

2018 Southwestern Region New Mexico Congressional Briefing



Photo: West Fork
Gila National Forest

**Carson National Forest • Cibola National Forest & National Grasslands
Gila National Forest • Lincoln National Forest • Santa Fe National Forest**



Forest Service
Southwestern
Region

Message from the Regional Forester



We designed this briefing packet to be your quick reference guide to the Southwestern Region of the Forest Service. Organized by forest and by program area, the most up-to-date information is at your fingertips. This is intended as one tool to bolster our working relationships, as we continue to engage with you on a variety of issues that are of interest to your constituents.

Under the direction of Secretary Sonny Perdue, the Forest Service was, for the first time, named in the U.S. Department of Agriculture's priorities: to foster productive and sustainable use of our National Forest System Lands. Our agency strategic plan is in alignment with the department's priorities, and our Southwestern Region (also known as Region 3) priorities, the **R3's 3Rs**, are in concert with both.

Our first priority is **Restoration** at the landscape scale, to provide livelihoods and valued products. The second is **Recreation**, sustaining the connection to nature for health and economic vitality. The third is **Relationships**, both externally with those we serve, and internally with our workforce.

It is through our relationships with tribes, stakeholders, partners, other agencies, and the public that we are able to restore landscapes and provide for sustainable recreation opportunities. We also value our internal relationships and are actively taking steps to provide a safe, rewarding and resilient workplace for all Forest Service employees.

Your continued cooperation and support is appreciated as we strive to meet the needs of the lands we steward, the communities we serve and our employees.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Cal Joyner".

Cal Joyner, Regional Forester





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Meet the Executive Team of the Southwestern Region

The executive team is responsible for leading USDA Forest Service within the region's 20.6 million acres, which include six national forests in Arizona, five national forests and a national grassland in New Mexico, and one national grassland each in Oklahoma and the Texas panhandle.



Cal Joyner, Regional Forester

Regional Forester Cal Joyner has worked for the Forest Service for more than 36 years, beginning his career in 1980 as a hydrologist and environmental coordinator in Oregon. He has held numerous positions at all levels of the Forest Service, in both the eastern and western United States and the Washington Office. As a hydrologist, Cal has an intimate understanding of the importance water and watersheds have across all aspects of landscape-scale restoration, especially in the desert southwest. He is an advocate and champion of efforts that impact and restore the health and resiliency of National Forests and Grasslands. Cal has a passion for the beautiful lands he is charged to take care of, and he works collaboratively with employees and stakeholders to ensure the ecosystems will be here for many years to come. Cal graduated Humboldt State University with a B.S in Watershed Management.



Sandy Watts, Deputy Regional Forester

Deputy Regional Forester Sandy Watts followed in her father's footsteps and began her career in the Forest Service in 1988 on Kootenai National Forest in Libby, Montana as a front-line employee. She has served in positions at various levels of the agency, including within forest and district operations, Financial Management, Business Operations Deputy Chief's Office, and the Chief Information Office. Her expertise in program, portfolio, and project management was instrumental in increasing capacity through technology. Sandy's leadership and expertise in workforce planning helped to successfully realign the Chief Information Office. She has a passion for leading people, is a great communicator and prides herself on her ability to bring folks together to affect meaningful change. Sandy holds a Project Management Professional certification and completed the Senior Executive Fellows at Harvard and the Leading in a Democratic Society leadership program at the Federal Executive Institute in Charlottesville, Virginia.



Elaine Kohrman, Deputy Regional Forester

After serving as the Cibola National Forest and National Grasslands Forest Supervisor in New Mexico since 2013, Elaine Kohrman was named as one of two Deputy Regional Foresters for the Southwestern Region beginning in May 2018. Starting as a wilderness ranger, Elaine then held numerous positions at all levels of the Forest Service during her 32-year career. With vast experience in recreation and restoration planning and economics, she will be instrumental to the success of the region in the areas of landscape-scale restoration and sustainable recreation. An avid cyclist, Elaine has immersed herself in diverse landscapes and cultures. She holds a bachelor's degree in Economics from Colorado State University, a master's degree in Whole Systems Design from Antioch University Seattle, and is a Donella Meadows Leadership Fellow.

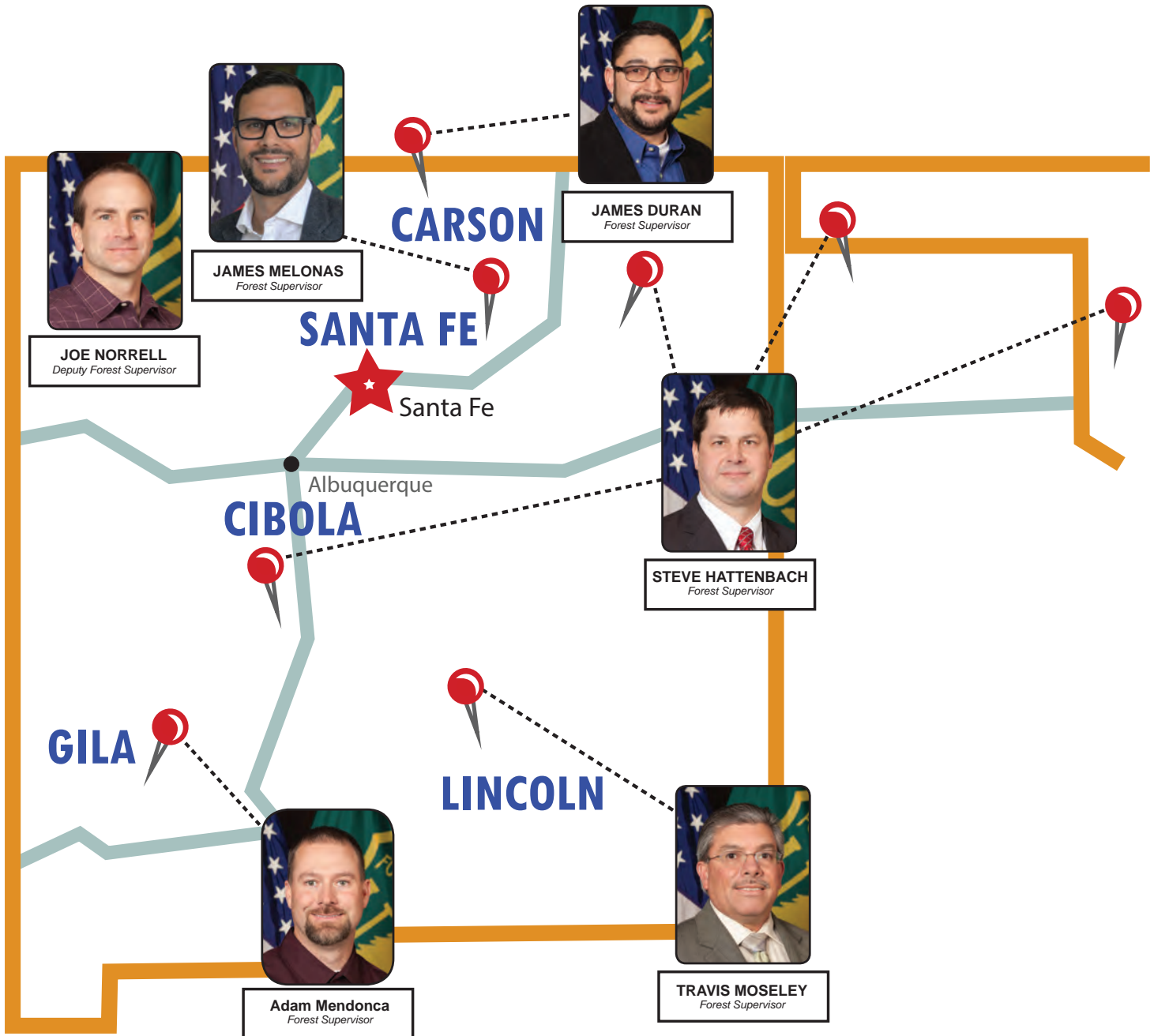


Rita Skinner, Chief of Staff

Rita Skinner began her career with the Forest Service in 1991. Over the subsequent decades, she has held positions in archaeology, environmental planning, natural resource litigation, and currently serves as Chief of Staff for the Southwestern Region. Throughout her career, Rita has been a passionate advocate for people. From promoting tribal engagement in her role as an archaeologist, to engaging with communities as an environmental coordinator, she embraces the ever-present connection people have with land. Her passion for people extends to the workforce as well. Over the years, Rita has served on many training teams, is an active mentor and coach, and coordinates and facilitates employee development efforts, including new employee orientation. Rita says that the common thread throughout her career has been the privilege of serving as a liaison and communicator – bridging the gap between people of diverse backgrounds while increasing understanding of our nation's natural resources. Rita received her B.S. and M.A in anthropology from Eastern New Mexico University in 1987 and 1990.

SOUTHWESTERN REGION

New Mexico National Forest Supervisors & Deputy Forest Supervisors





SOUTHWESTERN REGION

New Mexico Forest Supervisor's Office & Ranger Districts

www.fs.usda.gov/r3

Carson National Forest.....(575) 758-6200
Forest Service Building, 208 Cruz Alta Road, Taos, New Mexico 87571

Ranger Stations . . .

- Canjilon RD, P.O. Box 469, SR 115, Bldg. 358, Canjilon, NM 87515(575) 684-2489
- El Rito RD, P.O. Box 56, Hwy. 554, Bldg. 1221, El Rito, NM 87530(575) 581-4554
- Jicarilla RD, 1110 North Rio Vista Lane, Unit #2, Bloomfield, NM 87413(505) 632-2956
- Camino Real RD, P.O. Box 68, 15160 SR 75, Penasco, NM 87553(575) 587-2255
- Tres Piedras RD, P.O. Box 38, 22280 US Hwy. 64, Tres Piedras, NM 87577(575) 758-8678
- Questa RD, P.O. Box 110, 184 SR 38, Questa, NM 87556(575) 586-0520

Cibola National Forest.....(505) 346-3900
2113 Osuna Road NE, Albuquerque, New Mexico 87113-1001

Ranger Stations . . .

- Mt. Taylor RD, 1800 Lobo Canyon Rd., Grants, NM 87020(505) 287-8833
- Magdalena RD, P.O. Box 45, 203 1st St., Magdalena, NM 87825.....(575) 854-2281
- Mountainair RD, P.O. Box 69, 40 Ranger Station Rd., Mountainair, NM 87036-0069(505) 847-2990
- Sandia RD, 11776 Hwy. 337, Tijeras, NM 87059(505) 281-3304
- Black Kettle NG, Rt. 1, Box 55B, Cheyenne, OK 73628.....(580) 497-2143
- Kiowa and Rita Blanca NGs, 714 Main St., Clayton, NM 88415(575) 374-9652

Gila National Forest.....(575) 388-8201
3005 E. Camino del Bosque, Silver City, New Mexico 88061

Ranger Stations . . .

- Black Range RD, 1804 North Date Street, Truth or Consequences, NM 87901(575) 894-6677
- Glenwood RD, P.O. Box 8, Hwy. 180 S., 18 Ranger Station Road, Glenwood, NM 88039(575) 539-2481
- Reserve RD, P.O. Box 170, 8 Smokey Bear Circle, Reserve, NM 87830.....(575) 533-6232
- Silver City RD, 3005 E. Camino del Bosque, Silver City, NM 88061(575) 388-8201
- Wilderness RD, 3697 Hwy 35N, Mimbres, NM 88049.....(575) 536-2250
- Quemado RD, P.O. Box 159, 1 Forest Service Circle, Quemado, NM 87829(575) 773-4678

Lincoln National Forest.....(575) 434-7200
3463 Las Palomas Road, Alamogordo, New Mexico 88310

Ranger Stations . . .

- Smokey Bear RD, 901 Mechem Drive, Ruidoso, NM 88345(575) 257-4095
- Sacramento RD, P.O. Box 288, 4 Lost Lodge Road, Cloudcroft, NM 88317(575) 682-2551
- Guadalupe RD, 5203 Buena Vista Dr., Carlsbad, NM 88220.....(575) 885-4181

Santa Fe National Forest.....(505) 438-5300
11 Forest Lane, Santa Fe, New Mexico 87508

Ranger Stations . . .

- Coyote RD, HC 78, Box 1, Coyote, NM 87012(575) 638-5526
- Cuba RD, P.O. Box 130, 04B County Road 11, Cuba, NM 87013.....(575) 289-3264
- Espanola RD, 1710 N. Riverside Drive, Espanola, NM 87532(505) 753-7331
- Jemez RD, P.O. Box 150, 051 Woodsy Lane, Jemez Springs, NM 87025(575) 829-3535
- Las Vegas RD, 1926 N. 7th Street, Las Vegas, NM 87701(505) 425-3534
- Pecos/Las Vegas RD, P.O. Drawer 429, 32 South Main Street, Pecos, NM 87552-0429(505) 757-6121

USDA Forest Service Southwestern Regional Office(505) 842-3292
333 Broadway Blvd., SE, Albuquerque, NM 87102



USDA Forest Service Southwestern Region • Carson National Forest Briefing Paper

April 2018

Meet the Forest Supervisor

James Duran is a native northern New Mexican, having grown up in Cuba, New Mexico. He was the District Ranger on the Sacramento Ranger District (RD), Lincoln National Forest (NF) until 2010, when he became supervisor on the Carson NF. James first experienced the Forest Service (FS) as a Youth Conservation Corps student on the Santa Fe NF. After high school, he attended New Mexico State University in Las Cruces where he studied Range Science and began to work towards a FS range specialist. As a student, he worked on the Custer NF in eastern Montana and the Dakota Prairie Grasslands throughout North and South Dakota. James was also active in fire suppression and served on the Lewis and Clark Hotshots Crew, where he gained valuable fire and teamwork experience. He came back to New Mexico and worked in range management for the FS in southern New Mexico.



Forest Plan Revision

A preliminary draft proposed plan (PDPP) with alternatives to the PDPP was completed and posted on our plan revision webpage on December 21, 2017 for the public to review and provide feedback. The 13 areas identified from our wilderness evaluation as having wilderness characteristics were included in part or in whole within the PDPP or one of the alternatives. These areas will be analyzed for their environmental effects before a final decision is made to recommend any areas as wilderness in a final plan.

An updated version of the Wild and Scenic River (WSR) eligibility evaluation (draft) was posted on our plan revision web page on January 23, 2018. The updated document includes changes resulting from public feedback. As the Carson NF works towards a completed draft plan and draft environmental impact statement (EIS) in the fall of 2018, we will continue to make our documents available for the public to review and provide feedback.

The Carson NF is having the PDPP translated into Spanish and it will be available at each of our offices for the public to review.

The forest has made changes to the preliminary draft proposed plan based on feedback from a Northern New Mexico Stockman's Association working group. We continue to have quarterly meetings with the Land Grant Council and different land grants.

We held open houses in December, January and February, and continue to provide the public opportunities to meet with the plan revision team, ask questions and learn about our PDPP and related work.

Piedra Lumbre Visitor's Center

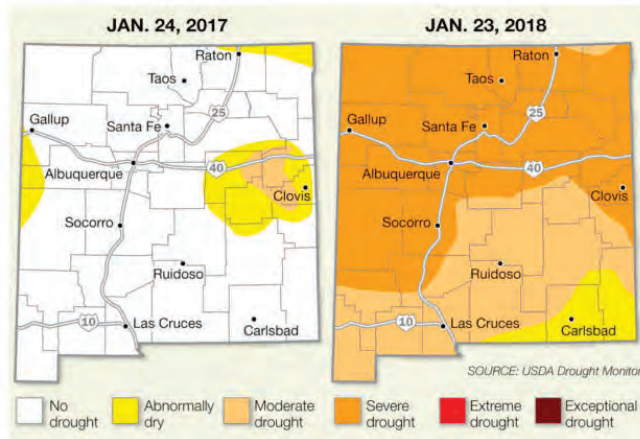
Three individual land grants have expressed interest in acquiring the Piedra Lumbre Visitor Center on the Canjilon RD, which is currently slated for disposal. The Carson NF supports the conveyance of the center and has determined that the Forest Service Facility Realignment and Enhancement Act (FSFREA) is the only authority we can use to convey the land through a competitive or direct sale.

Generally competitive public sales are the preferred method of conveyance, however, a non-competitive or direct sale may be made to an Indian tribe or federal, state or local governmental entity when deemed to be in the public interest and approved in advance by the Regional Forester.

In pursuance of a possible direct sale, the appraisal process has begun for the Piedra Lumbre Visitor Center. The Piedra Lumbre Visitor Center may be conveyed with up to 40 acres of land.

Background information and documentation are being gathered at this time to support the appraisal process. The Sale Implementation Strategy is moving forward to be finalized concurrently. A complete appraisal is expected within 4-6 months. It will be shared with the three individual land grants interested in acquiring the property and the New Mexico Land Grant Council.

Drought



More than 93 percent of New Mexico is experiencing drought conditions, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's drought monitor map released January 18. Of that 93 percent, about 60 percent is categorized as severe drought, including the area of the Carson NF. Snow is well below normal in the Sangre de Cristo Mountains at 26 percent of normal according to the National Weather Service. The seasonal outlook indicates a continued La Niña through early spring, meaning weather will continue to be warmer and drier than normal. The drought could have impacts on everything from grazing to fire season. We may experience higher fire danger earlier in the year that could lead to fire restrictions being imposed earlier than normal. The drought could also affect water availability and forage production. There is a lot of time left in the winter season so we will continue to monitor forest conditions and plan ahead for any adjustments that may be needed to forest management.

Lucky Corridor

Lucky Corridor LLC (Lucky) formed in 2007 to develop, acquire, construct and operate electricity transmission infrastructure in northern New Mexico. They have submitted three proposals to the Carson NF since 2011 to construct, operate and maintain a new 345 kV transmission line that would carry wind- and natural gas-generated energy from eastern New Mexico to the Four Corners generating station. The power would likely continue to be transmitted to the western market and parts of Mexico. The proposal does not include providing electricity within the state of New Mexico.

This proposed powerline would run through Taos Canyon - through the Carson NF and parallel to the Enchanted Circle Scenic Byway - to a sub-station west of Taos. The powerline would also run through the Town of Taos, the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) Rio Grande del Norte National Monument, the Taos Pueblo, and state and private lands.

Lucky has not been able to provide any documentation that the existing capacity on Tri State's line west of Taos could support Lucky's line west of Taos. Previous applications making the same assumption also acknowledge that upgrades would be needed in order to utilize this excess capacity. Lucky has not been

able to provide any documentation that Tri State has agreed to the proposal to have its line removed and replaced. Neither the FS nor BLM have accepted Lucky's proposals because they have not articulated a clear purpose, proven that the project would be in the best interest of the American people, or provided a detailed understanding of what the proposal would entail.

Miranda Canyon Collaborative

At the behest of the local community and using land and water conservation funds in order to protect the watershed from private land development, the Carson NF purchased 5,000 acres of land in Miranda Canyon from the Trust for Public Land. The area is south of Taos, just west of Picuris Peak and south of McGaffey Ridge. The forest facilitated the start-up of a community collaborative that would work together to develop a proposed management plan for the Miranda Canyon Area. The collaborative consists of the following stakeholders:

Cristobal de la Serna Land Grant	Picuris Pueblo
Miranda Canyon Neighborhood	Taos Pueblo
Taos County Government	Equestrian
Llano Quemado Community	Motorized Users
Environmental groups	Youth
Non-Motorized Users	(Hiking/Mountain Biking)

Due to the diverse nature of interested stakeholders and steeped history, the forest chose the establishment of a collaborative to empower the community to drive the development of a community-created plan to manage the Miranda Canyon area. The collaborative is developing its charter and process and has developed a rough draft of the components that will be part of their proposed management plan. The collaborative meets monthly and had their third meeting on January 30.

