

Decision Notice and Finding of No Significant Impact

Mountaineire HFRA Project

**USDA Forest Service
Mormon Lake Ranger District, Coconino National Forest
Coconino County, Arizona**

Introduction

I am pleased to announce that we have completed the detailed analysis process and revised Environmental Assessment (EA) for the Mountaineire HFRA Project. The Decision Notice documents my decision for this project. The revised EA includes some corrections and clarifications to the original EA published November 18, 2005.

I would like to thank everyone who participated in this planning effort for making this a successful project. Our cooperative effort with the Greater Flagstaff Forests Partnership (GFFP) is extremely valuable. The Partnership's efforts in expanding public involvement, research, monitoring, and working to develop markets for small diameter trees have made this a very valuable and worthwhile endeavor for the Forest Service and public we serve.

As District Ranger for the Mormon Lake Ranger District of the Coconino National Forest, I have made the Mountaineire HFRA project a top priority, as it will reduce wildfire threat to the community of Mountaineire and the greater Flagstaff area.

It is my decision to implement a suite of activities that help reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire and improve forest health. The result will be a forest where low intensity fire is more likely to occur, allowing for fire's natural role in the landscape. Vegetative diversity will be enhanced and a well maintained, efficient road and trails system that reduces impacts to meadows, vegetation and soils.

Most importantly, if a crown fire occurs and travels towards the communities of Flagstaff, suppression efforts are much more likely to be successful. Treatments will reduce the likelihood of running crown fires, instead transforming them to ground fires. Flame lengths will be low enough to allow suppression forces to take safer and more effective action. These conditions will not prevent less fires in the area, but allow more low intensity fires in these locations. In addition, many of the treated stands will be less likely to initiate a crown fire.

Key wildlife habitat components such as hiding cover, travelways, and foraging areas will be maintained for Mexican spotted owl, northern goshawk, Abert squirrels and other species. Treatments will result in a diversity of forest structure that provides ample opportunity for research and monitoring.

Many roads will be obliterated and re-vegetated after thinning and initial burning activities are completed. In areas with high densities of nonnative and invasive plants, there may be an increase in undesirable weeds. However, project design features include measures to prevent further spread. In other areas, weeds will be eradicated as a part of project design. Activities may

disturb wildlife with noise and human presence, but this disturbance is short-term. Many trees will be cut and removed, allowing more nutrients, sunlight and water for remaining trees.

This Decision Notice contains my decision on a selected alternative and describes my rationale for selecting it. My decision is supported by and based upon analysis in the EA. Copies of the EA are available upon request from the Mormon Lake Ranger District.

Proposed Action

A "proposed action" is defined early in the project-level planning process. A proposed action serves as a starting point for the interdisciplinary team (IDT) and gives the public and other agencies specific information on which to focus comments. The proposed action for the Mountaineer HFRA Project proposed thinning, prescribed burning, road, and recreation management activities to improve declining forest health and reduce wildfire potential. Thinning prescriptions varied to create a mosaic of resulting stand densities. The following actions were discussed:

The Proposed Action was designed by the Forest Service ID Team members and GFFP partners to best meet the Need for Change for Action of the project while meeting requirements of the Forest Plan and other guiding documents such as the *Integrated Treatment of Noxious or Invasive Weeds EIS*.

This action proposes to meet the purpose and need by thinning and/or prescribed burning on lands within the 16,603 acre project area. The existing road system would be used, only 1.3 miles (consisting of 3 segments) of temporary road would be constructed for hauling access. These segments would be obliterated after thinning activities are complete. In summary, the Forest Service would:

- Mechanically thin approximately 13,780 acres to achieve an average canopy cover of 30-50%, depending on resource objectives. Thinning would reduce wildfire risk and restore forest structure and diversity. To restore grasslands all ponderosa pine trees will be removed in those sites.
- Conduct initial prescribed burns on approximately 15,256 acres after thinning to reduce fuel loads and reintroduce low to moderate intensity surface fire.
- Conduct additional maintenance burns after initial prescribed burns to maintain fuel loads.
- Designate and maintain an open road system of 47.7 miles within the project area.
- Designate dispersed camping areas to reduce human-caused ignitions of wildfires.

