Rank	Community Name	Community Description	Total Court Cases	Out of Town Court Cases	Community Travel Burden (miles) <sup>1</sup>
1	Tuba City	Navajo Nation	496	496	78,526
2	Page	Incorporated City	1,048	236	58,576
3	Tonalea	Navajo Nation	253	253	39,403
4	Flagstaff	Incorporated City	5,053	221	29,047
5	Kaibeto	Navajo Nation	238	238	27,293
6	Cameron	Navajo Nation	152	152	17,876
7	Leupp	Navajo Nation	172	172	15,540
8	Doney Park	Unincorporated Community	341	341	11,012
9	Williams	Incorporated City	280	85	6,793
10	Grand Canyon Village	Unincorporated Community	43	43	6,753

1. Data Source: AOC Court data – defendants' residence and court locations for court cases filed in 2023 in the 10 courts located within Coconino County that are under AOC jurisdiction.

Tuba City residents had the highest Community Travel Burden, suggesting the greatest potential benefit from expanded court access initiatives. The combination of a high number cases and a round-trip distance of more than 150 miles to attend any court resulted in a substantial Community Travel Burden for this community. Page had the 2<sup>nd</sup> highest Community Travel Burden despite having both a municipal and justice court within the city. This is largely because many residents of Page had cases filed in Flagstaff courts, requiring approximately 260 round trip miles to attend court. Two small neighboring communities, Tonalea and Kaibeto, had the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> highest out-of-town travel burdens. These communities had a moderate number of cases (all of which are out-of-town) at 253 and 238, respectively. Tonalea is 112 and 196 round-trip miles from Page and Flagstaff, respectively, while Kaibeto is 71 and 244 round-trip miles from Page and Flagstaff, respectively.

Flagstaff, whose residents make up a majority (53%) of the overall court cases for Coconino County is ranked 4<sup>th</sup> for Community Travel Burden. The vast majority of cases for Flagstaff residents are filed at courts within Flagstaff, which serves as the primary geographic hub for the County and houses a Municipal Court, Justice Court, and Superior Court. Of the 5,053 cases among Flagstaff residents, only 221 were filed in courts located outside of Flagstaff. These out-of-town cases occur in locations such as Page, Williams, and Sedona and cause Flagstaff to still have a relatively high Community Travel Burden.

In summary, remote and tribal communities rank higher in the need for improved court access when accounting for travel distance rather than case volume alone. These findings highlight the importance of geographic isolation in understanding court access and highlight opportunities for focused strategies—such as mobile court sessions, expanded remote hearing options, or additional court access points—to reduce travel demands for residents in geographically isolated areas.

## Court Access Options

The following section describes strategies that can increase court access for rural community members.

### Remote Hearings

During the Covid-19 pandemic, many courts expanded their use of remote attendance. Individuals can join via their telephone or computer and attend court virtually from a location of their choice if they have reliable internet and phone service. Continued availability of remote hearing options can reduce travel-related barriers for individuals attending court.

### Travel Court (Justice Bus)

Travel Court is an initiative for court officials to travel outside of Flagstaff and provide services such as quashing warrants, assistance with adult probation, assistance with marijuana conviction expungement, and accessing payment systems for court fees. Participating courts include Coconino County Superior Court and Flagstaff Justice Court. This program benefits individuals in rural areas by creating opportunities for individuals to resolve court matters in person without being required to travel long distances to Flagstaff. Expansion of this program to include more participating courts, travel locations, or frequency of travel days would further help individuals in rural areas to access court.

### Addition of Remote Court Pods

Remote court pods, shaped like a phone booth, are equipped with all required technology such as audio and video equipment and also allow individuals to scan and sign documents. Remote court pods provide a private location for individuals to attend court hearings remotely over video. This option is particularly helpful in communities where many individuals lack personal internet connection or reliable cell service. Unlike Travel Court, remote pods can increase access to courts each day during operating hours rather than on scheduled days only. Communities with the highest need for pod placement include Tuba City, Page and Tonalea.

Based on data and analysis in this report, Coconino County Superior Court and Coconino County Health and Human Services received a grant to coordinate placement of a remote court pod in Tuba City to increase court access in the northeastern region of the County. To estimate its potential impact, the difference in Community Travel Burden was calculated, assuming all courts within the County choose to participate and allow hearings from the remote pod. If all Tuba City residents utilized the court pod instead of traveling to their assigned court, the total Community Travel Burden for Coconino County would decrease by 22%. If all individuals who reside closer to the remote pod than to their physical court utilized the pod—including those residing outside Tuba City—the County's overall Community Travel Burden would decrease by 47%. Because some individuals may prefer or be required to appear in person, these estimates represent an upper bound. Nonetheless, they represent a substantial potential impact from a single intervention.

## Findings and Recommendations

Community Travel Burden for in-person court appearances varies by community and is generally higher for communities in the northeastern portion of Coconino County, on or near the Navajo Nation. These communities include Tuba City, Tonalea, Kaibeto, and Page. This pattern is a combination of two factors: (1) the long travel distance between individuals listed home residence and the court where their case is, and (2) the high number of court cases filed against individuals who reside in these communities. Options for ensuring court access in these communities include remote court options, Travel Court, and the placement of remote court pods in locations of high need.