Collaborative Forest Restoration Program

The Collaborative Forest Restoration Program (CFRP) is a grant program that funds collaborative, community-based ecological restoration projects on public lands in New Mexico. It contributes to the economic health of rural communities through use and access opportunities and ensures that public lands and watersheds are sustainable, healthy and productive. It also mitigates wildfire risk by working together with mutual partners to promote healthy watersheds that reduce the threat of large, high-intensity wildfires in the forests in New Mexico.

Last year the Carson NF partnered with The Nature Conservancy on a 30,000-acre planning project. A key component of this project will be to develop, demonstrate and evaluate ecologically-sound forest restoration techniques. The project will also be instrumental in how we move forward with the task of strengthening rural communities and creating sustainable forests through collaborative partnerships whose objective is forest restoration.

A second CFRP grant was awarded last year to Andy Chacon Forestry, in collaboration with the El Rito RD and other partners. Forest restoration treatments will occur on 423 acres of ponderosa pine, mixed conifer and aspen stands in the Agua Caballos area of the Vallecitos Federal Sustained Yield Unit.

The program's strong emphasis to collaborate with stakeholders and treat forested acres by restoring ecosystem functions, structures and species composition is what has supported land managers on the Carson for many years.

Forest "Mayordomo" Concept

The Camino Real and Questa RDs are working to develop community forestry models to implement a vision of shared stewardship on the Carson. These efforts will result in a "community forester" position on each district that will assist with meeting the high demand for fuelwood and other forest products from the local communities. In practice, the community forester will serve as a "Mayordomo" who is responsible for administering commercial fuelwood areas sold by the districts.

Drawing from historical acequia governance, the Mayordomo Stewardship Model addresses multiple needs by employing local community members to harvest firewood while restoring forests and mitigating

wildfire risk to their communities. The mayordomos will work with Forest Service staff to ensure silvicultural prescriptions are being followed. The mayordomo will also serve as a liaison between the Carson NF and the community woodcutters. The Carson is partnering with the community and nonprofit organizations to use this model as an innovative approach to meet the community need for fuelwood while implementing restoration projects. Currently, there are three potential funding proposals for this model:

Funding from the Joint Chiefs' Landscape Restoration Partnership: The Taos Valley Watershed Coalition Collaborative Restoration Landscape consists of 280,000 acres that encompass most of the headwaters of the Rio Grande within Taos County. Joint Chiefs' funding was recently approved for the landscape project, which includes the funding of a "community forester" position. This position will administer community fuelwood areas within the portion of the Camino RD that lies within the Taos Valley Watershed Coalition footprint.

CFRP Proposal: The LOR Foundation is developing a CFRP proposal to develop a Forest Council made up of community members from Arroyo Hondo, San Cristobal, Gallina Canyon, and Arroyo Seco/Valdez. The Forest Council will hire a stewardship mayordomo who will oversee the implementation of fuelwood blocks from the Kiowa/San Cristobal project in the Questa RD.

Rio Grande Water Fund: The Forest Stewards Guild has submitted a project proposal to establish a Forest Council with representation from local stakeholders from the Camino Real RF. Potential organizations to make up the council include land grant communities, acequia associations, Pueblo of Picuris and New Mexico State Forestry. The Forest Council will hire a stewardship mayordomo who will oversee the implementation of fuelwood blocks from the Rio Trampas project area.



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April 2018

Meet the Forest Supervisor

Steve Hattenbach has accepted the position of forest supervisor for the Cibola National Forest & National Grasslands, beginning on May 13, 2018, following his three-year tenure at the as the director of Wildlife, Fish, Rare Plants, & Rangeland Management for the Southwestern Region in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Steve has worked on a variety of environmental and natural resource issues brings a breadth of perspective and understanding to his new position, having served as both an acting deputy regional forester and a regional public and legislative affairs director with the Forest Service. His experience includes 18 years of legal counsel for state, local and federal governments involving environmental and natural resource issues. An avid recreational user of our public lands, Steve has made New Mexico home since 1997. He holds an undergraduate in Anthropology and History, a Master of Public Administration with a concentration in Natural Resource Management, and a Juris Doctorate.



Sustainable Recreation

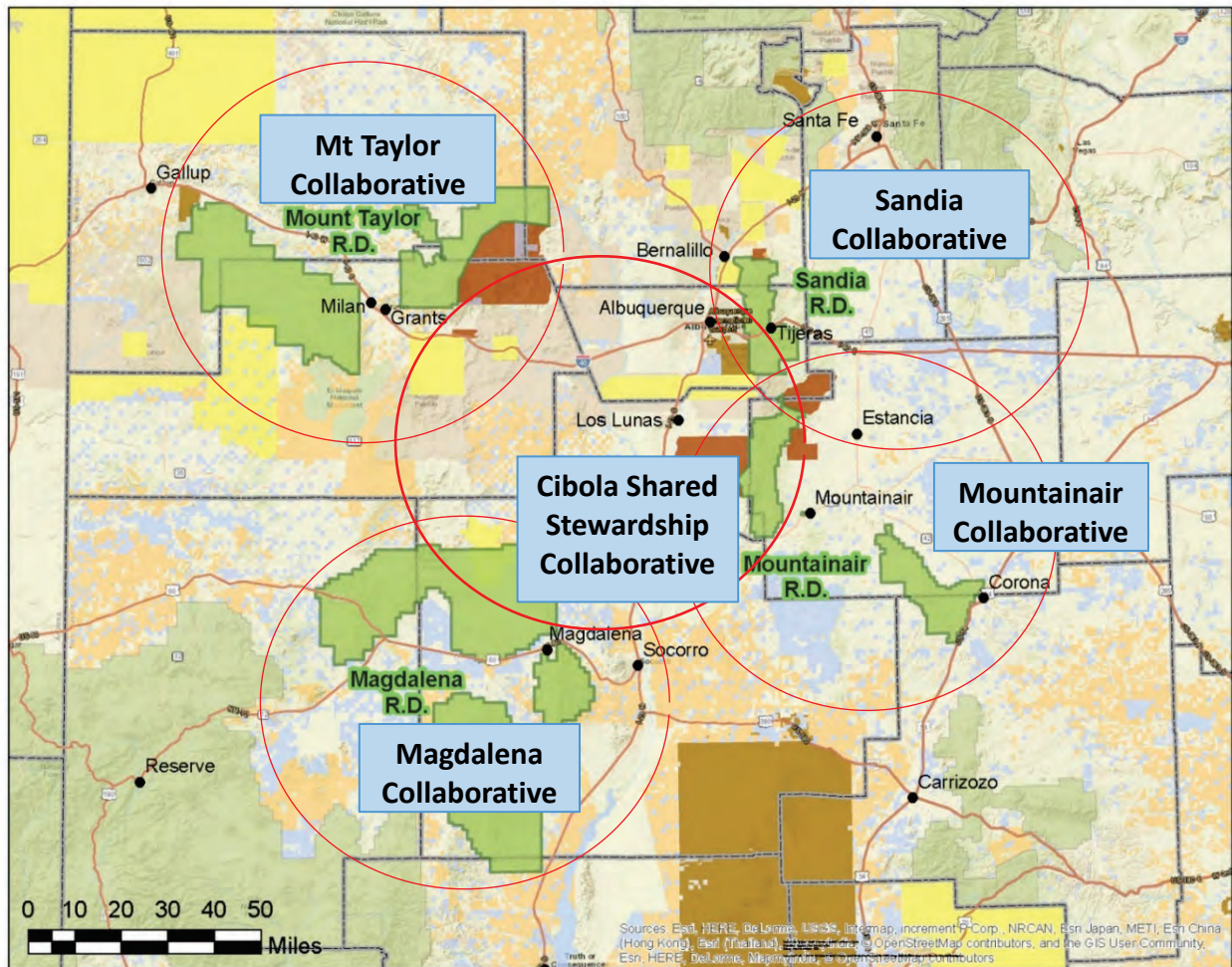
Several actions are in place to implement a sustainable recreation program on the Cibola. A forest-wide Recreation Site Analysis (RSA) is currently underway to assess the existing and desired conditions at developed recreation sites, and evaluate what is needed to make each site more sustainable. From this analysis, we will develop a five-year program of work that addresses operating and maintaining sites to standard, reducing deferred maintenance costs, and considering how recreation sites contribute to social stability, environmental integrity and economic vitality.

The Cibola's recreation program is supported by numerous partnerships including the Southwest Conservation Corps, Rocky Mountain Youth Corps, Forest Guild Youth Conservation Corps crews, and New Mexico Wilderness Alliance (NMWild). We are working with Shared Stewardship collaborative groups to engage additional stakeholders, government agencies and members of the public.

The NMWild partnership has allowed us to hire two wilderness rangers to address key stewardship needs on the forest within the national Wilderness Stewardship Performance framework. Additionally, this partnership affords mutual benefits to the partner by providing experience working in the outdoors to local youth, outlining a path to careers in public land management and raising awareness about designated wilderness areas and the need for stewardship of these special places. In addition to the direct benefits to the forest and the wilderness rangers, the activities conducted with volunteers have indirect benefits of connecting people to their public lands and increasing wilderness stewardship within the general public.

Partnerships

In 2015, the Cibola engaged numerous tribal, federal, state, county, city, land grant, soil & water conservation districts (SWCD) and other cooperating agencies to enhance public engagement and foster an all-lands management approach during the Forest Plan revision process. Landscape Teams, representing each of the four mountain districts, were formed under a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to assist with public workshops, comment reviews, wilderness recommendations, and alternatives. The Landscape Teams have since expanded into collaborative groups at the Mt. Taylor, Magdalena, Mountainair, and Sandia RDs. An overall collaborative, called the Cibola Shared Stewardship Collaborative, was formed to join the other four groups together; participants represent 50-75 diverse interests and active partnerships with the Cibola.



Forest Plan Revision

The Forest Plan revision process for Cibola’s mountain districts (Mt. Taylor, Magdalena, Mountainair, and Sandia) began in 2012. The draft sustainability assessment was released in 2013 for public comment and published in 2014. Public meetings on the wilderness inventory process began in 2014.

In 2015, the Cibola included tribal, federal, state, land grants, SWCD, counties, cities and other cooperating agencies (44 to date) via MOUs. They organized Landscape Teams around each district and worked with the Cibola as part of the interdisciplinary team. These Landscape Teams helped to build broad support and a shared vision for a diverse range of values and uses.

The teams cohosted and codesigned public meetings, improved public outreach, reviewed public comments, and provided input on the draft desired conditions, standards and guidelines, management areas, areas suitable for wilderness recommendation, and draft alternatives. The preliminary draft plan, alternatives and draft maps of potential wilderness with preliminary recommendations were released for public comment in July 2016.

In early 2016, the Landscape Teams and the Cibola jointly designed a Shared Stewardship Workshop to reach out to nongovernmental interests to expand the efforts into a true collaborative approach. This resulted in the Cibola Shared Steward Collaborative Council (CSSC) as an oversight group and expanded the local collaborative teams around each landscape at the district level (five total).

In the fall of 2016, the Landscape Teams worked with the Forest Service to review public comments and incorporate changes to the draft plan and alternatives. In 2017/2018, the Cibola completed review of public comments to finalize the wilderness inventory and evaluation, draft plan, issues and alternatives,

including areas recommended for wilderness. These will be released in the draft environmental impact statement (DEIS).

Key Points:

- The Cibola has consistently promoted a model of working as a partner at the table including a diversity of interests to create a shared vision and find common ground. This approach has stimulated greater understanding and dialogue among the participants even on contentious issues.
- The collaboratives continue to expand their charters and relationships with each other and with the Cibola as a whole with the CSSC. The groups are currently working with the Cibola and from 50-75 other partners to work on projects for FY2018 and identify collective priorities and projects for FY2019.
- When the draft plan and DEIS is released, we encourage our partners to jointly review these to find common ground and resolve conflicts as much as possible prior to submitting public comments. This will result in a better outcome, reducing time, costs and objections on the final decision.
- Our goal is to successfully finish and implement the plan and projects with partners, to achieve sustainable outcomes for the diversity of communities, partners, and affected and interested people who rely on and care about the Cibola and surrounding landscapes.

Flagship Targets

The Cibola has a timber target of 8 mmbf¹ (16,000 ccf²) in FY 2018. We are achieving this primarily through the Zuni Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Project (CFLRP) at the Mount Taylor RD near Grants, New Mexico. Located in the Zuni Mountains, the Zuni CFLRP consists of the Bluewater, McGaffey and Puerco Projects. The combined projects will restore 219,802 acres on the Cibola and thousands of acres of private, state, and tribal lands; this will significantly reduce the threat of wildfires. From 2012-2017, the Cibola invested \$11,476,425; partners matched and leveraged \$6,167,723. Prescribed fire and thinning are being used to restore historic vegetative conditions, create climate change resilience, increase water availability, and provide local employment.

The projects are being implemented through a Stewardship Agreement with the National Wild Turkey Federation (NWTf). Other key partners include, but are not limited to, the Forest Stewards Guild, New Mexico Forest and Watershed Restoration Institute, New Mexico State Forestry, New Mexico Game and Fish Department, and the Wood Industries Network.

To date, 73% (17,048 acres of 23,325 NEPA-approved³) of the thinning and 26% (7,793 acres of 30,000 NEPA-approved) of the prescribed fire areas have been treated in the Bluewater project. An additional 2,800 acres of thinning were approved under the Farm Bill authority for the McGaffey Restoration and Resilience Project in June, 2017; 2,410 of these acres have been identified to procure funding within the NWTf Stewardship Agreement. This will expedite NEPA, accelerate restoration, and provide additional acres to be funded. The Puerco Environmental Analysis (EA) is scheduled for completion in early 2019, which will provide up to 49,360 acres for thinning with wood product removal; 22,270 acres for thinning with material left on site for soil improvement; and total of 58,714 acres for prescribed burning. Currently, 5,858 acres are funded in agreements and are being treated, to be completed in the next three years. The Cibola also expects to provide 12,000 ccf in volume through the regular forest-wide firewood programs.

Range and Drought

Drought conditions continue to persist throughout the southwest. Long-term weather forecasts predict that the dry trend will continue for at least another three months. As the drought continues, forage decreases and the risk of wildfire increases. Cibola's Rangeland Management Specialists have been working diligently to evaluate forage conditions and water availability in pastures and allotments. Their evaluations may result in recommended management actions to mitigate the effects of the drought and

¹ Board-foot volume million board feet (MBF)

² The cunit—100 cubic feet of solid wood (CCF)

³ NEPA – National Environmental Policy Act

protect rangeland resources. District Rangers will consider the recommended actions in consultation with permittees so that the impacts to range operations will be minimal.



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April 2018

Meet the Forest Supervisor, Adam Mendonca

Adam Mendonca has served on the Gila National Forest (NF) since July 2015 and is the acting Deputy Regional Forester until April 28, 2018. As a native of New Mexico he appreciates the unique cultures of the southwest. Mendonca has a drive for developing partnerships and he continues to foster working relationships with local governments, interest groups, and citizens.



During Adam's absence, Deb Bumpus has been the acting Forest Supervisor on the Gila NF since January 2018. Her goal is to support the Gila NF in meeting the Chief's objectives of fuels reduction and timber production. Deb's permanent assignment is on the Coronado NF.

Forest Plan Revision

Background: The Gila NF is engaged in a multiphase, multiyear effort to revise its existing 1986 forest plan under the 2012 Forest Planning Rule (36 CFR 219). . Plan revision involves three distinct phases: 1) assessment of the current conditions and trends of forest resources and multiple uses, 2) development of a revised plan, and 3) monitoring and implementation of the final approved plan. The revised plan will describe the strategic direction for management of forest resources for the next 15 years.

Current Status:

The Gila NF has completed an assessment report of existing conditions, trends and risks to sustainability for the 15 ecological, social and economic topics specified in the 2012 Planning Rule. Based on the results from the assessment and input from stakeholders, need-to-change statements were developed to guide revision of the existing 1986 forest plan. These statements formed the basis of the proposed action in the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) Notice of Intent published in the Federal Register in April 2017 to prepare an environmental impact statement (EIS) to revise the current forest plan.

During the second phase of the process, the need-for-change statements provide focus for the development of the revised forest plan. This phase will be guided, in part, by the NEPA and includes the preparation of an EIS. Plan components will be developed to ensure management meets desired conditions for each resource and together will provide for multiple uses, sustainability, ecological integrity and ecosystem services. Our vision is to create opportunities for all stakeholders to provide meaningful input. Stakeholder involvement during this phase of the revision process will lead to better understanding of multiple perspectives, areas of agreement relevant to plan components, and significant issues which will form the basis for a range of alternatives. We encourage stakeholders to share material that may be relevant to the planning process for the Gila NF. In addition, there will be opportunities to comment on draft process papers, initial plan components, preliminary range of alternatives, and the draft EIS.

Public engagement has already occurred throughout the process. Feedback from the public thus far has been mostly positive; people indicate that they feel engaged and listened to - and that they are gaining a better understanding of the planning process. The forest has hosted five rounds of community meetings as well as a series of technical meetings and a desired-conditions workshop to continue the dialogue between the forest and nearby residents, users and interested individuals. Additionally, the Gila NF has been informing and engaging communities at a local level through presentations at over 40 governmental and organizational meetings; informational booths at fairs and local community events; and online interactive classroom sessions to engage youth. A self-convening group of local governments has formed and is

actively engaging with the Gila NF. Stakeholder engagement will continue throughout the upcoming plan and EIS development.

The forest released a preliminary draft plan for review and comment in March 2018. The forest expects to release a draft revised plan and draft EIS, developed through a collaborative public engagement process by late 2018, and a final revised plan and final EIS by 2019.

Key Points: The forest will strive for a planning process that is inclusive, collaborative and science-based to promote a healthy, resilient, and productive Gila NF.

Contact: Matt Schultz, Forest Planner, matthewschultz@fs.fed.us, 575-388-8280

Collaborative Forest Restoration Program (CFRP)

The Gila NF worked collectively with local stakeholders to develop and submit a CFRP proposal during 2017. The proposal is designed to restore grassland ecosystems on the Wilderness RD by removing encroaching pinyon and juniper. The material generated from the project will be utilized by local wood producers. The proposal received approval for funding during the CFRP workshop last fiscal year. Implementation of the 237 acre Gatton's Park Fuels Treatment Project began in January 2018.

Secure Rural Schools Update:

The Southern New Mexico Resource Advisory Committee (RAC) met twice in 2016 to recommend funding for projects located in six counties that include all of the Gila NF, all of the Lincoln NF, and the Magdalena Ranger District of the Cibola NF. The structure and completion of the two meetings allowed the committee to recommend enough projects to exhaust all the available funding for these six counties through the end of FY 2017. With substantial turnover of the current committee, the Southern New Mexico RAC will focus on recruiting new members for 2018. The Gila NF will implement 14 RAC projects in 2018. These include forest restoration projects, recreation improvement projects and trail maintenance projects.