The Proposed Action is described in detail in Chapter 2 of the Environmental Assessment, "Actions Common to All Alternatives" and "Proposed Action," (Alternative 2).

Decision and Rationale

Background

The Forest Plan provides a framework that guides development of Desired Future Conditions at the site-specific project level, such as the Mountaineer HFRA project.

The process for developing Desired Future Condition (DFC) and Need for Change statements began with Forest Service IDT members collecting and modeling data to determine the existing conditions in the project area. The team then began reviewing Forest Plan direction related to management of the Mountaineer HFRA project area. The team reviewed all Forest Plan standards and guidelines and determined whether they are standard operating procedures for implementing activities or if they are intended to guide management practices towards a desired future condition of the forest. Standards and guidelines in the latter category were used as sideboards when the team developed DFC statements.

Many of these standards and guidelines are quantitative in nature and describe in detail a specific distribution of environmental resources. In contrast, other direction is couched in broad, qualitative terms and allows IDT and GFFP partners to interpret and clarify this direction as it pertains to this project.

As the team started discussing and developing desired future conditions for the project area, it considered goals for the entire project area in addition to discrete areas deemed important for biological or social needs. The DFC statements the team developed generally reflect Forest Plan language, however in many situations where direction was vague or overly broad, the team further defined their vision for the Mountaineer project landscape in qualitative and quantitative terms. In many circumstances, the team also developed appropriate timeframes to meet these DFCs and considered the difference in conditions over time. Need for Change statements articulate the difference between the existing and desired future conditions.

Need for Change

This Need for Change information was captured in a Final Report of the Need For Change Analysis (November 2004). While the Need for Change Report is broad in nature and covers many different resource areas within the project area, this Mountaineer HFRA Project Environmental Assessment only includes findings of that report related to forest restoration, fire hazard reduction activities, and transportation management. Other projects may be developed based on findings of the Need for Change analysis in separate NEPA documents in the future.

A comparison of the existing condition of the project area and the desired condition indicates a need to:

- Reduce fire hazard ratings to low and moderate levels;
- Reduce flame lengths to 2-3 feet and increase critical flame lengths to 10-15 feet;
- Reduce fuel loads to 5-7 tons per acre;
- Increase crown base heights to 20 feet or greater;
- Reintroduce and maintain low to moderate intensity surface fire;
- Designate dispersed camping sites to reduce human caused ignitions
- Reduce canopy cover, basal area, and Stand Density Index values towards the desired future conditions represented in Table 1-4 of the Environmental Assessment for forest and grassland structure needs;
- Restore historic vegetative structure in meadows and savannah areas;
- Move VSS distribution towards values listed in Table 1-3 of the Environmental Assessment to create an uneven-age structure in forested stands;

- Create or retain openings to promote understory diversity, and initiate VSS 1 and 2 classes.
- Designate an open road system;
- Close roads for administrative access where roads cause resource impacts but are needed for emergency access; and
- Decommission user-created social roads and system roads that are causing resource impacts.

Decision

Based upon my review of all alternatives, I have decided to implement Alternative 3 with a few modifications made through further analysis that was done based on comments received during the HFRA objections process. Implementation must consider all the details described in the EA including the description of Alternative 3 and the Design Features/Mitigation Measures, and Monitoring sections.

This selected action would include: (See attached Final Decision Map)