## Appendix

### Equation A1.

$$\text{Community Travel Burden}_c = \sum_{i \in c} 2 \times d(i, \text{court})$$

Where:

- $c$  = a given community
- $i \in c$  = each defendant residing in community  $c$
- $d(i, \text{court})$  = one-way distance from the defendant's community to the defendant's court location. Calculated distances are given in Table A2.
- The factor of 2 accounts for a round-trip

**Table A1.** Case counts by court and community of residence for the 10 communities with the most court cases.

Defendant's Residence Location	Coconino County Superior Court	Flagstaff Justice Court	Flagstaff Municipal Court	Page Justice Court	Page Municipal Court	Williams Justice Court	Williams Municipal Court	Sedona Municipal Court	Fredonia Justice Court	Fredonia Municipal Court	Total
Flagstaff	361	1,596	2,875	40	<10	76	22	59	15	<10	5,053
Page	94	86	33	300	512	<10	<10	<10	15	<10	1,048
Tuba City	32	263	122	32	31	<10	<10	<10	10	<10	496
Doney Park	13	212	97	<10	<10	<10	<10	<10	<10	<10	341
Williams	15	44	22	<10	<10	83	112	<10	<10	<10	280
Tonalea	25	54	44	64	62	<10	<10	<10	<10	<10	253
Kaibeto	14	28	17	69	109	<10	<10	<10	<10	<10	238
Kachina Village	12	119	87	<10	<10	<10	<10	<10	<10	<10	235
Leupp	13	86	68	<10	<10	<10	<10	<10	<10	<10	172
Timberline-Fernwood	<10	112	40	<10	<10	<10	<10	<10	<10	<10	169

\*Values between 0 and 9 are displayed as "<10" to protect privacy.

**Table A2.** Driving distances from Coconino County communities to court locations.

Driving distances were calculated using ESRI's "[Calculate Travel Cost](#)" tool. Distances were multiplied by two to compute the round-trip distance. The "Community" column lists all localities used when geographically summarizing defendant's address information. Community Travel Burden was calculated for each of these communities.

Community	Round-trip distance (miles) to court locations				
	Flagstaff	Fredonia	Page	Sedona	Williams
Alpine Ranchos	54	416	280	116	120
Bellemont	25	416	280	81	45
Birdsprings	111	473	337	172	176
Bitter Springs	215	176	52	278	283
Blue Ridge	143	537	401	180	205
Cameron	102	291	155	164	169
Cedar Ridge	181	211	86	244	249
Cliff Dwellers	265	127	95	327	332
Clints Well	112	505	369	149	173
Coalmine Mesa	198	323	188	260	265
Coppermine	220	204	43	282	288
Cow Springs	217	294	133	279	284
Desert View	164	353	217	226	161
Doney Park	20	379	243	82	86
Flagstaff	0	392	257	63	66
Forest Highlands	15	406	271	52	76
Forest Lakes	255	628	492	244	316
Fort Valley	27	416	280	90	75
Fredonia	392	0	162	454	460
Grand Canyon Village	161	405	269	225	122
Gray Mountain	86	306	170	148	153
Greenehaven	277	142	23	340	345
Happy Jack	82	475	339	135	143
Howard Mesa	114	476	340	170	58
Inscription House	252	278	117	314	319
Jacob Lake	329	63	159	392	397
Kachina Village	18	409	273	63	79
Kaibab Estates West	112	505	369	168	46
Kaibeto	244	231	71	306	311
Lechée	251	166	5	313	318
Lees Ferry	256	154	86	318	324
Leupp Corner	101	467	331	162	166

Leupp	88	450	314	149	153
Marble Canyon	247	145	77	310	315
Moenave	155	255	130	217	222
Moenkopi	155	281	145	218	223
Mormon Lake	61	454	318	115	122
Mountain View Ranches	25	387	251	87	90
Mountaineaire	23	414	278	67	84
Munds Park	42	433	297	83	103
North Rim	416	150	246	478	484
Oak Creek Canyon	45	436	300	19	105
Page	256	162	0	318	324
Parks	52	445	309	108	30
Red Lake	79	472	336	135	22
Sedona	63	455	319	0	125
Stoneman Lake	91	482	346	67	152
Supai	330	724	588	387	265
The Gap	167	225	89	229	234
Timberline-Fernwood	25	369	233	87	90
Tolani Lake	118	468	332	180	185
Tonalea	196	273	113	259	264
Tuba City	156	282	146	218	224
Tusayan	143	411	275	206	104
Twin Arrows	47	413	277	108	112
Valle	102	453	317	166	63
Vermilion Cliffs	254	138	84	317	322
Westwood Ranches	155	549	413	212	90
Williams	66	460	324	123	0
Winona	30	395	259	91	95
Winslow West	120	486	350	181	185