Restoration Successes:

The Gila National Forest continues to support local economies through its restoration program. In the last three years the forest has provided the following:

Convertible Products (saw logs)

5,817 Million Board Feet (MBF)
11,634 Hundred Cubic Feet (CCF)

Non-Convertible Products

10,069 Million Board Feet (CCF)
5,035.5 Hundred Cubic Feet (CCF)

Convertible products are material that can be converted into lumber while nonconvertible products are materials used for items such as fuel wood, posts, poles, stays, vigas and latillas. The amount of materials reported above does not include materials given under District Ranger authority for free use. These materials include fences for permittees, (post, poles and stays) and free-use fuelwood areas

Sustainable Recreation

The Gila NF continues to work toward sustainable recreation. Currently, the forest is focused on expanding partnerships with local communities and stakeholders. As part of its sustainable recreation strategy, the forest has identified the need for expansion of its partnership programs. The intent is to continue to develop strong working relationships with interested parties that will allow the forest to provide quality experiences to the public we serve. The forest relies on strong partnerships with groups such as the Upper Gila Watershed Alliance, Backcountry Horsemen of New Mexico, Greenways, and others to implement projects that improve access to and use of the National Forest.

Escudilla Landscape (West Escudilla, Luna, and Pueblo Park Planning Areas)

Background: In response to congressional, agency, and regional emphasis on All-Lands Restoration level planning, the Gila NF and Apache-Sitgreaves NFs have proposed ecological restoration treatments

across a large landscape encompassing both national forests. Discussions between the two forests, to treat the landscape holistically across the state line, resulted in the identification of the Escudilla Landscape, a multiple state, forest and district ecological restoration planning area.

The Escudilla Landscape is approximately 279,470 acres. About 262,706 acres are National Forest System (NFS) lands, and 16,764 are non-national forest lands. Within the Escudilla Landscape there are three planning areas: *Pueblo Park* on the Glenwood RD (25,325 acres), *Luna* on the Quemado RD (185,586 acres), and the *West Escudilla* on the Springerville and Alpine RDs (68,559 acres). A variety of ecological restoration activities and projects will be identified within these planning areas.

Luna Restoration Project Purpose and Need: The purpose of the Luna Restoration Project is to create and maintain a healthy resilient landscape and watersheds capable of delivering benefits to the public including clean air and water, habitat for native fish and wildlife, forest products, and outdoor recreation opportunities. There is a need to:

- Reduce the impacts of high severity fire on natural and cultural resources, private inholdings, communities, infrastructure and livelihoods within the planning area
- Implement vegetative treatments to restore departed landscapes that are overstocked; encroached upon; and at risk of fire, disease, insects and other climate stressors
- Implement treatments in watersheds that are not properly functioning
- Improve water quality by hardening stream crossings and performing road maintenance
- Continue to provide the wide range of forest products that are important to the culture, tradition and livelihoods of local communities
- Protect and restore threatened and endangered species and habitats
- Provide opportunities for off-highway vehicle (OHV) use, enjoyment and access from the community of Luna
- Provide permanent water to support wildlife and livestock
- Improve rangeland, wildlife, aquatic and riparian habitat

Planning Status: The forest will complete an EIS for this project.

- Separate analyses will be completed for the planning areas identified in the Escudilla landscape.
- There will be one baseline cumulative-effects analysis completed for the Escudilla landscape.
- Routine and timely coordination and communication is occurring to maximize alignment of treatment activities across all three project boundaries.
- Forest plan amendments are needed to increase acres treated with prescribed fire, increase the number of habitat structures, and implement the 2012 Mexican spotted owl (MSO) Recovery Plan First Revision.
- Scoping was completed spring 2016 on the proposed action. Input from scoping identified three significant issues. Significant issues form the basis of alternatives for the proposed action.
 - Mowing and cutting rabbit brush and alligator juniper may not be effective treatment methods.
 - Treatment of mixed conifer stands east of Hwy 180 with prescribed fire may result in high severity fires impacting wildlife. Limited burning and thinning may not improve or protect MSO habitat.
 - Motorized transportation system include the 50” motorized trail size limits access by side by side vehicles (UTV) and no additional motorized routes should be added to the national forest system of roads and trails.
- These issues resulted in the development of alternatives.
- We anticipate releasing the draft EIS in April 2018.
- We anticipate a decision for Luna restoration project in fall 2018, with implementation to begin in 2019.

Contact Information: Emily Irwin, Quemado Ranger District; 575-773-4578 or eirwin@fs.fed.us

Hazardous Fuels Reduction

Background: The Forest Service received a 40 percent increase in its hazardous fuels reduction target this fiscal year. Reducing hazardous fuels helps improve forest resiliency by creating habitats that support a diversity of plant and animal species. This, in turn, helps increase the ways the ecosystem can respond to drought, fire and other disturbances. Reducing hazardous fuels will also help prevent future stand-replacing wildfires.

Current Status: The Gila NF is scheduling several prescribed burns beginning this spring to meet our 25,000-acre hazardous fuels reduction targets. Key prescribed burns include:

- Black Range Ranger District
 - Area 74 ~9,000 acres
 - Indian Peaks 1 ~3,700 acres
 - Indian Peaks 2 ~7,350 acres
- Wilderness Ranger District
 - L-T West ~5,500 acres

Key Points:

- The Gila NF is working with collaborators, partners, private citizens, county, state and federal agencies to accomplish the planning and implementation of these prescribed burns.
- Prescribed burning is dependent on appropriate weather and fuels conditions.

Contact Information:

Deb Bumpus, Acting Forest Supervisor, 575-388-8201 or dbumpus@fs.fed.us

Gabe Holguin, Forest Staff Officer, 575-388-8201 or gholguin@fs.fed.us

Arizona Water Settlement Act (AWSA)

Background: The AWSA of 2004 allows the Secretary of Interior via the New Mexico Interstate Stream Commission (ISC) to permit consumptive use of an additional 14,000 acre-feet/year of water from Gila and/or San Francisco Rivers, their tributaries and groundwater sources in New Mexico. The act provides up to \$128 million in non-reimbursable federal funding to be used in the southwest water planning region (Catron, Grant, Hidalgo, and Luna counties). In 2005, ISC initiated an MOU creating the Gila-San Francisco Coordinating Committee; it was signed in 2006 by the New Mexico office of the Governor, ISC, the Southwest New Mexico Water Planning Group, Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to evaluate potential effects of water withdrawals on Forest resources based on flows allowed by the Consumptive Use and Forbearance Agreement (CUFA). Diverse stakeholders - including irrigators, environmental and wildlife groups, agencies, universities, cities, towns, and soil and water conservation districts - meant broad differences, low mutual trust and difficulty in agreement. On November 24, 2014, ISC notified the Secretary of the Interior that it intended to construct or develop a New Mexico Unit of Central Arizona Project (CAP). ISC has signed a Joint Project Agreement (JPA) with a consortium of local governments to form the New Mexico Central Arizona Project Entity (NM CAP). The NM CAP, ISC, and BOR are currently developing an initial design for the NM Unit Project, which includes new diversions, conveyance systems, storage facilities, and other associated water developments. Following approval of the initial design, BOR will move forward with finalizing design plans.

Current Status: The NM Cap, ISC and BOR continue to work toward the development of an initial design. The Gila NF awaits this initial design to determine the potential location of future projects. BOR is the lead agency for this project.

Key Points:

- The Gila NF has not received a Gila Diversion project from the BOR, ISC or NM CAP to review.
- Future projects will likely involve varying degrees of flow augmentation from the Gila River that will impact natural resources on the Gila NF.

- A second diversion may be needed on the San Francisco River in order to supply the annual average 14,000-acre feet of water allocated to New Mexico under the AWSA. Up to 4,000 acre-feet per year may be consumed from the San Francisco River.
- Federally-listed species of concern include loach minnow, spikedace, Gila chub, southwestern willow flycatcher, narrow-headed garter snake and their habitat on Gila
- When the Gila NF receives a proposed project from BOR, the appropriate evaluation process will begin.
- If the AWSA process moves forward to fund implementation of a project that will involve occupancy of NFS lands, their analysis will have to meet and align with the forest's Land and Resource Management Plan requirements and applicable federal laws.
- If the project includes occupancy of FS lands, the FS will be responsible for signing a NEPA decision related to applicable special use permit(s).
- Regional leadership has informed BOR, ISC and the NM CAP of FS requirements for permitting structures on federal lands.

Contact: Cal Joyner, Regional Forester, cjoyner@fs.fed.us, 505-842-3300

Holloman Air Force Base Environmental Impact Statement

Background: The United States Airforce had a Notice of Intent to Prepare an Environmental Impact Statement for the Special Use Airspace Optimization Project, Holloman Air Force Base, New Mexico on August 25, 2017. Public scoping meetings were held, one of which was in Truth or Consequences on September 13, 2017, and the district ranger for the Black Range RD, Michael Hutchins, attended. The proposed new Military Operating Area (MOA) adds more than one-third of the existing acres of designated wilderness areas on the Gila NF to already-existing designated wilderness and wilderness study areas within current Memorandum of Agreements (MOAs). Scoping comments were due on September 25, 2017. The Gila NF submitted our letter on September 21, 2017, with the following comments.

That in order “to minimize impacts to the wilderness character of Solitude the Gila NF requests you consider the following:

- *Maintain a minimum 2,000 feet AGL⁴ above wilderness areas. Please consider a minimum of 2,000’ AGL above the entire Gila NF due to relatively limited area of non-wilderness national forest land being proposed in the new MOA.*
- *Consider a change in timing in the use of wilderness areas:*
 - *Limit use or no use above wilderness areas and wilderness study areas during the fall (September-December) when these areas are heavily used, especially for hunting and outfitting/guiding.*
 - *During spring through fall (March-December), consider flying during the middle of the week versus the weekends when visitor use is higher.*
- *During analysis, consider the cumulative effects of noise and social-recreation impacts from flight activities within the wilderness areas and wilderness study areas.*
- *The use of flares and risk of wildfire is a concern for the Gila... We recommend that the entire Gila NF have a minimum 2,000’ AGL to ensure deployed flares are extinguished by the time they hit the ground.*

Current Status:

Two public meetings have been held in Silver City proper. One, at the request of the Grant County Commissioners, was held on October 11, 2017, with an excess of 200 community attendees. The second meeting, at the request of the Lieutenant Government, was held on March 8, 2018, with an estimated 300-400 attendees. Large protests were held before both meetings. The Gila NF is responding to community

⁴ AGL – Height above ground level

requests for information by referring them to the EIS website at www.HollomanAFBAirspaceEIS.com and copies of the Gila NF comment letter.

Contacts:

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Royal John Mine and Mill Site

Background: The USDA Forest Service prepared an Engineering Evaluation and Cost Analysis (EE/CA) for the Royal John Mine and Mill Site, located in the Cold Springs Creek watershed. The 1,440-acre site is found on the western slopes of the Black Range of the Mimbres Mountains, in Grant County, New Mexico. A portion of the site is located on private land. The EE/CA evaluated potential removal alternatives to decrease risks to both site visitors and to the environment from contamination associated with past mining and milling activities.

Current Status: Additional hydrologic studies have been planned to determine the best location for a repository. Several removal action alternatives were evaluated to reduce potential risks posed by metals detected at the site to site visitors and to the environment. The alternatives were evaluated based on their overall effectiveness, ability to implement, and cost.

Consolidation and burial of contaminated waste rock material and tailings in an on-site repository is the recommended removal action alternative. This alternative would provide a long-term reduction in direct exposure to the contaminated material and would decrease the potential for the contaminants to move from the waste rock material to the surrounding environment. This alternative is effective, can be implemented with access improvements and appropriate scheduling, and has the best value of all the alternatives that meet the removal action objectives. The Gila NF has met with regional office staff and work on this project is tentatively scheduled to begin in February 2019.

Contacts:

Diane Taliaferro, Silver City District Ranger, dtaliaferro@fsf.ed.us, 575-388-8430

Travel Management Implementation

Background: The Gila NF's Travel Management Decision was released in June 2014 with Forest Supervisor Kelly Russell selecting Alternative G. Twenty-two appeals were initially received - four were dismissed without review because they failed to meet the agency's criteria for an appeal, one was withdrawn by the appellant and the remaining appeals were reviewed by a regional agency appeal review team. The decision was upheld by Southwestern Deputy Regional Forester Gilbert Zepeda in September 2014.

Implementation Status: Travel Management Rule (TMR) went into effect July 1, 2016 on four ranger districts - Quemado, Reserve, Wilderness and Black Range. TMR went into effect on the Glenwood and Silver City RDs in January 2017.

Key Points:

- The TMR requires each national forest or ranger district to designate those roads, trails and areas that are open to motor vehicles.
- The initial implementation will be an effort to educate employees and users about the newly-created Motor Vehicle Use Maps (MVUM). It will be available in both a hard copy format and an electronic version.
- The MVUM is free of charge and available at all Gila NF offices.
- The decision keeps open 3,334 miles of road, increases motorized trail opportunities from 16 to 179 miles, and maintains a 3-acre area for motorcycle and all-terrain vehicle use on the Reserve RD.

- The 908 miles of closed roads, which are ½ to 1 mile in length, generally paralleled each other and ended at the same location.
- Hunters are allowed to drive up to 300 feet from either side of roads designated with a corridor to retrieve their big game.
- All closed roads will be accessible for emergency response.
- Only the use of motorized travel is restricted to the designated open travel routes.
- Fuelwood cutters can use their motorized vehicle within designated cutting areas to gather their fuelwood.
- The decision is not set in stone. Officials will be open to having discussions regarding adjustments to previous decisions when there is new information or opportunities to consider.
- Comments will be gathered from the public (paper and electronic) and reviewed by the forest supervisor, district rangers and law enforcement.

Contacts:

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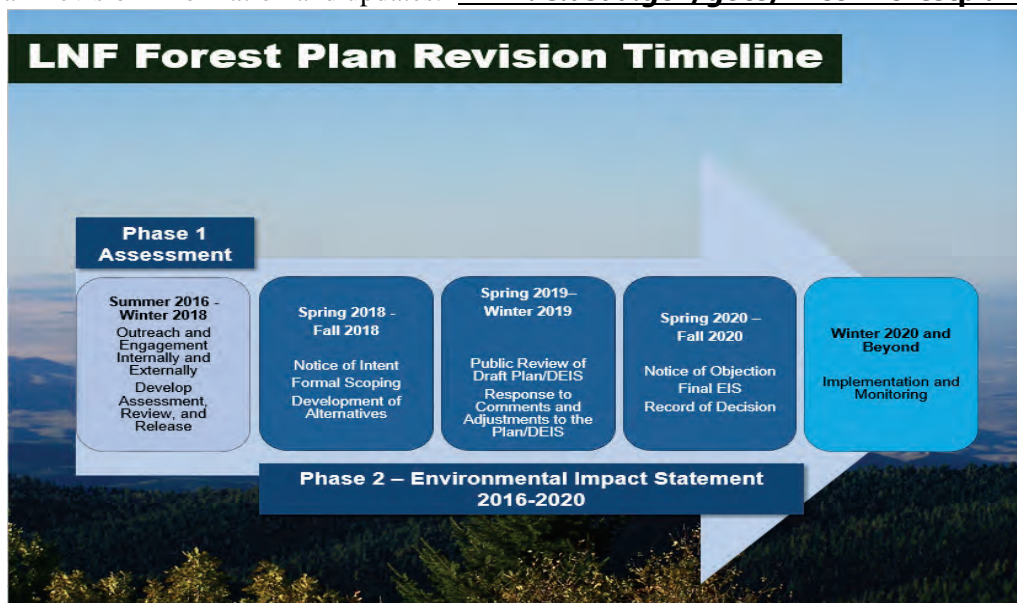
Travis Moseley – Forest Supervisor, Travis has been on the Lincoln National Forest (NF) since May, 2013. Having gained over 31 years of experience in the Forest Service, he has held positions in Oregon, Alaska and New Mexico in forestry, rangeland and watershed management and - for the last 16 years - as a line officer. Travis was brought up in northern New Mexico’s upper Chama Valley where his immediate and extended family has lived on the land for many generations involved in ranching and community service. “It is here that I gained a deep respect for the land and water - and people’s use and dependence on them. These are fundamental to people’s heritage, culture and ultimately their existence,” Travis reflects. As the leader of the Lincoln NF, he sees the role of the forest employee as facilitating the interests and wise use of the land for the benefit of future generations, utilizing the best available science within the framework of the applicable laws and regulations. “This can be very complicated work, but it is *oh so rewarding* when it all comes together,” Travis said.



Lincoln National Forest – Forest Plan Revision Update

The Lincoln NF began its four-year plan revision process in February 2015. We are currently in the assessment phase of the process and have had numerous opportunities to meet with our partners, stakeholders and the public. During the Assessment Phase, ecological, social and economic conditions and trends were identified that relate to the Lincoln NF. Conditions and trends found in the assessment are key in helping identify the needs-for-change in the current Forest Plan. Once the Regional Office completes review of the forest’s assessment, public meetings will resume, most likely in the summer of 2018. The public meetings will offer a venue to discuss the assessment findings, determine the needs-for-change (from current Forest Plan) through a collaborative effort and continue the dialogue with interested individuals, residents and forest users.

Forest Plan Revision information and updates: www.fs.usda.gov/goto/lincolnforestplan



Flagship Targets

Accelerating the pace and scale of forest restoration on national forests is needed to create more resilient natural landscapes and the communities that rely on them for their livelihoods and well-being. Insect and disease infestation and catastrophic wildfire have been increasingly evident over the last decade throughout the west, and the Lincoln NF is no different. Acres of fuels reduction treatments and biomass production (measured as cubic feet or board feet of commercially-utilized timber) are the principle measures utilized to demonstrate multiple objective outcomes from creating healthier, more resilient forests. With a multiple-use mandate and a myriad of competing interests and demands that result, it requires focus and prioritization of limited resources and funding to increase the pace and scale of restoration.

In FY 2017 the Lincoln's goals of 12,500 acres for fuels treatment and 9,500 ccf was nearly achieved at 14,114 acres and 5,716 ccf, respectively. This was no small task, but with the help of partnership funding, good weather resulting in appropriate prescribed burning windows, and a healthy demand for commercial use of timber, the communities benefitted greatly. This year our goal has increased to 17,000 acres of fuels reduction and 8,000 ccf.

Simultaneously, the Lincoln was engaged in a number of National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) efforts to feed the pipeline for forest restoration. A prerequisite to any discretionary ground-disturbing activity is the process of public involvement and disclosure of environmental, social and economic effects. At the increasing pace and scale for treatments, the Lincoln was in danger of running out of NEPA-cleared acres. In order to address this, we have been focusing on the South Sacramento Restoration Project (SSRP), a 140,000-acre restoration partnership with New Mexico Game and Fish. Westside Collaborative Forest Restoration Program, another partnership effort with the City of Alamogordo, focused on fuels treatments in and around municipal water sources located and piped from the Lincoln NF. A number of Categorical Exclusion decisions were recently signed that provided for forest-wide maintenance of pinyon-juniper treatments, commercial and personal use fuelwood harvesting, and tree planting on high-severity wildfire areas.

The future looks bright in terms of the opportunity to increase the pace and scale of forest restoration. Our remaining challenges will be to muster the public-private partnerships, industrial capacity to economically process wood fiber, and the appropriate conditions to reintroduce prescribed and managed wildfire, while protecting life and property and the myriad of other values at risk.

Tribal Relations

The Lincoln NF regularly consults with three federally-recognized Indian tribes: the Mescalero Apache Tribe, the Pueblo of Zuni, and the Hopi Tribe. Although currently located far to the northwest, the Hopi and Zuni consider the Lincoln NF part of their ancestral territory, while the Mescalero have occupied the region since the 1400s and their reservation borders both the Smokey Bear and Sacramento Ranger Districts. The Lincoln NF maintains close relationships with the Mescalero Apache Tribe. In addition to sharing common borders, the Lincoln NF and the Mescalero Apache Tribe are partners in fuels reduction projects under the Collaborative Forest Restoration Program and Reserved Treaty Rights Lands. The Tribe also operates and maintains Ski Apache resort, which is located on Forest Service land under a Special Use Permit.