- Mechanical treatments on 13,363 acres as described in Alternative 3. Table 2-4 pages. 39 - 41 describes the acres for the various mechanical treatments. The number of acres treated has been reduced from the Proposed Action in this alternative for the inclusion of the Arizona Game and Fish (AZ G&F) Squirrel habitat and research area included with Alternative 3. These differences are described in Table 2-4 and elsewhere in the analysis. The number of acres and methods of treatment are also slightly adjusted due to modifications, as described below, that I am making with this decision. The modifications to Alternative 3 are due to adjustments made in response to the Mountaineer objection review. (See discussion below).
 1. The treatment acreage is reduced by 147 acres by dropping treatments in two Protected Activity Area (PAC) stands as described below.
 2. An additional adjustment was made to site 358/0001, (97 acres), adjusting the treatment level from an uneven-age to 30 percent canopy cover to uneven-age 40 percent canopy cover.
 3. After review during the response to objections an additional site, 324/17, (42 acres) in a Northern goshawk protected fledgling area (PFA) was changed from mechanical treatment to prescribed burn only.
- Restoration of 2,805 acres of savannah/grasslands. In grasslands most ponderosa pine trees less than 24 inches diameter breast height (DBH) will be removed. The trees to be removed in the grasslands are typically black barked or from stunted 1980's tree plantations. No yellow pine trees would be removed. (These acres are inclusive of mechanical treatment acres above).
- Prescribed burning treatments as described by the Proposed Action (Alternative 2) but reduced by 147 acres due to dropping the two PAC stands from treatment as described below. A discussion of dropping treatments in the PAC's is included below. Total prescribed burn acres with this decision is 15,109 acres. In addition to those acres that will be prescribe burned following mechanical treatment, 1746 acres will be treated with

prescribed burn only. (This acreage includes 42 acres adjusted from mechanical treatment to burn only in stand 324/0017).

- Prescribed fire maintenance burning following initial prescribed burning continues to occur on 15,109 acres as described in the proposed action and adjusted for Alternative 3.
- The Abert Squirrel habitat research area proposed by AZ G&F and GFFP on 1310 acres of forested land in three research areas north and northwest of the Mountaineer community (See EA pages 30 and 31, and Figure 2-5 page 31a). Research area treatments include three distinct treatment types, developed to maximize tassel-eared squirrel density and recruitment while meeting other ecological restoration goals in some areas, to reduce fire risk, and improve tree vigor. The research area treatment types include:
 - Meso-Reserve Areas – 228 Acres. No thinning will occur in these areas. The areas will range from 67 to 94 acres in size. Prescribed fire will be introduced to remove fuels and create small openings.
 - Matrix Areas – 472 Acres. Matrix areas will surround Meso-Reserves to reduce fire risk in the meso-reserves as well as provide foraging habitat for squirrels. These areas will receive an uneven-age treatment and thinned to 40% canopy cover.
 - Full Restoration – 610 Acres. Full restoration areas will be adjacent to matrix and meso-reserve areas to reduce fire risk in these areas. Uneven-age thinning in these areas will reduce basal area to 40-60 sq. ft. per acre and reduce canopy cover to approximately 30% in many areas.

(Refer to the EA for further description on the specifics of these treatments).

- Designate and maintain a transportation system that does the following: (See EA pages 29 and 30 and Appendix A)
 - o Designate and maintain an open road system of 47.7 miles within the project area.
 - o Build 1.3 miles of temporary road that will be closed and obliterated after use.
 - o Decommission (permanently close) 55.7 miles of road.
- Designate dispersed camping areas to reduce human-caused ignitions of wildfires in southern portions of the project area. A Forest Order will direct a camping prohibition as defined by Figure 2-4 page 30a of the EA for the remainder of the project area.

In response to the EA review for objection, this decision includes the following changes from Alternative 3 that were described in the Environmental Assessment and noted above.

- No treatment (thinning or burning) would occur on 147 acres of Mexican spotted owl habitat in the Protected Activity Center (PAC) as originally proposed. During objection The Center for Biological Diversity raised a concern that we had violated Forest Plan Standards and Guidelines by proposing treatments in the PAC that exceeded 9 inches DBH. On page 18 of the EA we describe our rationale for interpretation of Standards versus Guidelines and our

reasons for proposing the 12-inch DBH treatment. Although our intentions were based on providing some protection for MSO habitat, and that the 9 inch limit was a guideline in the Recovery Plan, upon further review during objection it was determined that the Forest Plan incorporated the MSO Recovery Plan itself as a standard. Thus, we have dropped the treatments in those stands. All treatment is dropped as it has been determined that treatments up to 9 inches DBH would not be effective for protection objectives in the PAC. Prescribed burning in these stands is not an option without the mechanical treatments.

