

James Melonas, U.S. Forest Service Southwestern Region
Presentation to:
New Mexico State Legislature Water & Natural Resources Interim Committee
July 1, 2014 Albuquerque, New Mexico

The Forest Service, along with multiple partners and stakeholders, has worked to develop the science, tools, and partnerships necessary to accelerate the pace and scale of forest and watershed restoration in New Mexico.

We have the Science:

- Last fall, the Forest Service Rocky Mountain Research Station, working with the Southwestern Region, published a report which provides a science-based framework for restoring frequent-fire forests in the Southwest, titled ***Restoring composition and structure in Southwestern frequent-fire forests: A science-based framework for improving ecosystem resiliency (GTR-310)***.

We have the Tools

- The 2014 Farm Bill contained some new tools which will help us get more work done on the ground.
 - Authorized Governors to designate areas of the national forests in each state at risk from **insect and disease outbreaks**.
 - Also created a new **categorical exclusion for insect and disease treatments** of 3,000 acres and less if the project is developed through a collaborative process using the best available science.
 - Permanently reauthorized the **stewardship contracting authority** which allows the Forest Service much more flexibility to achieve forest restoration goals while meeting local and rural community needs, including contributing to the sustainability of rural communities and providing a continuing source of local income and employment.
 - The **Good Neighbor Authority** allows the Forest Service to enter into agreements with State Foresters to allow state workers and contractors to implement projects in national forests.
 - Provides authority for **more efficient tree harvesting designation methods**, rather than individual tree marking, for thinning projects.

We have the Partnerships

- Partnering with **New Mexico State Forestry** to identify and implement watershed restoration projects approved by the state legislature this past session.
- We are working closely with **The Nature Conservancy, New Mexico Forest Industry Association** and other multiple partners on the development of the Rio Grande Water Fund project.
- Entered into an agreement with **New Mexico Association of Conservation Districts** to facilitate implementation of range improvement projects in partnership with ranchers, local Soil and Water Conservation Districts, and NRCS.
- We are building on the strong partnerships developed by the **Collaborative Forest Restoration Program** which has brought together diverse partners for over 10 years to restore forest health and strengthen economies across boundaries.
- We are advancing large-scale restoration projects such as the **Southwest Jemez Mountains, Zuni Mountains**, and the **Isleta Joint Landscape Restoration Project**.