



File Code: 1950-1

Date: May 25, 2006

Dear Interested Participant,

The Peaks and Mormon Lake Ranger Districts of the Coconino National Forest are seeking comments on management proposals for the Eastside Fuels Reduction and Forest Health Project. The project area is located in the wildland urban interface (WUI) and associated landscapes, south of Flagstaff from Forest Highway 3 to the Walnut Canyon National Monument and access road, between the private land boundary and Walnut Canyon, and east and north of Flagstaff including the WUI of the communities of Doney Park, Cosnino and Timberline. The north boundary of the project includes the WUI at the base of Mt. Elden from the Elden Environmental Study Area to the Elden Lookout Road. The project also includes a detached area at the top of Mt. Elden at the Electronics Site at Devils Head. The project encompasses approximately 22,000 acres of lands around Flagstaff and surrounding communities. It includes parts of Sections 29, 31-34, T23N, R8E, and Sections 33-36, T22N, R7E, and Sections 3-5, 8-11, 14-17, 20-22, 25-29, 31-33 and 35-36, T22N, R8E, and Sections 30 and 31, T22N, R9E, Sections 1-2, 25, and 35-36, T21N, R.7E, and Sections 1, 3, 6, 9, 11-17, 21-27, 29, and 31-33, T21N, R8E, and Sections 5-8, and 18, T21N, R9E, and Sections 1-3, and 10-12, T20N, R7E, G&SRBM, Coconino County. A complete description and map of the project is attached. This cover letter briefly describes background information for these projects and explains how the public can best prepare comments to help us develop better environmental analyses and project decisions.

The management proposals include:

Proposed activities include mechanical and hand thinning, and prescribed fire management activities within approximately 22,000 acres of the described land to reduce fire risk and improve forest health in the WUI, which includes several communities at risk of wildfire. The proposal includes restoration and protection of aspen, reduced bark beetle threat, and will incorporate treatments and mitigations for control of invasive plant species. The proposal also emphasizes cooperation between the Forest Service and Greater Flagstaff Forests Partnership (GFFP) partners such as Summit and Flagstaff Fire Departments, AZ G&F and with the National Park Service on implementation of treatments. An Environmental Assessment (EA) will be prepared to disclose the direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts of this proposal.

Comment Period

The Peaks and Mormon Lake Ranger Districts are providing a 30-day comment period for the public to submit comments for these projects. **The comment period will begin on June 5, 2006 and end on July 5, 2006.** The purpose of this comment period is to provide an opportunity for local residents and the public to have early and meaningful participation on these management proposals and to learn more about the projects. More information on comment period processes and contact information is located at the end of this letter. These management proposals and associated maps are also available online at <http://www.fs.fed.us/r3/coconino/nepa/index.shtml>

Open House Invitation

Two public open house meeting are scheduled. **On June 20, 2006 at Flagstaff Fire Station #6 on Lake Mary Road, and on June 22, 2006 at Fire Station #33 in Doney Park on Hwy 89N. Both meetings will run from 4:00 pm to 8:00 pm.** Representatives from Summit and Flagstaff Fire Departments and Greater Flagstaff Forests Partnership will be present at this meeting along with Forest Service staff, who



will be available to answer any questions about both proposals. I encourage your participation in the development of these project activities. We are holding this meeting in the middle of the comment period to allow more time for you to get familiar with the proposed activities. Comment forms will be provided at this meeting.

Background

These proposals are the result of months of collaboration with Greater Flagstaff Forests Partnership, a diverse, community-based group dedicated to reducing the risk of wildfire to communities and restoring ecosystem health of the ponderosa pine forests surrounding Flagstaff. This collaborative effort is aimed at involving the greater Flagstaff community to develop community-based solutions to local forest health and fire hazard concerns. More information can be found at www.gffp.org.

Healthy Forest Restoration Act

This project is being planned and analyzed under authorization of the Healthy Forests Restoration Act of 2003 (HFRA), which was designed to expedite the preparation and implementation of hazardous fuels reduction projects on federal lands. Use of this authority helps streamline the planning process and allows the district to implement the newly developed Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) for the greater Flagstaff area that was developed by numerous local and state organizations and agencies. Attached to the Purpose and Need and Proposed Action document for this project is an HFRA compliance document that provides additional detail about HFRA authorities and requirements.

Planning processes under HFRA are different than projects planned under traditional NEPA procedures. After this public comment period is complete, the Districts will start writing the Environmental Assessment (EA) for the project. HFRA requirements in areas with an approved CWPP require analysis of the Proposed Action only, but additional alternatives may be considered if comments from this scoping period provide rationale for how a new action alternative will better meet the intent of the CWPP.

Comments

Because there is no comment period on the EA under HFRA authority, it is critical that detailed comments are provided during this comment period opportunity. I have provided a detailed proposed action that provides in-depth management rationale and activity details. Comments from this scoping period will be used to improve the environmental analysis, and, if necessary, modify the proposed action, and/or develop an additional action alternative.

If a new action alternative is proposed, I ask that comments focus on how a new alternative will better meet the intent of the CWPP as required under HFRA (Sec. 104(d)). The Purpose and Need for Action includes measures to determine the effectiveness of a management action in meeting those needs. I encourage comments to include similar measures, if applicable. By using a common language, we can better display the differences among alternatives and their effectiveness in achieving resource needs.

Objections Period

Upon completion of the EA, I will be selecting a preferred alternative. There will be an objections process before the final decision is made and after the EA is mailed (36 CFR 218). In order to be eligible to file an objection to the preferred alternative, specific written comments related to the project must be submitted during this scoping period. Individual members of organizations must submit their own comments to meet the requirements of eligibility as an individual. Objections received on behalf of an organization will be considered to be those views of the organization alone.

For more information on how this objection process works, contact myself or Roger Poirier, Project Leader, at the Peaks Ranger District. Or you may view regulations under 36 CFR 218 Subpart A on the national Forest Service website at <http://www.fs.fed.us/emc/applit/36cfr218a.htm>.

Public Comments

Written, facsimile, hand-delivered, oral, and electronic comments will be accepted. Comments should be submitted within 30 days following publication of a legal notice in the Arizona Daily Sun to: Gene Waldrup, Peaks and Mormon Lake District Ranger, at Peaks Ranger District, 5075 N. Hwy 89, Flagstaff, AZ 86004; FAX (928) 527-8288; or by e-mail to: comments-southwestern-coconino-peaks@fs.fed.us. Please tell us which project you are referring to in the subject line.

To provide oral comments or ask questions about the projects, please contact Roger Poirier at (928) 527-8254 or by email at rpoirier@fs.fed.us, directly.

Only those persons who submit comment during this comment period will be placed on the mailing list for future information regarding the project. Individuals who do not submit comments but wish to remain on this mailing list should contact the team leader for the project.

We anticipate the Environmental Assessment for the Eastside Project to be completed by September 2006.

Thank you for your participation in this important forest management project. I look forward to discussing the project with you at the open houses. I hope you can join us.

Sincerely,

/S/GENE WALDRIP

GENE WALDRIP
District Ranger