The Lincoln NF has a full-time forest archaeologist, Bill Sapp, who has collateral duties as the forest's tribal liaison. He is responsible for advising line officers on consultation pertaining to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), consultation for Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), and compliance with Executive Orders 11593-*Protection and Enhancement of the Cultural Environment*, 13007-*Indian Sacred Sites*, and 13175-*Consultation and Coordination With Indian Tribal Governments*. The Tribal Liaison is also responsible for repatriation under the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act. The tribal liaison maintains contact with the tribal historic preservation officer and the director of the Office of Natural Resources Development and Protection.

The tribal liaison is responsible for coordination with the tribe and forest staff to facilitate traditional gatherings by tribal members. In support of this effort, in 2017 the Lincoln NF issued a letter to the Tribe allowing the collection of up to 4,400 tipi poles per year from areas that had already been cleared for fuels projects.

On an annual basis, the Lincoln NF consults on a comprehensive list of undertakings and planning efforts, pursuant to Section 106 of NHPA and NEPA. Typically the forest sends quarterly letters to the Tribes along with the Schedule of Proposed Actions, which serves as a starting point for government-to-government consultation on projects of tribal interest. The Tribes are also included in general scoping letters generated by the forest and are contacted to follow-up on issues generated by the Washington, D.C. office of USDA Forest Service.

The Lincoln NF has two partnership coordinators, Peg Crim and Mark Cadwallader, who also work closely with the Mescalero Apache Tribe. Crim focuses on tribal youth outreach and development through partnerships with the Sovereign National Service Corps, the Mescalero Boys & Girls Club, Youth Development staff, and the High School Natural Resources Academy summer program. Tribal youth are also engaged through the Every Kid in a Park program. Cadwallader has worked to build partnerships with the Tribe to fund fuels projects under the Collaborative Forest Restoration Program and Reserved Treaty Rights Lands.

Partners work together to create the Guadalupe Ridge Trail (GRT)

Nearly three years ago it was just an idea, but today over 100 miles of existing trail have been combined across agency boundaries to create the Guadalupe Ridge Trail. The trail extends from the highest point in Texas at Guadalupe Peak in Guadalupe Mountains National Park through the high deserts of New Mexico, across the Lincoln NF and Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to the Carlsbad Caverns National Park. The ribbon cutting ceremony for the GRT was held on May 6, 2017 at McKittrick Canyon in Guadalupe Mountains National Park. The partners involved with the GRT include the Lincoln NF's Guadalupe Ranger District; Guadalupe Mountains National Park; Carlsbad Caverns National Park; the BLM Carlsbad Field Office; and the Carlsbad Chamber of Commerce. The group meets on a regular basis to discuss signage, promotion and other items concerning the trail.

The Dark Canyon Lookout Tower is one of the featured highlights along a stretch of the Guadalupe District's portion of the trail. At an elevation of 6,963 ft., the 360 degree view is spectacular! The next ambitious step that the agency partners will pursue is to seek recognition of the Guadalupe Ridge Trail into the National Trail System from both the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the U.S. Department of the Interior. They hope to receive the designation in time to have a rededication ceremony on the 50th anniversary of the National Trails System Act, October 2, 2018. And finally, a plan is underway to enter into a "Service First" agreement so that partners can collaboratively work on any portion of the trail system without having to worry about which jurisdiction that portion of the trail falls on. The opportunity-seeking partners are also looking to add a 25-mile extension to the trail, linking the City of Carlsbad to the trail system at Carlsbad Caverns National Park, in the vicinity of White City, New Mexico. This would involve BLM land, as well as adding the New Mexico State Land Office and New Mexico State Parks to the list of partners. For more information about the GRT, visit: <http://guadaluperidgedgetrail.com/>

Sitting Bull Falls Recreation Area offers Sustainable Recreation to Forest Visitors

Each year, thousands of visitors stop and enjoy the Sitting Bull Falls Recreation Area (SBF) on the Guadalupe Ranger District of the Lincoln NF. This oasis in the desert offers water and trees in an otherwise arid environment. While there is no direct evidence that Chief Sitting Bull ever visited the falls, there is evidence of historic and prehistoric occupation of the site by Native Americans and early settlers. The area around the falls was part of a large ranch and was purchased by the Forest Service in the 1920s. The original two picnic shelters, restroom and dam were constructed by the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) in 1940, from limestone and sandstone cut from nearby Last Chance Canyon. The area was renovated from 1996-

1998 at a cost of \$845,000 with additional shelters, a new restroom and concrete paths. Today, the developed site consists of six acres with parking, picnicking, hiking, rock climbing, and restrooms with running water.

SBF participates in the 2004 Recreation Enhancement Act where 95 percent of the fees collected are returned to the area for workforce hiring, maintenance, and improvements of facilities and interpretive displays.

SBF is a popular day-use destination for both tourists and locals. During the summer months the site is filled to capacity most weekends. Each year in April, SBF is the learning site for over 900 fifth-graders from Eddy County schools during National Environmental Education Week. The schools rotate through eight stations that are staffed by local agencies and environmental groups. Roswell Schools' fourth-graders visit SBF as the highlight of the Every Kid in a Park program that allows students to experience their public lands up close and personal.

Cedar Creek Trails offer Extraordinary Opportunities to Outdoor Enthusiasts

During the summer of 2017, the Smokey Bear Ranger District opened one of the first of its kind on National Forest System lands – a downhill bike trail known locally as the “flow.” Free and open to the public, the trail offers experienced riders a new challenge mostly found only as a paid experience at ski areas. And, although the name may be a bit misleading, no one wanted to change the title of “JerryAtric” Trail, a 4.5-mile long mountain biking loop that was completed last fall, which starts just behind the District Office. This new trail segment adds up to a total of about 25 miles of sustainable hiking and biking trails that are accessed from the Cedar Creek Road in Ruidoso, New Mexico.

The trails were designed and built by local government and private partners willing to bring labor and money to create a world-class system of trails from a mismatch of steeper trails known formerly as the “spaghetti bowl”. This year the district, aided largely by the AmeriCorps-sponsored “EcoServants,” will add about 5 miles in Perk Canyon that will connect the two popular recreation areas.

Excellent Progress being made on South Fork Campground Restoration

This once very popular developed campground in the Rio Bonito watershed, near Bonito Lake, was affected by the Little Bear Fire of 2012 and the subsequent flooding that followed. Although there were still green trees in the campground, overall, the place was in shambles. Restoration work started with removal and mastication of burned trees, determination of the 100-year flood plain and removal of campsites from that area.

In the fall of 2017, 20 acres were planted with ponderosa pine and Douglas fir. During 2017-2018, work was completed to build two ADA toilets, establish high water crossings, reshape the washed-out drainage crossing, remove debris and rubble, and replace picnic tables. The next phase is to replace kiosks and signage and continue to address the needs at the individual campsites.

The popular trail that follows the South Fork Bonito Creek will be cleared up to the Wilderness Boundary to give future campers an opportunity to enjoy the live creek and a two-mile hike. The district will be working with Upper Hondo Soil and Water Conservation District to reestablish riparian vegetation, treat weeds, and reseed soils, which is work that is scheduled to be completed this winter.

Because of Mexican spotted owls potentially nesting nearby, heavy equipment use is curtailed for the breeding season. The goal of the district is to have the campground ready to reopen on Labor Day weekend 2018.

Lincoln National Forest's Guadalupe District offers new dimensions to Carlsbad Early College High School Students

The Carlsbad Early College High School (CECHS) was fully implemented in the fall of 2014. The program supports a very aggressive curriculum that allows high school students to graduate with an Associate's Degree and/or up to two years of college credits. Students that pursue the Early College are better-prepared and more competitive in the job market. Should they choose to pursue a higher education, they have the advantage of having already completed many of the prerequisites towards a degree.

The Lincoln NF and the CECHS are partnering to enhance student learning opportunities by using the forest as an outdoor classroom. The CECHS curriculum offers an experiential learning environment through personal experience and involvement. Students are required to serve in internship positions in their chosen field of study during their junior and senior years. The Lincoln NF, along with many of the businesses in the area, has joined with the school to provide those internships. Those looking at careers in agriculture, natural resources, government or public administration can choose with district resource specialists doing important project-related work on the Guadalupe Ranger District. The partnership is a "win-win" scenario for both entities. The high school benefits by extending the classroom beyond the walls and into the "real world." Teaching expertise is expanded by incorporating the Guadalupe District's resource specialists into the instructor/mentor cadre. USDA Forest Service benefits by supplementing its workforce, as the classroom teachings and field exposure are focused on actual project-related work. Students have been working in administration, recreation, range, wildlife, caves and fire prevention.

The Early College concept is not unique as many school districts around the country offer similar programs. What is unique is the relationship between the school district and a federal land management agency. The partnership that the Lincoln NF and CECHS have created is one-of-kind and, at this time, we are unaware of any similar partnerships that exist. The forest and the school were able to obtain a grant of \$43,000 from the Forest Service Youth Engagement Program to help pay the students' salary and necessary safety equipment. Then they entered into an agreement with a financial plan calling for matching funds to be contributed by the school. The agreement will be in place until December 31, 2020, and has provisions for additional funds to be added in later years.

Bluff Springs Recreation Site Renovation

As visitor use in the Bluff Springs area has continued to increase, so have the impacts to the riparian and wetlands that define this popular recreation site on the Sacramento Ranger District. Visitors are attracted to the cool temperatures of this 8,100 ft. elevation recreation site with waterfall, trails, rustic bridge and the Rio Peñasco, a small stream flowing through the recreation site. The site is located within an area designated as critical habitat for New Mexico Meadow Jumping Mouse and is home to the federally-listed Sacramento Mountains thistle.

Starting in September 2018, the Lincoln NF will begin the NEPA planning process to renovate the site to accommodate day-use visitors, while conserving the natural resources that visitors are there to enjoy. A draft design concept has been developed that provides for a high quality visitor experience while meeting Forest Service accessibility standards and protection of threatened and endangered species, through conservation of this unique and sensitive riparian and wet meadow habitat.

Rehabilitation and expansion of the existing recreation site may include consideration of all or some combination of the following: replacement or removal of some existing facilities, delineating parking areas for passenger vehicles and OHVs, adding picnic stations and shade structures, building a viewing platform, construction of rustic fencing, construction of accessible trails and an additional bridge, construction of benches, restoration of riparian vegetation, regrading trails and parking areas, recontouring and armoring natural slopes, installing interpretive sites, dust abatement, and construction of a boardwalk.

A decision on this project is expected in late 2019, with work on-the-ground beginning as soon as funding becomes available.

New Mexico Meadow Jumping Mouse on the Lincoln National Forest

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) listed the New Mexico meadow jumping mouse (NMMJM) as endangered on June 10, 2014. Critical habitat was designated by the FWS on March 16, 2016. The Lincoln NF is one of four forests where the NMMJM is known to occur. There is only one known location where it persists on the Lincoln. As a result of the listing/critical habitat designation, there is a need to address the listing of the NMMJM as an endangered species and to be in conformance with the Lincoln NF Land and Resources Management Plan.

A conservation plan is being developed to address the long-term conservation and recovery needs of the NMMJM at the landscape-level on the Lincoln NF. It consists of identifying areas for expanding protection of occupied sites (Mauldin Spring), identifying and restoring riparian/wetland habitat in historically-occupied sites, working with grazing permittees to develop livestock grazing strategies that minimize impacts in the habitat of NMMJM and other listed species, improving watershed conditions through restoration treatments in uplands (South Sacramento Restoration Project), identifying and protecting critical habitat in areas where livestock grazing does not currently occur (Silver Springs), managing recreation use in Bluff Springs to reduce impacts to designated critical habitat, controlling invasive species (thistle) in critical habitat, and collaboratively addressing road drainage and habitat alteration in Cox Canyon.

The Lincoln has initiated NEPA for two Environmental Assessments (EA) for long-term habitat restoration projects that will provide protection to NMMJM habitat, affecting two allotments (Sacramento and Agua Chiquita). These projects propose replacement of temporary fencing with permanent fences and construction of additional livestock gathering facilities (corrals and traps) and watering options. The Lincoln NF plans to complete both EAs in 2018.

The Forest Service and FWS continue to meet with interested/affected partners to discuss 2018 livestock grazing and impacts on the protected NMMJM habitat. Monitoring conducted during 2017 found that the Forest Service was out of compliance with the Biological Opinion for ongoing livestock grazing on the Sacramento Allotment. As a result, reinitiation of consultation has been requested and a modified proposal is being developed to provide for increased protection of the NMMJM, the Mexican spotted owl, the Sacramento prickly poppy, and the Sacramento Mountains thistle.

On June 9, 2017, the New Mexico State Engineer issued an order and license recognizing claimed pre-1907 waters rights by ranchers grazing cattle under permit on the Lincoln NF. The Lincoln NF is committed to working with the Goss family to provide reasonable access to water while ensuring compliance with the Endangered Species Act. The Lincoln NF continues to ensure cattle have adequate access to water while protecting habitat for endangered species such as the NMMJM. Where exclosures have been necessary to protect species habitat, a variety of mechanisms have been used to provide for access to critical water sources, such as water lanes in exclosures, development of diversions for off stream drinkers and additional water developments.

Restoration Partnerships - South Sacramento Restoration Project (SSRP) Update

In partnership with the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish (NMDG&F), the Lincoln National Forest is currently conducting a NEPA analysis on a large landscape scale project (140,000 acres) known as the South Sacramento Restoration Project (SSRP). The expected NEPA completion date is October 1, 2018, with project implementation in priority areas initiated immediately after the signing of the NEPA Decision.

To date, the Lincoln National Forest has conducted two formal collaboration workshops for the general public and multiple working group and information sharing meetings. Future public collaborative meetings are planned this summer. Notice of Intent (NOI) was published in the Federal Register on April 7, 2017. A public workshop was held in Cloudcroft, NM, on April 26, 2017 for the purpose of engaging two-way dialogue, Q&A session and to collect comments for consideration on the proposed action. Scoping was

concluded on May 8, 2017. An agreement between NMDGF and FS was finalized on May 23, 2017 to fund a third-party NEPA contract with SWCA Environmental Consultants to conduct the environmental analysis. SWCA commenced work in June 2017 on the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). Chapters 1 and 2 have been drafted and individual resource specialist reports are near completion with the development of Chapter 3, Environmental Consequences, expected in the coming months. The Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) is expected to be released for public and comment by June 2018, with the Record of Decision (ROD) being finalized by October 1, 2018.

In preparation for initial implementation, a data collection agreement between NMDGF and FS is in progress. The forest is currently focused on having shelf-ready projects identified and ready for implementation in late 2018 or early 2019, immediately following the NEPA decision. Data gathering would include Mexican spotted owl (MSO), botany, salamander, goshawk, common stand exams, and cultural resource surveys. An area of about 20,000 acres is identified with the idea of implementing initial treatments in MSO Protected Activity Centers (PACs) and monitoring effects for use in future adaptive approaches and mastication projects located in the southern part of the project area.

The Challenge Cost Share Supplemental Project Agreement (SPA)

This agreement was approved November 17, 2015 between the NMDGF and the Lincoln NF. It was funded up to \$625,000 over a three-year period, for wildlife habitat and watershed improvement on the Sacramento District. To date, the agreement has funded over 2,500 acres of prescribed fire activities on the 171, Wet Burnt and Perk Prescribed Fire projects; funded the reconstruction of two existing water developments; and funded over 500 acres of mechanical mastication. Before its expiration in June 2018, the agreement will fund up to four additional water development reconstructions and additional acres of prescribed fire. The project agreement has been instrumental in improvement of habitat quality for wildlife while enhancing watershed health and forage conditions across the landscape.

The Lincoln NF, in partnership with NMDGF, continues to dedicate other NMDGF funds to mastication, prescribed burning and herbicide treatments on juniper sprouts. **Jim Springs Mastication Project** completed 234 acres in late 2017. **Bluewater Mastication Project**, approximately 400 acres, is anticipated to start in July 2018. The **Perk Prescribed Burn** project was initiated in early 2018, with 700 acres accomplished. An additional 1,800 acres is on track for implementation if prescription windows allow in the coming months. The **McDonald Flat Herbicide Treatment** on juniper sprouts, a Habitat Stamp Program (HSP)-funded project, will accomplish 170 acres in April 2018.

Reserved Treaty Rights Lands (RTRL) grant funding

The Bureau of Indian Affairs through the Wildland Fire Management program, allocated funding to enhance the health and resilience of tribal ancestral lands located outside the boundaries of the Mescalero Apache Reservation. RTRL funding emphasizes restoration of tribal landscapes through collaborative, interagency projects. In 2018, approximately \$375,000 is available to fund restoration projects on the Lincoln National Forest lands adjacent to the reservation. Those projects include prescribed fire, fuel reduction and vegetative thinning.

Timber Harvesting Continues on Lincoln National Forest

On the Lincoln NF, most of the timber harvest occurs on the Sacramento Ranger District in Otero County. The volume of sawtimber is sold and removed through conventional timber sale contracts, stewardship agreements, fuelwood sales (both commercial and personal use), and through miscellaneous forest products.

Currently there are five active small production sawmills in Otero County; one full production pallet mill in Canutillo, Texas; and multiple firewood processors throughout Otero, Lincoln, Chaves and Eddy counties. The local sawmills and processors produce products including: architectural beams, framing lumber, pallet stock and cants, railroad cross ties, oil well and equipment mats and oil well cribbing, utility poles, house logs, dried shavings (bagged) and firewood.

Timber management and harvesting on the Lincoln NF can bring economic benefits both locally and regionally. In step with the Southwestern Region, our goal is to assess and evaluate opportunities that will allow us to be situated to better meet the demands for timber products.

New Mexico Wood Industry Summit to be held in Ruidoso - November 16-17, 2018

The Lincoln NF is partnering with South Central Mountain Resource Conservation & Development Council (SCMRC&D), Village of Ruidoso, New Mexico State Forestry, Mescalero Apache Tribe, Little Bear Forest Reform Coalition, local contractors, timber equipment companies, and other partners to support and sponsor this first statewide, two-day event designed to enhance and promote the wood industry across the entire state of New Mexico.

Regional Forester Cal Joyner has been invited to be the keynote speaker for the event. The venue will offer educational presentations with break-out sessions, Wood Industry presentations, workshops, equipment demonstrations, panel discussions, wood products samples and sales, and information for contractors. A strong vibrant wood industry in New Mexico is essential for the accomplishment of our landscape scale forest restoration goals on the Lincoln and other forests across the state.



USDA Forest Service Southwestern Region • Santa Fe National Forest Briefing Paper

April 2018

Meet the Forest Supervisor

James Melonas is the forest supervisor on the Santa Fe National Forest (NF). James returned to the Southwestern Region in March 2017 after serving as Deputy Forest Supervisor of the national forests of North Carolina. Prior to that, he was the New Mexico State Liaison for the Southwestern Region. James leverages his familiarity with both the region and the forest to build on successes of recent years and meet the challenges ahead. In his earlier role as state liaison, James worked with a diverse set of stakeholders, including many unique to New Mexico such as land grant communities and acequia associations. He is a strong proponent of partnership and collaboration in the stewardship of public lands.



