

Opportunity to Comment on an Environmental Assessment for the Removal of Dead Trees in the Wildland/Urban Interface Resulting from the Rodeo-Chediski Fire under 36 CFR 215

30 Day Comment Period

The Forest Service, Apache-Sitgreaves and Tonto National Forests, Black Mesa, Lakeside and Pleasant Valley Ranger Districts, are preparing an Environmental Assessment (EA) in response to Judge Martone's Order of July 9, 2003, filed in United States District Court, District of Arizona, for treatment of dead trees in the wildland/urban interface (WUI) resulting from the Rodeo-Chediski Fire. The Judge ordered the preparation of an EA analyzing the effects of treating dead trees in the WUI. Pending the completion of the EA, the Judge did not enjoin the WUI portion of the project. During preparation of the EA, the WUI decision has been implemented consistent with Judge Martone's Order. Project implementation will continue during the process of notice/comment and appeal provided for by 36 CFR 215.

This project is located within one-half mile of private lands found within the Rodeo-Chediski Fire perimeter, located in Gila, Coconino, and Navajo Counties; from Forest Lakes, Heber, Overgaard, and Linden near Show Low, Arizona. This project responds to the need for public safety by reducing fuel loading on National Forest System lands within one-half mile of private lands. Existing standing dead fuel loadings range from 49 tons per acre to over 91 tons per acre. Dead trees pose a threat to public safety as they fall down. Over time, the dead trees will become a wildfire hazard that could threaten private lands. The dead trees may be removed from the burn area or left on-site. Dead trees are defined as having no living green needles visible on the limbs or bole. All means of treatment will be considered such as salvage logging, chipping, chunking, and making them available for fuelwood and other forest products. Site-specific resource conditions will dictate the type of treatment applied within the project area.

The proposed action description and other information are available for review at Forest Service offices located in Springerville, Lakeside, Overgaard, Pleasant Valley, and Phoenix, Arizona. Additional information regarding this action can be obtained from James Anderson, Forest Planning Staff Officer, PO Box 640, Springerville, AZ 85938 or by email to janderson08@fs.fed.us. The purpose of this comment period is to provide an opportunity for the public to provide early and meaningful participation on a proposed action prior to a decision being made by the Responsible Officials.

How to Comment and Timeframe

Written, facsimile, hand-delivered, oral, and electronic comments concerning this action will be accepted for 30 calendar days following the publication of this notice in the White Mountain Independent and East Valley Tribune. The publication date in the newspaper of record is the exclusive means for calculating the comment period for this analysis. Those wishing to comment should not rely upon dates or timeframe information provided by any other source. The regulations prohibit extending the length of the comment period.

Written comments must be submitted to: Elaine J. Zieroth, Forest Supervisor, Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests, PO Box 640, Springerville, AZ 85938. The office business hours for those submitting hand-delivered comments are 7:30 am to 4:30 pm Monday through Friday, excluding holidays. Oral

comments must be provided at the Responsible Official's office during normal business hours via telephone at (928) 333-4301 or in person.

Electronic comments must be submitted in a format such as an email message, plain text (.txt), rich text format (.rtf), or Word (.doc) to comments-southwestern-apache-sitgreaves@fs.fed.us. Comments must have an identifiable name attached or verification of identity will be required. A scanned signature may serve as verification on electronic comments.

Appeal Eligibility

It is the responsibility of persons providing comments to submit them by the close of the comment period. Those who provide substantive comments during this comment period are eligible to appeal the decision under the regulations. Individuals and organizations wishing to be eligible to appeal must provide the following information:

1. Name and address;
2. Title of the proposed action;
3. Specific substantive comments (36 CFR 215.2) on the proposed action, along with supporting reasons that the Responsible Official should consider in reaching a decision;
4. Signature or other verification of identity upon request; identification of the individual or organization who authored the comments(s) is necessary for appeal eligibility;
5. For multiple names or multiple organizations, a signature must be provided for the individual authorized to represent each organization, or for each individual that wishes to have appeal eligibility, and
6. Individual members of organizations must submit their own substantive comments to meet the requirements of appeal eligibility as an individual, comments received on behalf of an organization are considered as those of the organization only.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is an equal opportunity provider and employer.