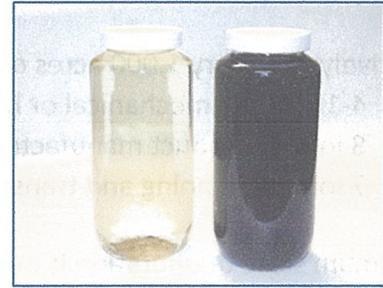
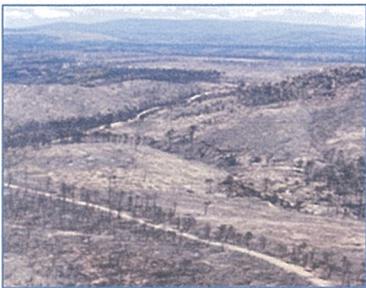


# New Mexico Wildfire and Water Source Protection

Presented to the New Mexico Finance Authority Oversight Committee  
October 31, 2013

## Problem:

- New Mexico forests are significantly overgrown with brush and trees that act as fuel for high-severity wildfires.
- Increasingly large areas of New Mexico are burning, some with more than usual high-severity burned area (e.g. Las Conchas fire at 42% high-severity burn).
- Rainfall after a high-severity burn may cause debris flows and flooding, damaging water sources and supplies (e.g. damage to Bonito Lake, Cochiti Reservoir, and San-Juan Chama water).
- New Mexico has done extensive water planning for the future, but until now the damaging effects of high-severity wildfire on water sources have not been addressed.



Las Conchas fire 66,000 acres high-severity burn; Damage after debris flow in Cochiti Canyon; Jemez River water (right) after rain.

## Solution:

- We know enough to act: Scientists agree that large-scale forest treatments are needed, such as cutting and removing the overgrown trees and using controlled burns when and where it is safe to do so.
- We need to go big scale: The pace and scale of forest treatments is currently insufficient: Las Conchas fire grew 40,000 acres in a day, but annual treatments in the Jemez Mountains are only 2-3,000 acres, even with preferential funding through the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program.
- Protecting our communities and water sources means taking action on all lands. Regardless of ownership, every year more acres burn at high-severity, and that becomes a bigger New Mexico issue -- jeopardizing downstream communities and threatening the security of our water sources.

## Actions Needed:

- We need a public-private partnership, such as a statewide Wildfire and Water Source Protection Fund, that can accelerate treatments to at least 10-times the current rate with cost-share funding on federal, state, local, tribal and private forests.
- Sources of funding could include: contributions from water users; businesses for whom water security is a necessary investment; and leveraging of federal, local, and private funds.
- Criteria for use of a statewide Wildfire and Water Source Protection should include probability of high-severity wildfire and post-fire debris flow and risk to communities and important municipal, industrial and agricultural water sources.

- The majority of funding is needed to accelerate the reduction of fuels in overgrown forests. To succeed, some funds will also be needed for planning and environmental review (at the level necessary to comply with existing laws), and the development of infrastructure to perform treatments and utilization of wood removed from treatments. And while treatments are needed at a large scale to get ahead of the problem, we still have many acres of burned lands where debris flows and flooding are a threat, so some funds should be used for rehabilitation of fire-damaged lands.

### **Economic Impacts:**

For every **\$1 spent in managing our forests**, we save:

- **18¢** cost to fight and suppress wildfires
- **61¢** rehabilitation costs to immediately stabilize burned areas
- **86¢** direct costs such as property losses, evacuation aid, and damage to utilities and facilities from fire and post-fire flooding
- **\$2.23** in the full cost of wildfires

Proactively, for every 1,000 acres of forests that are restored we can generate:

- 4-10 jobs in mechanical or hand thinning
- 8 jobs in product manufacturing and sales
- 7 jobs in planning and transportation

A minimum scale of operation is needed to reduce the risk of high-severity wildfire and generate economic development benefits. For example, considering northern New Mexico and the security of San Juan Chama water, at least 30,000 acres of forested watersheds need to be restored each year.

The bottom line:

- \$21 million investment to restore 30,000 acres of forest annually
- \$46 - \$373 million saved each year in fighting fire, property and other losses, and burned area rehabilitation
- 660 jobs created in New Mexico, predominately in northern New Mexico

**Statewide Goals:  
50,000-100,000 acres or  
more treated annually  
\$30 - 40 million annually**

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