James started his Forest Service career as a Presidential Management Fellow in the Chief's Office where he helped implement special projects. While in Washington, D.C., he also worked on the Forest Stewardship Program, the Open Space Conservation Strategy and the forestry provisions of the 2008 Farm Bill. He holds a Master of Public Affairs degree with an emphasis on environmental policy and natural resource management from the Indiana University School of Public and Environmental Affairs. Prior to joining the Forest Service, he served as a Peace Corps volunteer in Malawi.

Forest Plan Revision (FPR)

Forest Plan Revision is a multiyear project to update the 1987 Forest Plan to guide forest management, use and protection while supporting the economic vitality of communities in and around the Santa Fe NF over the next 10 to 15 years. After assessing current ecological resources and socioeconomic conditions on the forest and identifying “needs for change,” the forest is working on the draft Forest Plan and Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS). Both documents should be available for public comment by the fall of 2018 with a new plan in place by the fall of 2019.

In 2017, the FPR team developed initial Plan Components, which provide a basis for resource management across most of the Santa Fe NF. In addition, the team identified several Management Areas, which require specific management. As work on the DEIS progresses, the team is finalizing a Proposed Action (Draft Plan) and Alternatives. The subsequent analysis will help inform the Forest Supervisor's final decision. The Santa Fe NF is holding open houses once or twice a month across the forest through fall 2018 to keep the public informed ahead of the draft plan and DEIS release.

The 2012 directives for Forest Plan Revision require forests to identify and evaluate lands that may be suitable for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System, and to evaluate potential additions to the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System. Since spring 2016, the Santa Fe NF held three rounds of public meetings on the wilderness process, all of which were well-attended and represented an array of opinions. The forest finalized the wilderness evaluation, which will be released ahead of the draft plan and DEIS. An interdisciplinary team evaluated all rivers on the forest for Wild and Scenic River eligibility and identified 12 rivers as eligible.

In addition to multiple rounds of public meetings, the forest consulted with county and state governments, other federal agencies and tribal governments. Twelve agencies agreed to work as cooperating agencies through the Plan Revision process. The FPR team is also committed to engaging youth in the process, including participating in the national Every Kid in A Park initiative, presenting material as part of high

school and college science curriculums, and helping with weeklong programs on the forest for high school and college students.

Southwest Jemez Mountains (SWJM) Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Project (CFLRP)

The SWJM project is one of the largest forest restoration projects in the Southwest, encompassing approximately 210,000 acres across multiple ownership boundaries. The long-term collaborative effort will restore forest ecosystems at the landscape scale and improve resilience to major disturbances, including fire, insects and disease, and climate change.

The Record of Decision (ROD) for the project was signed in December 2015. From 2010 through 2015, just under 27,000 acres of the project area was treated (mostly through prescribed and managed fire) and 35 miles of roads decommissioned under the auspices of legacy projects and other NEPA vehicles. The following activities are authorized in the ROD:

- Mechanically treat 30,000 acres of ponderosa pine and mixed conifer forest
- Allocate 20 percent ponderosa pine and 20 percent dry mixed conifer vegetation types as old growth
- Restore and revegetate riparian areas
- Protect and improve water flow from seeps and springs
- Improve riparian and aquatic wildlife habitat by installing instream structures
- Close and revegetate degraded campsites
- Control nonnative and invasive plants (without herbicide)
- Protect cultural resources by treating vegetation and controlling erosion
- 77,000 acres of prescribed fire
- 100 miles of road decommissioning
- Resolution of an objection filed by WildEarth Guardians added an additional 14 miles of road decommissioning

Since signing the ROD, accomplishments include:

- Awarding 3,743 acres of mechanical thinning and forest stand restoration under an Integrated Resource Service Contract (IRSC); 130 acres were completed in 2017
- Treatment of an additional 7,900 acres of fuels treatments using prescribed fire and hand thinning/piling), 9.8 miles of roads decommissioned
- Thinning vegetation around 800 cultural sites to protect them from fire damage
- Installing structures on the Rio Cebolla to reduce downstream cutting and restore wetland vegetation

Regional, forest and district personnel led tours and reviews for congressional and Washington office staff in August and October of 2017.

In the near future we plan on:

- Decommissioning 11 miles of road under the project account and 10 miles by WildEarth Guardians through a separate Collaborative Forest Restoration Program (CFRP) grant in 2018
- Continuing to prepare and award Task Orders under the IRSC, including around 2,700 acres in 2018
- 3,000 acres of fuels and prescribed fire treatments in 2018, including through an agreement with the Pueblo of Jemez; additional acres may be treated through managed wildfire as opportunities arise
- Meadow and riparian restoration by WildEarth Guardians, Rio Grande Water Fund, The Nature Conservancy, Trout Unlimited, New Mexico Trout, and the Pueblo of Jemez
- Continuing vegetation treatments on 1,200 cultural sites over the next two years
- Continuing an extensive monitoring project coordinated by the Valles Caldera National Preserve. The annual SWJM CFLRP “all hands” workshop in April brings agency specialists, partners and members of the public together to update stakeholders on all facets of the project.

A stewardship contract for all of the mechanical thinning work (targeting about 2,500 acres per year) was awarded to TC Company, a local contractor that operates the Walatowa Timber Industries (WTI) mill on the Pueblo of Jemez in a joint partnership with the pueblo. WTI produces a wide range of products, including dimension lumber, posts and poles, vigas and latillas, mulch, chips and firewood. They also completed installation of a pellet processing mill and plan to install pressure treating equipment. The range of products greatly enhances wood utilization, as well as provides employment for pueblo members.

Greater Santa Fe Fireshed Coalition (GSFFC)

The Greater Santa Fe Fireshed Coalition is a partnership established in 2015 to address the wildfire risk in the forests surrounding the greater Santa Fe area east of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains. Partners share an interest in restoring and maintaining functioning ecosystems in Santa Fe's forests and watersheds to:

- Protect against the catastrophic losses that a wildfire and subsequent flooding would cause
- Provide a variety of ecosystem services to communities
- Contribute to the sustainability of Santa Fe and surrounding communities in Northern New Mexico

The GSFFC brings together representatives from a variety of local agencies and organizations, including:

- New Mexico State Forestry
- The Nature Conservancy
- Forest Stewards Guild
- City of Santa Fe
- Pueblo of Tesuque
- Wildfire Network
- Santa Fe National Forest
- USDA Forest Service Southwestern Region
- U.S. Geological Survey, Jemez Mountain Research Station
- County of Santa Fe Fire Department
- New Mexico Forest & Watershed Restoration Institute
- Santa Fe-Pojoaque Soil & Water Conservation District
- New Mexico Forest Industry Association
- Santa Fe Watershed Association
- Natural Resources Conservation Service

The GSFFC mission is to use a proactive, collaborative approach to improve the health and long-term resilience of forested watersheds and communities surrounding Santa Fe. The Coalition will identify and implement high-priority, on-the-ground projects that can benefit from treatments such as prescribed fire and thinning.

As the coalition took shape, two strategies emerged:

- Look at the entire 107,000-acre landscape as a whole to identify areas where available resources can best be used to achieve the coalition's goals.
- Focus on specific areas where both the need for treatment and the benefits to values at risk are so obvious that we do not want to wait for the macroanalysis.

The Forest Service is already moving forward on two projects that fit the strategy: the Hyde Park Wildland Urban Interface Project and the Pacheco Canyon Forest Resiliency Project. We are also in the early stages of developing a third project with collaborative input.

Hyde Park WUI Project

This 1,840-acre project will increase resilience and reduce fuel hazard in forests east of the community of Hyde Park Estates, near Hyde Memorial State Park, and adjacent to Black Canyon campground. Conditions in the project area make it highly susceptible to crown fires, which have severe consequences for forest resources and pose a high threat to firefighter safety. The project area is immediately adjacent to

the Santa Fe Municipal Watershed, which has been part of a decade-long effort to reduce the threat of wildfire in the watershed, which provides 40 percent of the city's water supply. Resources in this area, including NM State Road 475, a National Scenic Byway, would be severely impacted by a catastrophic wildfire, including post-fire flooding and debris flow.

The Hyde Park WUI Project was categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental assessment or environmental impact statement, and a decision memo was signed on March 21, 2018. Work is expected to begin as early as October 2018.

Pacheco Canyon Forest Resiliency Project

Collaborative work by the GSFFC, especially the Tesuque Pueblo, pushed the project to the top of the priority list based on the Pueblo's strong interest to protect tribal land inholdings, combined with the urgent need to break up the continuity of the canopy in the Fireshed. The project area is about 2,200 acres of National Forest System lands surrounding tribal lands along Pacheco Canyon Road. Conditions in the project area are similar to those found in the Hyde Park Project. The high density of stands contribute to a high risk for insect outbreaks, while in the conjunction with the presence of ladder fuels, increases the risk for a wildfire to grow fast and have unnaturally severe effects on the forest and downstream resources from post-fire flooding. A large-scale, high-severity fire here would harm multiple values, including tribal hunting areas, recreation uses and acequias. The Pacheco Canyon Forest Resiliency Project is undergoing environmental analysis with a decision expected in early May 2018. Work is expected to begin as early as July 2018.

Hazardous Fuels Program/Prescribed Fire

The Santa Fe NF's appropriated fuels budget has been roughly \$1 million a year over the past six years. The forest has also successfully competed for ~\$200,000 for Tier III projects and \$700,000 – \$1,000,000 for supplemental fuels projects in recent years. The fuels program developed multiple partnerships with New Mexico Department of Game and Fish, New Mexico State Forestry, Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, National Wild Turkey Federation, Rio Grande Water Fund and the City of Santa Fe that have provided funds for planning and implementation. Other integrated partnerships include work with the National Park Service for fire effects monitoring; the New Mexico State Forestry Inmate Work Crew for prescribed fire preparation/implementation; and The Nature Conservancy for the annual international Spanish-language fire training exchange (TRES) hosted by the forest.

The Santa Fe NF Fuels Program has roughly 300,000 acres that is NEPA-cleared. The fuels target is currently 16,000 acres for fiscal year 2018. In addition, the forest is beginning the NEPA planning for the Greater Santa Fe Fireshed Coalition, a 100,000-acre collaborative planning effort that is a new priority for both the Southwestern Region and the Santa Fe NF.

The following projects are NEPA-complete and ready to implement:

Project Name	Approximate Acreage	Ranger District
Gallina WUI	3,000	Coyote
Rio Chama	90,000	
Mesa Poleo	1,500	
Cordovas	2,000	
Golondrino	32,000	
Moya	22,000	Cuba
Chaparral	22,000	
Eureka Mesa	2,000	
Southwest Jemez	110,000	
Gallina Watershed	6,000	Jemez
Lower Santa Fe Watershed	7,000	Pecos/Las Vegas
Upper Santa Fe Watershed	8,000	
Mesitas/La Sotella	10,000	
Valle II	800	
TOTAL	316,300	

The following key points and assumptions will ensure program success now and into the future:

- There will be more catastrophic wildfires in the future. Increased insect mortality is occurring now and is expected to continue into the future. This will result in renewed interest by Congress and the public in the pace and progress of forest restoration.
- In order to meet assigned targets, we need to give more emphasis and focus to managed wildfire and prescribed fire.
- Non-federal partners that contribute funds for fuels treatments identify their primary interests as watershed protection and wildlife habitat improvement. Prescribed fire is the treatment of choice to treat large areas as efficiently and cost-effectively as possible.
- Smoke management concerns may necessitate the use of alternative methods of slash treatment. Prescribed burning on large areas (e.g., in the thousands of acres) should occur only when ventilation conditions are most favorable.
- In order to implement large acres of prescribed fire, especially those in smoke-sensitive areas (i.e., the Santa Fe Fireshed), the window for prescribed burning is likely to be spring, summer and early fall. Unfortunately, this is also the time when our fire workforce is likely to be unavailable due to suppression support in other parts of the country.
- We need to take full advantage of opportunities to manage wildfires to meet resource objectives.

Collaborative Forest Restoration Program (CFRP)

The CFRP on the Santa Fe NF remains a robust and reliable tool for expanding forest restoration, improving watershed conditions and building local community capacity on the forest. A legacy of former United States Senator Jeff Bingaman, the CFRP exists only in New Mexico and originated from the Community Forest Restoration Act (P.L. 106-393) of 2000.

Objectives of the program include:

- reducing the threat of large high-intensity wildfires
- improving forest ecosystem function by reducing the density of small-diameter trees
- improving the use of, or adding value to, small-diameter trees
- creating local employment or training opportunities

Currently, the Santa Fe NF is administering seven projects on tribal and public lands with a combined dollar value of approximately \$2.5 million. In February, 2018, a total of 15 applications were submitted statewide. Of those, seven were assigned to the Santa Fe NF including four NEPA planning, one utilization and two implementation applications.

In an effort to build partnerships and expand the availability of NEPA-ready acres, there has been an increased push to encourage more applications that will complete the NEPA planning and analysis within priority watersheds located throughout the forest. Similarly, more utilization applications involving the purchase of heavy forestry equipment have been promoted to increase the capacity of local operators to successfully compete for forest restoration bids.

Threatened and Endangered Species

Emerging issues for the Wildlife, Fish and Rare Plant program on the Santa Fe NF focus on threatened and endangered species and species whose status might lead to their listing by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). Listed species are the Jemez Mountains salamander (JMS), the New Mexico meadow jumping mouse (NMMJM), Mexican spotted owl (MSO) and Holy Ghost ipomopsis (HGI). Thanks to a revision of the MSO Recovery Plan in 2012, the forest has more flexibility in restoration treatments; however, that flexibility typically comes with additional monitoring requirements.

Listed in September 2013, the JMS continues to complicate management due primarily to the lack of information on its habitat needs. Consequently, JMS consultations with USFWS are usually time-consuming and include increasing monitoring requirements to try and fill the information void. Conversely, we know quite a bit about the NMMJM and gained additional information last summer through research performed by Carol Chambers, Ph.D., with Northern Arizona University School of Forestry, and her team. Dr. Chambers' work confirmed that populations of the NMMJM are in fact located on the Santa Fe NF. While the species was probably once widespread in the mountains of the southwest, the range of the NMMJM declined significantly. On the Santa Fe NF, it is only found in the drainages associated with the Rio Cebolla, Rio de las Vacas and San Antonio Creek in the southern Jemez Mountains. The mouse's listing created considerable controversy within the ranching community as habitat for the species can be adversely affected by livestock grazing. However, the Santa Fe NF's intent is to maintain grazing while promoting the recovery of the species. The long-term strategy to support the recovery of the New Mexico meadow jumping mouse will be informed by the best available science, including field surveys of the species during its short summer active season, and interdisciplinary and interagency monitoring of occupied and potential critical habitat.

Though relatively uncontroversial in the past, the post-fire flooding from the Tres Lagunas Fire in 2013 impacted the road in Holy Ghost Canyon and required repairs that had the potential to affect the HGI. The good news is that the forest is collaborating with the USFWS as well as New Mexico State Forestry, and New Mexico Native Plant Society as part of a working group to look at issues and potential solutions to recover this endemic plant found only in this canyon on the Pecos/Las Vegas district.

Species with the potential for future listing include the Rio Grande chub and Rio Grande sucker. An interagency team is developing a conservation strategy for these two species that will likely mirror the conservation strategy developed for the Rio Grande cutthroat trout. That conservation strategy staved off the listing of the trout; however, a lawsuit is pending to force the USFWS to reevaluate its decision to not list the species. The forest's fisheries program Mmanager, along with the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish, is taking part in an effort to implement the Rio Grande Cutthroat Trout Conservation Strategy that includes restoration of the species in the Pecos drainage.

Tribal Relations

The Santa Fe NF shares a common boundary with 10 federally-recognized tribes: the Pueblos of Nambe, Tesuque, Ohkay Owingeh, Santa Clara, Cochiti, Jemez, Santo Domingo, Zia, San Ildefonso and the Jicarilla Apache Nation. The forest has a stand-alone tribal relations coordinator who serves as a liaison between tribal leaders and forest leadership to ensure implementation of the forest's commitment to strengthening the government-to-government relationship between our agency and federally-recognized tribes. Since the tribal relations position was created in 2012, the Santa Fe NF has been recognized by the regional office for significant progress in tribal relations, which includes active Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) with four individual sovereign tribal governments: the Pueblos of Jemez, Tesuque, Ohkay Owingeh and Cochiti. The MOUs create a framework for consultation and coordination

by ensuring regularly-scheduled quarterly meetings between line officers and tribal leaders to discuss topics such as:

- protection of sacred sites
- gathering of forest products for traditional/ceremonial uses
- cooperative law enforcement agreements
- road maintenance and easement issues
- tribal involvement in the Southwest Jemez Mountains Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Project (SWJM CFLRP) for shared socioeconomic and ecological goals
- adding value to tribal participation in Forest Plan Revision
- potential mentorship opportunities on the Santa Fe NF for tribal youth

In late 2017, the newly-approved tribal relations MOU template was provided to Santa Clara Pueblo to explore the possibility of executing a formal MOU with them to advance a pending Tribal Forest Protection Act (TFPA) project on National Forest System (NFS) lands on the Española Ranger District along the tribe's northern boundary. The TFPA gives tribal entities the authority to conduct restoration and hazardous fuels reduction projects within NFS lands. The Act does not provide funding for these projects, and they must be located within NEPA-cleared areas. The current TFPAs on the SFNF are:

- Jemez Pueblo for 1,747 acres on the Jemez Ranger District within the SWJM CFLRP. Regional Forester Cal Joyner approved this project in January 2015.
- Prior to the Las Conchas Fire, Santa Clara Pueblo had a pending proposal to treat 29,000 acres within the Española Ranger District and the Valles Caldera National Preserve.

Walatowa Timber Industries is another success story for Santa Fe NF tribal relations. A joint venture between the Pueblo of Jemez and TC Company and a past recipient of CFRP funds, WTI has significantly increased production capacity at the tribe's mill and provided employment for tribal members. The successful partnership helped position TC Company to successfully bid on the SWJM stewardship contract in July 2016. The Chief's Review of the Southwestern Region in February 2016 included a visit to WTI, which resulted in \$250,000 in funding from the Forest Service for a pellet mill that is currently under construction. Jemez Pueblo and the forest hosted a VIP ribbon cutting ceremony for the new mill on April 4, 2018.

Several tribes expressed vocal opposition to the EIS on the potential effects of geothermal energy development on Santa Fe NF lands. The U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) identified approximately 195,000 acres within the boundaries of the forest with "significant geothermal potential." The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) earlier received expressions of interest in leasing approximately 46,000 acres of Santa Fe NF land for geothermal exploration and development. Of the project area identified by USGS, approximately 30,000 acres, including the Jemez National Recreation Area (NRA) and the East Fork of the Jemez River, which is designated a federal Wild and Scenic River, are closed to leasing by statute. The Forest Service has discretionary authority to prohibit leasing to protect special resources. The proposed project area includes the Jemez Mountain Trail National Scenic Byway, the Jemez Historic Site National Landmark, and the Monument Canyon Research Natural Area, as well as Santa Fe NF administrative sites. In 2016 and 2017, the forest held two listening sessions with tribal leaders and the forest supervisor to better understand their opposition prior to a final decision on geothermal development. Several tribes praised the no-leasing alternative that was selected in December of 2017 by the forest supervisor and lauded the forest as an agency that truly listens to federally-recognized tribes.