- The objection raised questions about standard and guideline canopy cover requirements for Northern goshawk. Further review of the analysis was conducted to ensure that all requirements were being met. Consequently, there is a revised treatment in stand 358/0001 to increase canopy cover from 30 percent to 40 percent. Also, mechanical treatment was dropped in 324/0017 and the treatment is now burn only. These modifications total 141 acres and are less than one percent of the analysis area. These modifications are to individual site treatments that were determined upon further review to better meet within stand criteria for Standards and Guidelines for Northern goshawk management. Further analysis done in Chapter 3 of the EA determined that these modifications do not create a substantial change in affects of the alternative for the project area. In addition to these physical changes we have added further explanation and description of how we otherwise meet Standards and Guideline canopy cover requirements for the Northern goshawk throughout Chapters 2 and 3 of the EA.
- As a result of making the adjustments identified above, a review of the effects on fire hazard rating was conducted to ensure project objectives for reduced fire hazard are still being met. The reduction in treatment would cause no change in stand 358/0001; it would remain in a low classification following treatment (only tree growth and the rate of advancement into old-growth condition is affected). The remaining three stands, comprising 222 acres (138 acres contiguous, 42 acres at the opposite end of the project from these sites) would change from a low rating to a moderate rating. This change is approximately one percent for the project area and will not substantially affect overall objectives for fire hazard reduction.
- During review for objection several other clarifications and additions to discussion have been made in response to the objection that, although did not cause a change in the effects analysis in the EA, hopefully serves to provide further explanation of how Standards and Guidelines have been met. Further explanation is provided for objection questions and concerns about old-growth allocation and treatments, effects of each project alternative on MSO restricted habitat and how those Standards and Guidelines are met, and the effects of project alternatives on goshawk indicator habitat and their relationship to forest-wide habitat trend and forest-wide population trend. The opportunity to correct several editing errors and inconsistencies between some tables in the original EA was also taken.

RATIONAL FOR CHOOSING ALTERNATIVE 3

When compared to the other alternatives, Alternative 3 will best reduce fire hazard to threatened communities in the wildland urban interface (WUI), and restore health to a fire dependant ecosystem, while also maintaining and/or improving and protecting key wildlife habitat. As

implementation of Alternative 3 progresses, the desired condition of the reintroduction of low to moderate intensity surface fire will be realized.

While both Alternatives 2 and 3 make progress towards desired conditions identified in the Purpose and Need for the project, Alternative 3 incorporates a desirable research element by including the Abert squirrel habitat research areas and treatments. The inclusion of research is an item emphasized in our partnership with GFFP.

In addition to making progress on fire hazard reduction and improved health and function of forest and grassland/savannah ecosystems, the alternative includes the other desired conditions of an improved transportation system, and designated dispersed camping in conjunction with a camping closure order within the project area.

Alternative 3 with the modifications I have identified is responsive to the issues identified in analysis and objection. Vegetation treatment design, intensity, location and timing address wildlife and Sensitive or Threatened and Endangered Species habitat.

Project design features and mitigation measures have been incorporated to address issues for air quality/smoke management, control of prescribed fire, soil disturbance, insect and disease concerns, sensitive plant species and yellow pine retention. The road closure effectiveness issue is addressed by developing a transportation system that is well suited for the area. A well designed transportation system that fits the activity needs of the area will help greatly in public acceptance of excess road closure and obliteration.

Invasive species are managed and mitigated as defined by the Best Management Practices as outlined in the Three Forest Final Environmental Impact Statement for Integrated Treatment of Noxious or Invasive Weeds and specific actions are included in the alternative that include some site specific treatments and monitoring as well as mitigation measures to reduce the introduction and/or spread of invasive species.

Monitoring has been incorporated into various areas including invasive weeds, squirrel research, archaeology, MSO habitat; fuels post burn evaluations, and soils and hydrology. Other monitoring being developed by the GFFP Monitoring and Research Team may be conducted as part of this project if funding and/or volunteer assistance is provided by GFFP or other interested parties.

This alternative meets requirements under federal laws and executive orders pertaining to project-specific planning and environmental analysis on federal lands. A list of the most applicable laws can be found in the EA page 16. In addition to these laws and orders, the Mountaineer project was analyzed under Healthy Forest Restoration Act (HFRA) authorities. A discussion and analysis of how the project meets requirements set forth under the HFRA can be found in the EA – Appendix C. Also, to use certain alternative development options under HFRA a Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) must be in place. A CWPP for Flagstaff and surrounding communities was developed by GFFP and the Ponderosa Fire Advisory Council, in October 2004. Appendix D of the EA discusses the relationship of this project and the CWPP.