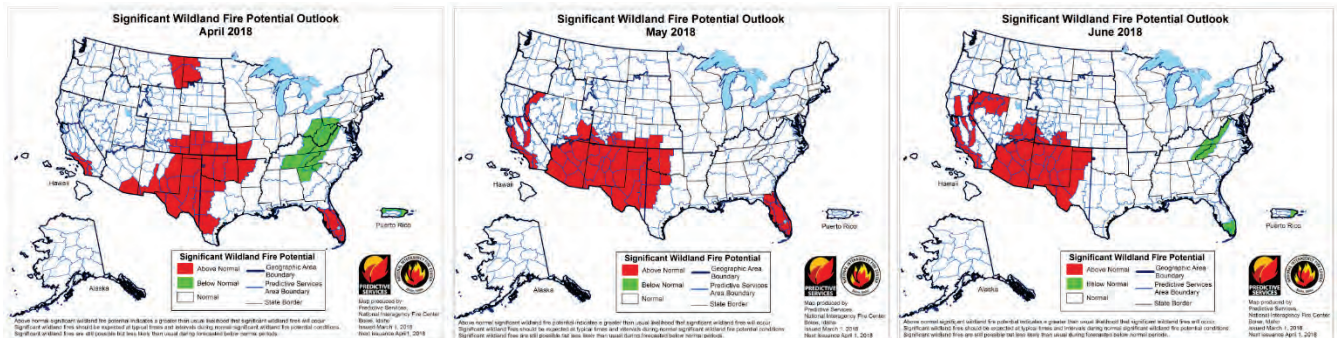
USDA Forest Service
Southwestern Region • New Mexico National Forests
Briefing Paper

April 2018

2018 Southwest Area Seasonal Outlook: New Mexico

Fire Potential Outlook

- Long-term drought has increased from west to east across the Southwest over the past five to six months.
- Moderate drought extends from eastern Arizona to northeastern New Mexico and much of west Texas and is likely to increase through April. Drought will impact areas of fine fuels with long-term impacts along and west of the Continental Divide.
- Substantial precipitation in 2017 has led to a buildup of warm-season fine fuels and, combined with high summer and fall moisture along with winter and early spring expected warmth, will likely contribute to widespread spring “green-up.”
- Fine fuel loading and continuity is normal to above normal.
- Snowpack has been near normal on average throughout the Southwest, better north, much less so to the south and east.
- Expect a West Coast ridge pattern to intersperse with an active jet stream across the northern portions of the Southwest, gradually weakening and shifting north. The southern portion of the area will be the focus for warmth, wind and dryness. An evolution away from La Niña is likely by mid-to late spring.
- Areas near and east of the Continental Divide are expected to be the epicenter of changeable, uncertain weather, with the highest potential for overlap of warmth, dryness, and periodic wind and lightning events.
- There is some indication that the onset of monsoonal precipitation could be early this year or at least “on time” with potential for a rapid switch to El Niño conditions.



Preparedness

- The Southwestern Region has completed permanent and seasonal fire hiring. Staffing levels are similar to that of 2017. Strong working relationships with state and federal interagency partners allow for efficient interagency response to fires through a seamless ordering and dispatch system.
- To obtain contracted equipment, the Forest Service issues competitive solicitations for certain resources needed for fire suppression and support efforts. Vendors whose resources are technically acceptable and are considered a low performance risk are issued awards

known as “incident blanket purchase agreements.” Through the agency’s Virtual Incident Procurement (VIPR) system, fire-contracted vendors supply additional equipment such as water tenders and engines to bolster fire suppression response on National Forest System land in the Southwest and throughout the country. Available resources in the Region include dozers and miscellaneous heavy equipment, engines, tactical and support water tenders, and communications trailers. These resources are available for dispatch to fires in the Southwest and nationally. In 2017, payments to Southwest vendors totaled over \$14.2 million.

- Strong working relationships with state and federal interagency partners allow for efficient interagency response to fires through a seamless ordering and dispatch system.
- The Southwest Area continues its involvement in a uniform fire restrictions program that was implemented in 2013. This effort, along with a website for public access, <http://firerestrictions.us/>, is improving public information and understanding when agencies implement fire restrictions and area closures.

Wildfire Response Resources Availability

- In 2006, the Forest Service’s Southwestern and Northern Regions entered into a cooperative agreement for firefighting resources. The exchange continues in 2017 as needed and includes overhead personnel, engines, and smokejumpers.
- The Southwest Area has two Type 1, three Type 2, and six Type 3 incident management teams.
- The Southwest Area’s 19 Type 1 interagency hotshot crews are being activated this spring and will be available nationally into early fall.
- On the average, the Southwest Area also fields about 20 Type 2 Initial Attack crews and six or seven Type 2 crews.
- The Forest Service has 111 engines with additional engines provided by interagency partners. The Southwestern Region has 67 engines stationed in Arizona, 44 in New Mexico.
- Aviation resources provide air support to crews on the ground. Aviation resources available to the Southwest on contract include very large airtankers (delivering 11,000+ gallons of retardant per flight) and large air tankers (delivering 2,000+ gallons of retardant per flight) as well as single-engine and military air tankers.
- In 2018, the Forest Service will have up to 25 Next Generation Air Tankers available for wildfire suppression nationwide (13 through Exclusive Use Contracts, up to 11 through Call When Needed Contracts, and one Forest Service).
- Federal single-engine airtankers (SEATs) are contracted and managed by the National Interagency Fire Center (NIFC) in Boise, Idaho. SEATs will be mobilized to the Southwest Area in May.
- There are eight airtanker bases in the Southwest that can service very large, large, and single-engine airtankers. Additionally, temporary bases capable of supporting single-engine airtankers can be activated at a variety of locations.
- The Forest Service has eight light, one medium, and two heavy helicopters on exclusive use contract (seven in Arizona, four in New Mexico). Additionally, there are 16 light helicopters on “call when needed” contracts throughout the Southwest.
- Helicopters and pilots in National Guard Units in A New Mexico are approved for firefighting.
- The Southwestern Region has 29 light fixed-wing aircraft on contract that are used for air tactical missions.
- The Southwest Area has partnered with Forest Service Regions in California, Oregon and Montana to share five Air Tactical aircraft. These aircraft will be staffed with full-time Air Tactical Group Supervisors and placed at strategic locations throughout the Southwest to respond to fires.

- Throughout its fire season, the Southwest also has access to available firefighting resources throughout the nation as mobilized through NIFC under the Incident Command System.

Fire Occurrence

- New Mexico has over nine million acres of National Forest System land.
- Last year, some 279 fires in New Mexico's five national forests burned 97,518 acres. Of these, 172 were lightning-caused, 107 human-caused.
- Under the Incident Command System, the Region also supported its federal and state partners in responding to 3,060 fires in the Southwest last year that burned 563,895 acres.
- So far this year, 25 fires have burned a total 323 acres in New Mexico's national forests, all human-caused. The Region has also supported its federal and state partners in responding to 434 fires in the Southwest that have burned 46,642 acres.
- In New Mexico, 300 communities are at risk and are covered by 242 community wildfire protection plans and 58 community protection zones.
- Homeowners living in or near the wildland-urban interface are responsible for "fireproofing" their private property. For assistance, homeowners can take advantage of information available through the Firewise® program (www.firewise.org). They can also contact municipal and county fire departments and state fire management agencies.

Accelerating restoration of fire-adapted ecosystems

- During Fiscal Year 2017 in New Mexico, some 36,377 acres in the wildland-urban interface were treated through hazardous fuels reduction projects.
- Outside of the wildland-urban interface, 32,737 acres were treated through hazardous fuels reduction projects.
- A total of 8,759 acres were treated through biomass utilization.
- The Region continues to take a holistic approach to wildfire, simultaneously considering fire's role in the landscape, the ability of humans to plan for and adapt to living with wildfire, and the need to be prepared to respond to wildfire when it occurs.
- Summer 2017 brought many opportunities for the Region to allow fire to play its natural role while working closely with federal, state and local partners for broad-based support at the local and regional levels. National forests in the Southwestern Region were able to use naturally-ignited wildfires to accomplish forest restoration objectives - 79,518 acres in New Mexico.

Smoke

- Fire plays an important ecological role across the wildlands of the United States and with fire, smoke is always present. Prescribed fire is a valuable land management tool used to reduce the risk and severity of wildfire and meet other resource management objectives such as maintaining habitat for endangered species. As compared to wildfires, prescribed fires are shorter in duration and are conducted under weather conditions to minimize the impacts of smoke on the public.
- When a specific wildfire is producing smoke that has the potential to impact human health nearby, the Forest Service, along with federal and state partners as appropriate, will monitor smoke impacts to help inform the public if unhealthy conditions exist.
- The Forest Service has pre-season coordination meetings with state regulatory agencies and health agencies to discuss preparation for the wildfire season.
- For several years, we have engaged state agencies in the concept of "Smoke Ready Communities," encouraging appropriate messaging related to developing clean air spaces in

homes, to considering smoke in Wildfire Protection Plans and considering clean air shelters in evacuation centers.

- During wildfire events, we coordinate with state regulatory agencies and health agencies to deploy monitors and ensure consistent messaging. Where long-duration smoke impacts are expected, we order Air Resource Advisors (ARA) to support the agency and Incident Management Teams by deploying monitors, modeling smoke impacts, and coordinating a response through appropriate messaging consistent with EPA while considering state regulatory and public health expectations. Products developed through the ARA with support from the Wildland Fire Air Quality Response Program (www.wildlandfiresmoke.net/) are then linked to EPA's AirNow (https://airnow.gov/index.cfm?action=topics.smoke_wildfires) site devoted to wildfires.
- The ARA program and Wildland Fire Air Quality Response Program are directly a result of the coordinated effort in the Southwestern Region during the Wallow Fire. The response at that time has become the foundation of the agency's response nationally and the region continues to provide leadership in this program.
- Further information on what individuals and communities can do to be prepared if they are affected by smoke is available on the New Mexico Department of Health's website: <https://nmtracking.org/environment/air/FireAndSmoke.html> and also <https://nmhealth.org/news/awareness/2018/3/?view=665>.



USDA Forest Service
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Briefing Paper

April 2018

Sustainable Recreation

Sustainable recreation continues to be one of the top three regional priorities. The goal of the program is “to achieve a sustainable recreation program, essential to advancing the mission of the Forest Service, with a diverse and engaged public that enjoys and actively cares for the National Forests and Grasslands of the Southwest.” This aligns with the agency’s core mission by focusing on the sustainability of the national forests and grasslands and serving local communities.

The Regional Sustainable Recreation Strategy focuses on building strong public engagement and support, community by community. In the shift to sustainable recreation, our primary source of strength is the millions of people who live in hundreds of communities adjacent to our beautiful national forests and grasslands - and the millions of visitors to our forests each year. The goal is to be more relevant to our communities while tapping into the energy and helping hands of the public as a partner to increase the sustainability of the forests. To achieve this, the Southwestern Region developed an innovative approach, which includes the following three critical success factors: 1) Leadership that is committed, focused, disciplined and shared, with an allocation and performance model and workforce that are aligned with our goal; 2) Our agency and the diverse communities and partners we serve are engaged and able, together, to make better decisions and successfully implement programs; and 3) Actions plans, developed and implemented with our diverse communities and partners, which deliver a sustainable recreation program.

The regional sustainable recreation team developed and adopted a transparent and equitable allocation model that rewards efficiency and creates a focus on producing benefits. A new sustainable recreation performance model was also designed and adjusted to help forests monitor how well they are creating satisfying recreation experiences and serving their communities and visitors, the sustainability of their infrastructure, and the resilience of their programs. The team also developed a regional communication plan to deliver a consistent message and gain support and understanding both among Forest Service employees and partners and the community. Additionally, each forest has developed a five-year action plan that will help them achieve their sustainable recreation goals.

Forests are in the third year of implementing their action plans. The Region is monitoring implementation of the action plans and has found that overall implementation has been occurring successfully. However, given that the shift to sustainable recreation requires a change in thinking in terms of how we approach the recreation program (i.e., we don’t just take care of “stuff,” but together with our communities and partners, we figure out ways to increase the sustainability of our forests), we do not expect to see major change overnight, but do expect change in the long run.



USDA Forest Service
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General Travel Management Background

Local Decision-making

Each national forest and grassland and the communities they serve have unique economic, recreation and resources issues. The Travel Management Rule (TMR) provides overall guidance and direction and each Forest Service unit has the discretion to make decisions based on extensive public outreach and input, taking into consideration local needs and challenges. By allowing local flexibility, there will be differences between national forest travel management plans, but the plans will best be able to respond to local needs and circumstances.

Motorized Big Game Retrieval

Motorized big game retrieval has been a significant and controversial topic during travel management planning. As stated in the preamble to the TMR: “The final rule includes a provision in §212.51(b), which allows the responsible official to include in the designation of a road or trail the limited use of motor vehicles within a specified distance of certain designated routes solely for the purposes of big game retrieval or dispersed camping. USDA expects the FS to apply this provision sparingly, on a local or State-wide basis, to avoid undermining the purposes of the final rule and to promote consistency in implementation. Provision for cross-country travel for big game retrieval and dispersed camping will be at the discretion of the responsible official. Nothing in this final rule requires inclusion of either activity in a designation, or reconsideration of any decision prohibiting motor vehicle use while engaging in these activities.” [p. 68284-68285]

It is also important to note that there is no consensus among hunters on this issue. Many hunters believe that minimizing motorized big game retrieval will improve wildlife habitat and hunting opportunities, while others would like unrestricted motorized big game retrieval to continue.

Motorized Camping Corridors

Most forests included corridors of 300 feet from certain designated roads where campers can drive their recreational vehicles for camping. It is important to note that the Travel Management Rule does not restrict dispersed camping—it restricts how far people can drive off the road to disperse camp. The public can still drive off the road one vehicle length (or up to 30 feet) to disperse camp along roads that do not have designated camping corridors.

Many forests also added spur roads to the road network to increase camping opportunities. Any additions of roads or trails to the forest network have to go through the NEPA environmental review process.

Accessibility and Mobility Devices

Everyone is allowed to drive in the places published on the Motor Vehicle Use Map (MVUM). The Forest Service is not legally required to allow those with limited mobility to drive places closed to motorized use because such an exemption could fundamentally alter the nature of its travel management program (7 CFR §15e.103). Reasonable restrictions on motor vehicle use applied consistently to everyone are not discriminatory.

Power-driven mobility devices such as Segways do not meet the definition of a wheelchair and so on National Forest System lands, they are considered to be motor vehicles.

Administrative Uses

Some closed roads may be utilized administratively for emergencies such as fire suppression activities and other incidents. Roads may also be designated for administrative purposes, and access may be granted on a case-by-case basis for special permit holders, such as grazing permittees and firewood collectors.



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Restoration

National Forests in the Southwestern Region comprise the largest share of headwaters that sustain our ever-expanding urban centers. Stewarding these lands is a challenging task that requires our best efforts and those of our supporting partners. We are committed to moving the landscape toward desired conditions as described in Forest Plans. Our restoration efforts encompass the entire landscape including upland and lowland ecosystems that provide sustainable habitat and water for fish, wildlife, plants and human communities. By proactively addressing uncharacteristic disturbance from insects, disease, invasive species, wildfire and changing climate, we can manage these important areas, making them more resilient while providing for the health and productivity of forests and grasslands into the future.

A variety of treatments are employed for this work, including vegetation thinning, prescribed burning and fuels reduction. Other actions include erosion control and impact mitigation for forest system roads, unauthorized routes and unmanaged recreation use. The expectation is an improvement in ecological function and an increased diversity in the structure and composition of the vegetation. Benefits would include increased soil moisture, reduced soil movement and improved water quality. The treatments are also expected to increase the resilience of the ecosystem to respond to expected changes imposed by future climate trends. The Forest Service is focused on sustaining the ecosystems that comprise the broader landscape and the ecosystem services on which the public depends. A primary service is to ensure functioning hydrologic processes that produce water to sustain ecosystems and communities.

Fiscal Year 2018 Targets

While national and regional targets can help us to achieve goals and keep us on the track of advancing the mission of the organization, too many targets set from the top-down can constrain flexibility to address the highest priorities on-the-ground. In FY2017 the Washington Office significantly narrowed its focus, emphasizing two targets, known as *Flagship Targets*. This strategy has continued in FY2018. These flagship targets allow the region more discretion and flexibility to determine, fund and complete the most critical work and focus on the public's highest priorities.

The *Flagship Targets* are **1) acres treated to reduce fire risk**, and **2) timber volume sold** (resulting from mechanical treatments, promoting growth of rural economies, and leveraging value of resources for further restoration work).

*The region is on track to meet or exceed its flagship targets for FY2018, with the majority of timber volume sold historically occurring during the summer months in the fourth quarter of the year.

Riparian and Aquatic Ecosystem Strategy

Water is the most precious resource in the arid Southwest. Rivers and streams are conduits for life and it is in these ecosystems that we, as an agency, can have the greatest impact in "Caring

for the Land and Serving People.” Protection and enhancement of riparian and aquatic areas is paramount in providing habitat and sustainable water for dependent fish, wildlife, plant species and human communities alike. While riparian and aquatic ecosystems represent only two percent of National Forest System lands in the Southwestern Region, they support two-thirds of all of our federally-listed species and almost half of our sensitive species. Much of the recreation that occurs in the region occurs in aquatic/riparian areas.

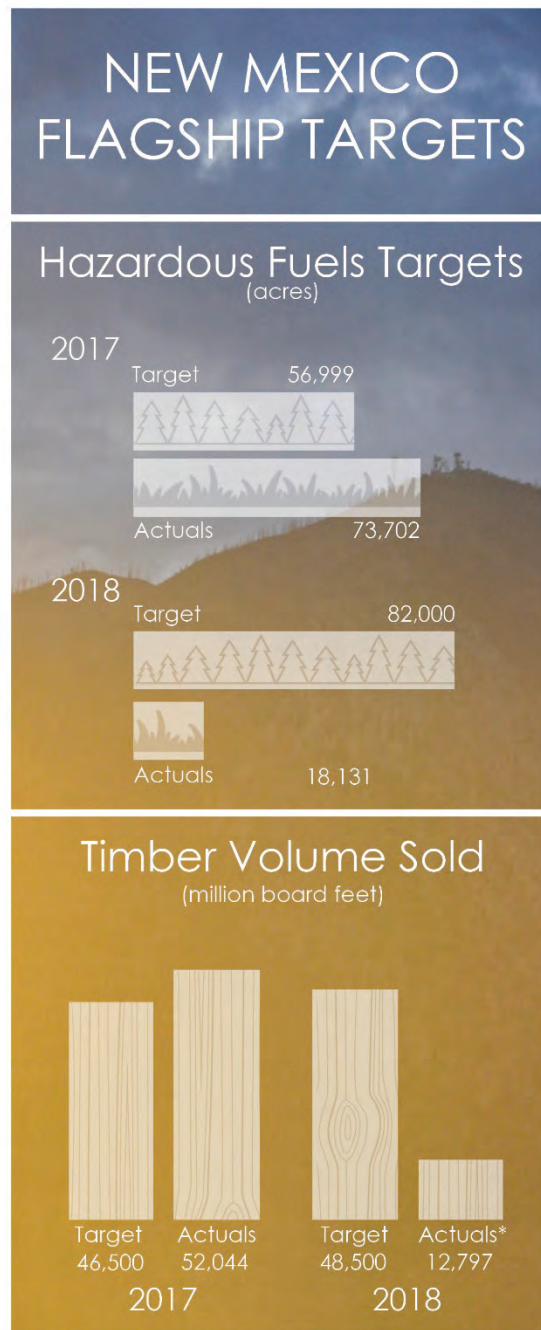
The region is finalizing a Riparian and Aquatic Ecosystem Strategy to ensure that the ecological integrity of riparian and aquatic habitats is maintained and/or restored. The intent is to build a program for managing these ecosystems collaboratively with our interdisciplinary staffs and partnership workforce (local, state and federal agencies; tribes; universities; and supporting nongovernmental organizations and stakeholders). Our objectives are to improve the structure, function, composition and connectivity of riparian/aquatic and terrestrial habitats. We intend to tie these values back to the communities we serve through enhanced water supply and quality, recreation, economics and cultural amenities.

Tools for Working Together

The region recognizes that relationships are key to accomplishing our restoration objectives. We also need to share knowledge, think innovatively and steward our nation’s forests and grasslands together.

The eleven forests within the Southwestern Region have been actively engaging in a variety of agreements, including Stewardship Agreements; leveraging resources together with local communities specifically to get a variety of forest products to market; partnering with organizations such as the National Forest Foundation and National Wild Turkey Federation; working across jurisdictional boundaries with our agency partners; and facilitating landscape-scale collaborative efforts – all to increase the pace and scale of restoration in the Southwest.

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USDA Forest Service
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April 2018

The Collaborative Forest Restoration Program

Background: The Collaborative Forest Restoration Program (CFRP) was established pursuant to the “Community Forest Restoration Act of 2000” (the Act) to reduce the threat of wildfire, improve the functioning of forest ecosystems, and enhance biodiversity by reducing the unnaturally high number of small diameter trees on Federal, Tribal, State, County, and Municipal forest land in New Mexico. The program provides cost-share grants to stakeholders for projects that are designed and implemented through a collaborative process that improves communication and joint problem solving to encourage sustainable communities and sustainable forests. A 12 to 15 member CFRP Technical Advisory Panel (Panel), a chartered Federal Advisory Committee, reviews CFRP grant proposals and provides recommendations to the Secretary of Agriculture on which ones best meet the program objectives. The Secretary of Agriculture approves project funding and appoints Panel members. The FACA Panel Charter must be reauthorized by the Secretary every two years. The Charter for the CFRP Panel will expire on July 14, 2018, and five of the Panel member’s appointments also expire in July 2018. There is no provision in the Act for the Secretary to fund CFRP projects that have not been reviewed by the Panel.

Summary

- Projects expand community involvement, increase ownership in forest restoration activities, create jobs and training opportunities, and decrease conflict.
- CFRP partners collaborate on the planning and implementation of cross jurisdictional forest restoration projects and improve the utilization of small diameter trees New Mexico.
- The Forest Service works with grant applicants to develop project proposals that support or complement agency work plans.
- New Mexico national forests receive funding to process grant awards and manage projects.

Key Points

- The 2016 Chief’s Review of the Southwestern Region highlighted the success of the CFRP as an example of the kind of partnerships the Forest Service should look to in the future.
- Delays in the FACA charter renewal process, the appointment of new members, and the approval of the Panel’s project funding recommendations are the principle impediment to the Region’s ability to award CFRP grants pursuant to the Act prior to the end of the fiscal year.
- The impact of the delay in approving the project funding recommendations of the Panel could be mitigated if the Secretary delegated the authority to approve project funding to the Forest Service following the precedent set during the first five years of the of the CFRP. This is consistent with the Act, which defines the “Secretary” as “the Secretary of Agriculture acting through the Chief of the Forest Service.”

In 2017 the Forest Service received 15 CFRP grant applications and the CFRP Panel recommended funding ten of them totaling of \$3.4 million. On May 2, 2017 the Forest Service Southwestern Region sent the Washington Office of the Forest Service a Decision Memo for the Secretary to approve the Panel’s recommendations. The Secretary approved the Panel’s recommendations on August 1, 2017.

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USDA Forest Service
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April 2018

Northern New Mexico Forest Plan Consistency

The Forest Plan Revision (FPR) process is designed to allow each forest to create a unique plan that meets the specific resource management needs, as well as needs of the communities each forest serves. The Carson, Cibola, and Santa Fe National Forests share similar resource issues and histories that have created a rich traditional and cultural legacy unique to Northern New Mexico.

The three forests are developing draft plan components based on engagement with their communities, comments submitted by members of the public and other stakeholders, cooperating agencies, and analysis by internal interdisciplinary specialists. The forests are working together to ensure consistency across the three forest plans, especially on matters related to the traditional values of Northern New Mexico's Hispanic and American Indian cultures, including grazing and range management. The three forest plans will include background statements that highlight the consistent social, cultural, economic, and ecological needs of the communities served by each forest.

Key Points:

- The FPR teams on the three forests have hosted hundreds of public meetings on all resources considered in the forest plans, including traditional communities and uses and sustainable rangelands and livestock grazing. Ranchers have had multiple opportunities to provide input and feedback and many, including members of the Northern New Mexico Stockmen's Association (NNMSA), have attended public meetings and submitted comments. Thousands of comments related to FPR have been received by the Carson, Santa Fe, and Cibola National Forests, since their FPR processes were initiated.
- The forest plans specifically recognize that traditional communities and uses in Northern New Mexico were established and have evolved on or near lands now managed as national forest. The three forest plans acknowledge and emphasize the importance of traditional uses, including grazing, on these lands as both a cultural and occupational/subsistence practice.
- Over the course of 2017, changes to the Sustainable Rangelands and Livestock Grazing section were made in all three forest plans, including desired conditions, objectives, standards and guidelines, narratives, and management approaches were made as a result of public input, particularly by the NNMSA.
- Members of the NNMSA have asked for guarantees from the forests that grazing, both as a tradition and as a livelihood, will continue into perpetuity. The forests have committed to managing their range programs based on sustainable grazing practices and ecologically sound pasture management that will keep the land productive, not just in the present, but for many future generations. Livestock grazing is also recognized in the Traditional Communities and Uses section.
- Some permit holders contend that livestock grazing on public lands is their "right" based on historical uses. The Forest Service follows Federal laws, regulations, and policies in its stewardship of public lands, including the 1943 Taylor Grazing Act, which states that grazing preferences "shall not create any right, title, interest, or estate in or to the lands" managed by the U.S. Government. A permit or lease is required to graze Federal lands, and the Forest Service

manages its permitting process under its statutory authority to protect National Forest System lands from the environmental impacts of overgrazing.

The Carson, Santa Fe, and Cibola National Forests will continue to work closely with all stakeholders in the FPR process, including the NNMSA and other ranchers and permit holders. Part of the conversation will be directed at coordinating discussions between permit holders and the NM Department of Game and Fish about the impact of wildlife, particularly elk, on grazing allotments. In addition, the Forest Supervisors have established an ongoing dialogue with NNMSA leadership and are committed to continuing that dialogue beyond the FPR process.

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USDA Forest Service
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March 2018

Status of Forest Plan Revision for New Mexico Forests

Background

The five New Mexico National Forests are in the midst of revising their 30-year old current Forest Plans, revising under the direction/guidance of the 2012 Planning Rule. The National Grasslands managed by the Cibola National Forest, completed plan revision under the 1982 Planning Rule in September 2012.

Current Status

The Cibola National Forest manages the Black Kettle, McClellan Creek and the Kiowa/Rita Blanca National Grasslands in NE New Mexico and NW Texas and Oklahoma. The revised Grasslands Plan had no appeals filed on it, and has been implementing since October 2012 with no difficulties encountered.

The Cibola National Forest in central New Mexico initiated plan revision of the “mountains” portion of the Forest under the 2012 Planning Rule in August 2012. Their NEPA Notice of Intent (NOI) to revise their current Forest Plan was published in February 2015. They have been collaboratively developing their revised plan with their publics since the NOI was published. The Cibola Draft Plan/DEIS is expected to be released for public review and comment by mid-2018, with an expected final revised plan/final EIS (FEIS) decision by fall 2019.

The Carson and Santa Fe National Forests in northern New Mexico initiated their plan revisions under the 2012 Planning Rule in October 2013. The Carson published their NOI in October 2015; the Santa Fe published their NOI in June 2016. Both have been collaboratively developing their revised plan with their publics since their respective NOIs were published. The Carson expects to release a draft plan/DEIS for public review and comment by summer 2018; with an expected final revised plan/FEIS decision by fall 2019. The Santa Fe expects to release their Draft Plan and DEIS for public review and comment by mid to late summer 2018; with an expected final revised plan/final EIS (FEIS) decision by late 2019.

The Gila National Forest in southwestern New Mexico initiated their plan revision under the 2012 Planning Rule in October 2014. The Gila has completed the assessment phase of plan revision and published their NOI in April 2017. They have been collaboratively developing their revised plan with their publics since the NOI was published. The Gila Draft Plan/DEIS is expected to be released for public review and comment by late 2018, with an expected final revised plan/FEIS decision by early 2020.

The Lincoln National Forest in southeastern New Mexico initiated their plan revision under the 2012 Planning Rule in October 2014. The Lincoln is in the later stages of completing their plan assessment, with their NOI expected to be published by mid-2018.

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**2018 Southwestern Region
Northern New Mexico Forest Plan Revision Timelines**

	Cibola National Forest	Carson National Forest	Santa Fe National Forest
Jan-Mar (Winter)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Complete DEIS Chapter 3 environmental consequences, including cumulative effects. Develop DEIS Chapter 4 Consultation and Coordination, and required appendices. - Complete timber suitability, including vegetation modeling by alternative. - Continue to develop Draft Biological Assessment (BA). - Develop Plan monitoring plan. - Complete other revisions to Draft Plan, monitoring plan, DEIS and draft BA based on DEIS iterative process. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Release updated draft plan w/alternatives (includes initial recommendations for wilderness by alternative) on the Carson Plan Revision website for public review. - Start draft EIS (DEIS) - Hold open houses to continue public engagement. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Finalize Draft Plan (proposed action), in particular sections on traditional use that are consistent across Carson, Cibola, and Santa Fe Plans, using comments. - Finalize alternatives to be analyzed as part of DEIS. - Begin development of the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS). - Finalize Wilderness Evaluation, begin Analysis. - Hold open houses to continue public engagement.
APR-JUN (Spring)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Regional Office review of Draft Plan and DEIS. - Edits to Draft Plan and DEIS based on RO review feedback. - Develop Washington Office briefing papers for Regional Office review. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Work with the National Forest Foundation to hold public meetings to present the draft plan to the public. - Hold open houses to continue public engagement. - Engage with Government Working Group to review draft proposed plan and DEIS - Develop draft BA (Biological Assessment). - Prepare Plan monitoring plan. - Finalize draft proposed plan and DEIS alternatives, utilizing public comments. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Finish Environmental Impact Statement for Regional and Washington Office reviews and briefings. - Finalize public engagement summaries and responses to comments from previous public meetings. - Hold open houses to continue public engagement.
JUL-SEP (Summer)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Conduct Washington Office Briefings on Draft Plan and DEIS. - Publish Federal Register Notice of Availability (NOA) and associated Newspaper of Record Legal Notice for public comment on the Draft Plan and DEIS. - Commence 90 day comment period on draft plan and DEIS, including holding public meetings. - Host open houses and collaborative workshops during 90-day public comment period. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Finalize draft EIS (DEIS). - Regional Office review of draft plan and DEIS. - Washington Office briefings on Draft Plan/DEIS. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Develop draft BA (Biological Assessment). - Regional Office review of Draft Plan and DEIS. - Washington Office briefings on Draft Plan/DEIS. - Hold open houses to continue public engagement.
Oct-Dec (Fall)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Continue public engagement and comment period on DEIS and Draft Plan. - Review public comments and make revisions to the Draft Plan and DEIS in updating to the Final Plan and FEIS. - Continue work on FEIS and draft Record of Decision for release in 2019 prior to the plan objection process. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Publish Federal Register Notice of Availability (NOA) and associated Newspaper of Record Legal Notice in late fall/early winter for public comment on the draft plan and DEIS. - Commence 90 day comment period on draft plan and DEIS, including holding public meetings. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Publish Federal Register Notice of Availability (NOA) and associated Newspaper of Record Legal Notice for public comment on the draft plan and DEIS. - Commence 90 day comment period on draft plan and DEIS, including holding public meetings.

2018 Southwestern Region Southern New Mexico Forest Plan Revision Timelines

	Lincoln National Forest	Gila National Forest
Jan-Mar (Winter)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Finalize the Draft Assessment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Continue drafting the preliminary forest plan and associated plan components (e.g. desired conditions, standards, guidelines). - Release preliminary draft forest plan for stakeholder feedback. - Host a round of community meetings to help create understanding of preliminary plan direction and receive feedback.
APR-JUN (Spring)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Deliver Draft Assessment to the Regional Office for review. - Incorporate Regional Office feedback into the Draft Assessment; prepare the document for release to the public. - Begin drafting needs for change to the current Forest Plan, based on assessment findings. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Begin identification of alternatives and development of the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS). - Complete wilderness evaluation step. - Continue wild and scenic river eligibility process. - Continue stakeholder engagement including holding a technical meeting on developing and implementing the monitoring plan. - Release preliminary range of alternatives for stakeholder feedback.
JUL-SEP (Summer)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Draft assessment and preliminary needs for change released to the public for review and input. - Start public meetings to present and discuss key findings of the draft assessment report and preliminary needs for change. - Gather public input on draft assessment and preliminary needs for change. - Finalize the assessment based on public input. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Continue development (with associated stakeholder involvement) on the draft proposed plan, its plan components, and the wilderness and wild and scenic river processes. - Develop draft Biological Assessment (BA).
Oct-Dec (Fall)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Publish NEPA Federal Register Notice of Intent (NOI) and associated Newspaper of Record Legal Notice to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the plan revision, based on final needs for change. - Identify cooperating agencies. - Initiate wilderness inventory process and public meetings. - Engage the public in developing recommended wilderness inventory and evaluation criteria, and begin inventorying potential wilderness areas based on that criteria. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Complete wild and scenic river eligibility process. - Continue stakeholder engagement. - Regional Office review of draft plan and DEIS. - Washington Office briefings on Draft Plan/DEIS. - Publish Federal Register Notice of Availability (NOA) and associated Newspaper of Record Legal Notice for public comment on the draft plan and Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS).



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April 2018

Southwestern Region, Wildlife, Fish, Rare Plants and Rangeland Management Program

Mexican Gray Wolf Reintroduction Project/Blue Range Wolf Recovery Area

Current

- In early 2018, surveys identified at least 114 Mexican wolves in the wolf recovery area in Arizona and New Mexico, an increase from 113 in 2016.
- In January 2015, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) published a new final 10(j) rule expanding the Mexican wolf recovery area from 7,212 mi² to 153,853 mi² in NM and AZ. The expanded area now includes all or portions of the Coronado, Tonto, Coconino, Prescott, Kaibab, and Cibola NFs Apache-Sitgreaves, and Gila NFs. Portions of the Apache-Sitgreaves and Gila were in the original recovery area, and participated in the Mexican wolf reintroduction project (project) since the late 1990s.
- In November 2017, the FWS published a Recovery Plan for the species. FS Region 3 employees have participated in the development of the Recovery Plan, which includes criteria for both down-listing and de-listing the species.
- Efforts with the 2017 Recovery Plan are focused on increasing the genetic viability of the wild population, implementing management activities that support more wolves in the wild such as reintroductions, including cross-fostering pups, and promoting payment programs through federal programs, Defenders of Wildlife, and other contributors to the Mexican Wolf/Livestock Depredation Fund implemented by the Livestock Depredation Council.
- Issues/concerns regarding the project continue from Non-Governmental Organizations, rural citizens, and especially the ranching community. Social tolerance for the project continues to remain low within the rural areas, and the need for public involvement/information has heightened because of the recently expanded wolf area.
- In 2010, the NM Department of Game and Fish (NMGFD) withdrew from participation in the project. In FY 15 they refused to issue FWS permits for wolf releases/captive facilities, and in FY 16 sued the FWS to stop the planned release of wolves in the spring of 2016. The Federal District court in NM issued a preliminary injunction in June of 2016 to FWS banning the import or release any wolves in NM without a permit from NM. In April, 2017, The U.S. Court of Appeals for the 10th Circuit vacated the preliminary injunction, which allows the FWS to once again propose releasing wolves into the wild in New Mexico. At this time NMGFD case has been settled and they participated in the development of the 2017 Recovery Plan, are attending meetings, and it is anticipated that they will sign onto the MOU in the future.
- The AZ Game and Fish Department participates in the project but continues to lobby and litigate for state management authority of the species. They were an active participant in the development of the 2017 Recovery Plan and are signatories to the MOU.

Funding & Targets

- Funding for a FS Mexican Gray Wolf liaison (hired in 2007) to work with the Mexican gray wolf interagency field team, local communities, livestock permittees, and FS personnel to increase communication. The FS also participates in a local Livestock Interdiction Council.

Context

- The Mexican Wolf Reintroduction Project has been a collaborative effort among various governmental agencies and tribal entities since the release of wolves into the wild on the Apache-Sitgreaves NF in 1998. The Forests and the Region continue to play an active role in the project, and are currently participating in the finalization of a new MOU.
- Social tolerance for the program in affected communities is low.

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Wild and Feral Equines in Forest Service Southwestern Region

Issue: The Region's active Wild Horse and Burro (WHB) Territories all exceed desired population levels and many are threatened with natural resource degradation, conflicts with permitted grazing, and competition with native wildlife. Unmanaged feral horses currently occupying National Forest System lands also result in natural resource degradation, conflicts with permitted grazing, competition with native wildlife, and occasional public safety concerns. In one case, feral horses that are not considered federal 'wild horses' have received special protection under state law in New Mexico.

Summary/Key Points

Wild Equines: There are five active Wild Horse and Burro Territories in the Region. Where populations have current census data, all exceed established appropriate management levels (AMLs). There are three territories which need to conduct census counts to estimate their populations. The active territories and latest estimated population size are indicated below. Future survey and management efforts are under consideration for all territories:

Carson NF	Jicarilla WHT	AML -50-105	Est. pop. -464
	Jarita Mesa WHT	AML - 20-70	Est. pop. - 133
Apache-Sitgreaves NF	Heber WHT	No AML set	Est. Pop. - UNK
Santa Fe NF	Caja WHT	No AML set	Est. Pop. -UNK
Kaibab NF	Double A WBT	AML -22-35	Est. pop. - UNK

Feral Horses: Known significant feral horse populations exist on or adjacent to the Apache-Sitgreaves, Tonto and Kaibab National Forests. These bands of horses range from dozens to hundreds. All significant populations are believed to have originated from feral horse populations on adjacent tribal lands. Currently, the region is developing relationships with tribes to assist in the management of horses on adjacent tribal lands.

Notable Management Efforts

Jicarilla & Jarita Mesa Wild Horse Territories/Carson NF

These territories have been actively managed for several years using bait/low stress trapping and administration of immuno-contraception vaccine (PZP). Hundreds of horses have been gathered and adopted and there are strong collaborative relationship with the Jicarilla Mustang Heritage Alliance for gentling of horses. Despite the unprecedented success of adoption efforts and use of PZP and low stress gathers, the population on the territories has remained consistent and several times above AML. As horses are removed from the territory, they are taken to the Forests' short-term handling facility where they are microchipped, vaccinated and dewormed. The program on the Carson has been very successful in placing animals (adoptions and sales), other Forests across the west have shipped horses from BLM holding to the Bloomfield facility. The Bloomfield facility is in need of updating and expansion to allow for a larger number of horses to be held and offered for adoption to the public. Returning horses to the forests to be used as pack and mounts for Forest personnel is another planned activity for consideration.

Regional Office

The Regional Office (RO) purchased 1,000 equine microchips (840 ISO standard 134 MHz). These microchips will replace freeze branding and use of the BLM identification system and meet the 9 CFR requirement for individual animal identification from point of origin. Each horse's microchip is being registered in the National Equine Registry. The RO has developed a solid working relationship with New Mexico State University on wild and feral horse issues in the state, as well as working with the Tribal Nations in the Southwestern Region to address horse issues and concerns on tribal lands.

With the absence of a national database exclusively for the WHB program, the RO WHB coordinator has been working with the WO to either develop or obtain a database system. The current National Resource Management database does not provide sufficient capture of all WHB data. The RO WHB coordinator has also become active in the United States Animal Health Association (USAHA) equine committee. Another activity being addressed is the formal closure of inactive WHB territories in the region.

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Wildlife Partnerships

Summary/Key Points: Forest Service partnerships with several wildlife conservation organizations and state agencies is expediting the pace of landscape scale restoration in the Southwestern Region.

- New Mexico Department of Game and Fish (NMDGF): The pace and scale of forest restoration on National Forest System (NFS) lands in New Mexico has been dramatically accelerated through a robust partnership with NMDGF. Several large fires burning since 2002 have underscored the need for restoration treatments at broad scales. Recognizing this shared goal, NMDGF has invested over \$11.9 million dollars since 2012 toward improving the health and resilience of NFS lands in New Mexico. This partnership has spurred an accelerated rate of mutually beneficial ecosystem revitalization. Treatments

have yielded better wildlife habitat, safer communities, healthier and more secure water supplies, and enhanced biodiversity.

- National Wild Turkey Federation (NWTF) is one of the Southwestern Region's largest partners. NWTF has holds stewardship agreements with the Cibola National Forest on the Bluewater Ecosystem Restoration and Black Kettle National Grassland Restoration Projects and with the Coronado National Forest on the Pinaleno Ecosystem Restoration Project. Over \$12 million has been invested in the Bluewater Project, with NWTF and partner contributions amounting to approximately \$2 million.
- Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation (RMEF): The Southwestern Region has a strong partnership with RMEF dating back to the late 1980s. Many of the region's forests regularly submit grant proposals and receive funding from the Arizona and New Mexico Project Advisory Committees (PACs) for habitat enhancement work. Overall, the region receives an average of approximately \$152,000/year in PAC grants to conduct landscape scale restoration, develop wildlife waters and enhance public access to NFS lands.
- Mule Deer Foundation (MDF) is an emerging partner in the Southwestern Region, recently contributing \$47,357 toward projects on the Gila, Kaibab and Prescott National Forests. MDF is managing the Ten X project on the Kaibab NF through a challenge cost-share agreement. The Ten X project was authorized as part of the first 4FRI NEPA analysis and decision. MDF recently was awarded a \$250,000 Rio Grande Water Fund grant to implement forest thinning on the Carson NF.
- Other partners, such as the Arizona Elk Society and Arizona Antelope Foundation, contribute in-kind labor and materials during member work projects on NFS lands.

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Consultation on NMMJM & Ongoing Grazing on Sacramento Allotment

Background: The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) listed the New Mexico Meadow Jumping Mouse (NMMJM) (*Zapus hudsonius luteus*) as endangered in June 2014. Critical habitat (CH) was designated in March 2016. The Apache-Sitgreaves, Santa Fe and Lincoln NFs have populations of the mouse and critical habitat (CH). Approximately 100 stream miles on these three forests are in critical habitat affecting 14 allotments with permitted grazing. As a result of the listing/critical habitat designation, the Apache-Sitgreaves, Lincoln and Santa Fe NFs have worked and continue to work to protect occupied and critical habitat to ensure compliance with Endangered Species Act requirements while providing for continued grazing by permittees.

Two lawsuits were filed over Forest Service protection efforts as a result of the listing and designation, one by Wild Earth Guardians and one by permittees. Both lawsuits were ultimately dismissed.

Through collaborative efforts with FWS, New Mexico State University (NMSU) Range Improvement Task Force, and universities in Arizona and New Mexico, a rapid assessment protocol for critical habitat was developed in 2015. Collaboration continued with development of a critical habitat assessment protocol in 2016.

A collaborative solution for protection of the mouse and continuation of grazing was reached on all 14 affected allotments. The protective measures generally provided for exclusion of livestock grazing in most of the currently-occupied critical habitat and a portion of unoccupied critical habitat using a combination of riparian exclosures, upland water developments, and other range improvements.

No reductions in permitted numbers or significant change in season of use was required on any allotment. Permittees have access to all working facilities and all water developments.

Surveys for the mouse were conducted in 2016 and 2017. New populations were found on the Apache–Sitgreaves and Santa Fe NFs, including on allotments where habitat protection had been implemented. All affected allotments in the region showed stable or positive habitat trend, with the exception of the Sacramento Allotment, which did not meet desired habitat conditions.

There are continuing concerns from the Goss Family, permitted on the Sacramento Allotment, Lincoln National Forest. In October 2016 a final biological opinion (BO) was issued for ongoing grazing based on agreement with the permittees. However, post utilization monitoring indicated a failure to meet desired habitat conditions in the BO. This triggered a condition requiring temporary fences to remain up during gathering operations in 2017 in the Rio Penasco Trap. The Forest Service continues to work with the Goss family to seek solutions and agreement on how to best protect critical habitat for the NMMJM, while allowing for livestock operations. Since late 2016, the Forest Service has constructed two sets of corrals and fenced traps, improved the road into the Atkinson Corrals, and purchased hay to be used as supplemental feed at Rio Penasco and Atkinson corrals and traps for gathering operations. The Forest Service worked with FWS to obtain additional latitude under the BO. On September 26th, the FWS amended the BO so the temporary fences at the Rio Penasco Trap could be removed again during gathering operations in 2017.

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Native Plant Materials Development Program

Overview:

A 2008 Forest Service Manual amendment (FSM 2070.3) directed forests to support the use, growth development and storage of native plant materials for restoration. The policy is based on knowledge that native plant species better restore ecological function, improving resilience and sustainability, and reducing invasive species infestations.

NFS units are to anticipate plant material needs for emergency and planned revegetation projects, develop core plant lists, planting guidelines, and lists of appropriate and adequate plant material sources, techniques, and seed storage and propagation facilities. A Strategic Framework was developed in 2012,

https://www.fs.fed.us/wildflowers/Native_Plant_Materials/documents/NativePlantMaterialsPolicy_Sep2012.pdf, and the FS is a partner in the 2015 National Seed Strategy for Landscape-Scale Rehabilitation and Restoration

https://www.fs.fed.us/wildflowers/Native_Plant_Materials/documents/SeedStrategy081215.pdf

The Southwestern Region faced challenges in developing native plant materials: extremely diverse habitats, lack of FS infrastructure, low botanical expertise, and only small growers in Arizona and New Mexico.

Approach: In 2015 the Southwestern Regional Office and the Southwest Office of the Institute for Applied Ecology partnered to establish the Southwest Seed Partnership (SWSP) to identify native plant species needs and build a regional partnership to address needs. Activities include the collection of wild source genetic stock, development of growing techniques, recruitment and nurturing of producers, and information sharing and collaboration to build a sustainable native seed industry to supply native seed needs for landscape and project scale restoration work across Arizona and New Mexico.

Progress: The SWSP now includes over 100 partners - 60 in New Mexico and 50 in Arizona - with seven federal and 10 state agencies (including one prison), six tribal programs, four universities, 10 nonprofits, 18 seed producers and newly-recruited small growers, and private landowners. Funds have been leveraged multiple times with four additional cash funders and multiple in-kind contributors.

Extraordinary accomplishments have been made in shortening the usual cycle from identification of needs to collection of wild-sourced stock and initial pilot grow outs for seed increase. This is usually a five- to eight-year process in similar programs, yet in only 2 field seasons the SWSP has achieved:

- 133 species and over 400 sites in seven ecoregions to provide needed genetic and geographical diversity
- three grasses and two forbs are in initial pilot production
- In the 2018 field season, there will be nine species in pilot production, six in small acreage field grow outs and three additional species in nursery pre-production of plugs for later field plantings

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Briefing Paper

April 2018

Drought and Grazing on National Forest System Lands

Background: According to national data, the current drought conditions in Arizona and New Mexico have intensified somewhat since the beginning of 2018. Drought conditions have generally prevailed within the Southwestern Region for more than a decade and, after some moderation in 2017, sporadic and relatively weak precipitation events over the winter and early spring have the entirety of the two states in drought of varying intensity once again. National Forest personnel remain in communication with grazing permittees as the possibility that delayed entry dates and/or reduced numbers of livestock during the 2018 grazing year may be necessary in some areas. Many permittees remain stocked below that which is authorized under their term grazing permit, and in preparation for what is predicted to be a warm and dry late spring and summer, some have voluntarily reduced herds even further by culling and selling retained yearlings early.

Current Status: According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's National Climatic Data Center (NCD) and using the Standard Precipitation Index as the measure, almost the entire state of Arizona is currently in moderate to extreme drought conditions. Although some areas have adequate residual forage moving into the active growing season, well below normal snowpack and winter precipitation at lower elevations have left most of the state with below normal surface water flows and ground water recharge. The availability of sufficient stockwater to last through the summer remains a real concern for many producers across the region, and some permittees are preparing to haul water where stock tanks and water systems have dried up. If predicted weather patterns and precipitation levels occur, most areas within the state will experience above normal temperatures and below normal precipitation through mid-summer this year. For late summer, prediction models indicate an equal chance of below normal, near normal and above normal precipitation across the region, so some areas may experience some late-season recovery.

The Forest Service administers domestic livestock grazing through a "Term Permit" system and the preparation of Annual Operating Instructions (AOIs) for each grazing permittee. Once prepared, the AOI becomes the permittee's grazing management plan for the coming year. It is the goal of the Forest Service to fully engage permittees in the preparation of their annual grazing authorizations and AOIs. There are over 1,300 individual grazing permits on National Forests within Arizona and New Mexico. The Forest Service employs the principles of adaptive management in the administration of grazing. As the grazing season evolves, range conditions are continually assessed by Forest Service rangeland management specialists and permittees so that management and use of the forage resource are adapted to evolving conditions of the resource and forage availability. For the most part, the Forest Service receives good cooperation from grazing permittees in developing appropriate strategies for managing the condition of the forage resources.

Should the Southwestern Region experience a severe fire season as the current dry conditions would indicate, Forest Service personnel will work with those permittees affected by wildfires to

find alternative areas to maintain their herds. Where they are available and range improvements are in functional condition, possibilities of alternative pasturing on the national forests could include vacant allotments or those that are currently in non-use for personal convenience of the permittee.

Conditions in New Mexico: Severe to extreme drought conditions encompass over 75% of the state, including National Forest System lands in all but the southern part of the state. Although most areas on National Forest System lands are entering the growing season with sufficient residual forage from 2017, current year forage production and water availability are of real concern, especially through the end of July. Across the state, Forest Service personnel have been in formal and informal communications with permittees to assess resource conditions and develop management strategies commensurate with the availability of forage and water.

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USDA Forest Service
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Briefing Paper

April 2018

Secure Rural Schools

Current Status: The Secure Rural Schools Act (SRS) was reauthorized for two years by section 524 of P.L. 114-10 and signed into law by President Obama on April 16, 2015. SRS was reauthorized for fiscal years 2017 and 2018 by section 401 of H.R. 1625 and signed into law by President Trump on March 23, 2018.

Background: Title II projects enhance forest ecosystems; restore and improve the health of the land and water quality; and, protect, restore and enhance fish and wildlife habitat. Examples of enhancements are maintenance or obliteration of roads, trails, and infrastructure; improvement of soil productivity; stream and watershed restoration; control of noxious and exotic weeds; and reestablishment of native species. These projects provide employment in rural communities and an opportunity for local citizens, through participation in Resource Advisory Councils (RACs), to advise the Forest Service on projects of mutual interest that benefit the environment and the local economy.

FY 2014 SRS Title II Funds:

All Southwestern Region SRS Title II funds were recommended (initiated) by RACs, so no funds will return to the U.S. Treasury.

FY 2015 SRS Title II Funds:

All Southwestern Region SRS Title II funds were recommended (initiated) by RACs, EXCEPT the Eastern Arizona RAC, led by the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests, which initiated only SOME of their funds.

- The A-S received RAC Budget Authority of \$766,440 for FY2015.
- \$128,000 of those funds can be used for RAC-initiated projects.
\$638,444.02 of those funds are to be returned to the U.S. Treasury.

FY2017 and FY2018 SRS Title II Funds:

It is anticipated that these funds will be received by the end of FY2018 or early in FY2019. The Northern New Mexico and Southern New Mexico RACs will need to work with USDA to ensure that their membership nominations are approved by the Secretary of Agriculture. A quorum is needed to recommend SRS Title II funds for project work.

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Environmental Analysis and Decision Making

Fast Facts



The Goal

The goal of the Environmental Analysis and Decision Making effort in the U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service is to increase the health, diversity, resilience and productivity of national forests and grasslands by increasing the efficiency of environmental analysis and decision-making procedures to accomplish more work on the ground. All Forest Service branches - the National Forest System, State and Private Forestry, Research and Development, and Business Operations - are fully engaged and committed to improving processes and policies that guide environmental analysis and decision-making as well as working to affect change in the culture that drives it.



The Need

The Forest Service will improve processes to be more efficient and effective in sustaining the health, diversity, resilience and productivity of forests and grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations, with our existing capacity.

- More than 80 million acres of National Forest System lands are at severe risk from insect, disease and wildfire.
- Environmental analysis and decision-making procedures are taking an average of 4 years to complete and costing about \$1 million a day.
- More than 6,000 special use permits are waiting to be completed, which impacts more than 7,000 businesses and 120,000 jobs.



Achieving the Goal

The Forest Service is building on past and ongoing efforts to implement a comprehensive, national approach to reforming agency culture, policies, and procedures through the following six activities: training our employees, examining and reforming Forest Service policies, improving efficiency through technology, developing new performance standards, improving consultation with other agencies, and changing the way we do business.



Increase Efficiency and Reduce Costs

The Forest Service will remain true to the responsibility of environmental stewardship by:

- Continuing to follow the law and deliver scientific-based, high-quality environmental analysis that leads to sound land management decisions and honors our stewardship responsibilities.
- Decreasing cost; increasing efficiency by 20 percent; and implementing comprehensive, national environmental analysis and decision-making improvements in 2019.



Provide jobs and Economic Benefits

The Forest Service will continue to provide jobs and contribute to the economic health of communities through improved and sustainable National Forest System land use and access opportunities.



Enlisting Field Experts and Partners

The Forest Service is enlisting the experience and skill of experts in the field and across all levels of the agency, as well as working with partners and tribes, by:

- Encouraging employees at all levels of the Forest Service to invest and engage in the effort.
- Conducting regional- and national-level roundtable events to tap into the valuable knowledge, expertise and networks of agency partners and tribes.



USDA Forest Service
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Briefing Paper

April 2018

Industry as an Agent of Forest Restoration: Addressing Biomass Challenges in NM

Overview: Forest restoration projects in fire-prone ecosystems have a high cost per acre, mainly due to the need to remove low-value “biomass.” Product markets and large-scale industrial capacity are generally lacking for the biomass which can account for up to 60 percent of the woody material coming from mechanical forest restoration treatments. In recent years, the Southwestern Region has increasingly relied on the Wood Innovations (WI) program to provide grants and technical support to encourage entrepreneurship within the wood industry as a primary agent for forest restoration. The WI program attempts to provide demand-side economic stimulus to compliment the extensive work of the Forest Service in the supply-side of raw woody materials.

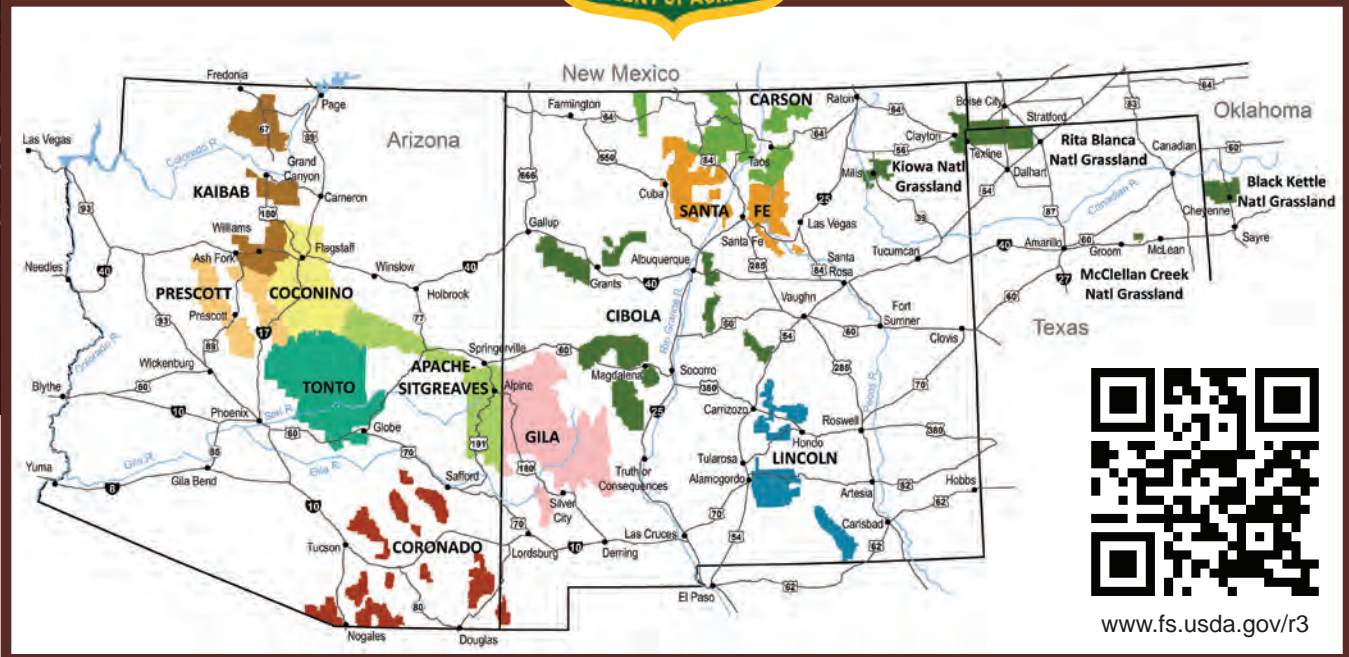
Wood Innovations in the Southwestern Region): Presently the Southwestern Region has three ongoing grants in New Mexico. Below is a brief summary.

New Mexico Statewide Wood Energy Team (2016)	Similar efforts as Arizona SWET.
Old Wood LLC.— Expansion of Wood Flooring Markets (2017)	National and international expansion of local wood flooring markets based on forest restoration byproducts.
Sandoval County, NM Wood Innovation Biomass Project (2017)	20-year area market development around a municipal landfill model along with product selection, facility design, and financing to shovel readiness.

In 2018, the Southwestern Region received an additional three new WI grant proposals that cover portions of New Mexico (currently under consideration). The 2018 WI proposals include: (a) wood plastic composite facility feasibility planning, (b) wood briquette product and market development as alternative heating source, and (c) wood pellet production.

Over the past several years there have been attempts by industry to develop markets and capacity to aid in forest restoration. Today, in Southwestern Region we see an eclectic response from industry or entrepreneurs who are striving to expand existing operations, create market niches, develop capacity, define products or brands as well as secure financing and reliable wood supply sources.

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Southwestern Region New Mexico 2018 Congressional Briefing

Send Congressional inquires to:
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