Other Alternatives Considered

In addition to the selected alternative, I considered three other alternatives in detail. One additional alternative was considered but eliminated from detailed study. This alternative was a variation on Alternative 4 that was proposed by the Grand Canyon Trust that had a variable upper diameter limit (See discussion on EA page 19). A comparison of the alternatives considered in detail can be found in the EA on pages 36-39.

Alternative 1 - No Action

Under the No Action alternative, current management plans would continue to guide management of the project area. Alternative 1 does not reduce fire hazard, which keeps the communities of Mountaineer and Flagstaff and other associated WUI as communities at risk to effects from uncontrolled crown fire. There is no restoration of damaged ecosystems. There is no progression toward the return of fire as a natural process in this fire-dependant ecosystem. Excess and damaging roads will remain and continue to proliferate under this alternative. Under Alternative 1, threats from human-caused fire from camping in the urban interface stays the same and increases over time due to no management changes. Alternative 1 does not meet any of the goals of the Purpose and Need for the project.

Alternative 2 – Proposed Action

This alternative is the same as Alternative 3 without the Abert squirrel habitat research area. Including the research area promotes the desire of the GFFP to incorporate research elements into the GFFP projects. Including the research project will contribute to our ability and knowledge for applying adaptive management as we proceed with GFFP and other fire hazard reduction projects.

Alternative 3 – Research Proposal

Alternative 3 is a modification of Alternative 2. This alternative includes recommendations from GFFP and the Arizona Game and Fish Department to manage certain areas for Abert Squirrel habitat and research opportunities. This alternative is identical to Alternative 2 except for different thinning practices on a total of 1,310 acres of forested lands in three research areas north and northwest of the Mountaineer community. Figure 2-5 in the Environmental Assessment includes a display of these areas with details. All prescribed burning, transportation system proposals, and dispersed camping designations described in Alternative 2 will be followed.

Alternative 4 – Thinning Diameter Limit

Alternative 4 is a modification of Alternative 2. All mechanical treatments described in Alternative 2 would occur although no 16 inch DBH or greater trees would be thinned. All prescribed burning, transportation system management proposals, and dispersed camping designation described in Alternative 2 would otherwise occur.

Public Involvement

As described in the background, the need for this action arose in 2004. The proposal was provided to the public and other agencies for comment during scoping in the spring of 2005. In

addition, as part of the public involvement process, the agency held a public meeting in Kachina Village to answer questions and collect public comments related to the proposal.

Using the comments from the public, other agencies, and GFFP, the interdisciplinary team identified several issues regarding the effects of the proposed action. One issue of concern centered on the thinning of large diameter trees. To address these concerns, the Forest Service created Alternative 4 described above and in detail in the Environmental Assessment.

Finding of No Significant Impact

After considering the environmental effects described in the EA, I have determined that these actions will not have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment considering the context and intensity of impacts (40 CFR 1508.27). An environmental impact statement will not be prepared.

This project is a site-specific action that by itself does not have international, national, region-wide, or statewide importance. The following discussion is organized around the Ten Significance Criteria described in the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) regulations (40 CFR 1508.27).

My finding of no significant environmental effects is not biased by the beneficial effects of the action. As described in the EA in Chapter 3 and Appendix E – Best Management Practices for the Mountaineer HFRA Project, impacts from this project are both beneficial and adverse. The adverse effects of thinning, prescribed fire, road obliteration, and temporary road construction are minor in nature and will not impair land productivity. These effects are short-term noise, smoke and human disturbance to wildlife, and short term soil disturbance that is not expected to cause soil erosion beyond the project area, and is expected to primarily remain on-site. Long-term effects are beneficial for most species habitat and forest ecosystem health. Habitat including the amount and location of forage and cover is improved for most species. Future forest structure follows the Forest Plan with a greater percentage of the landscape containing large trees. Fire cycles are returned to intervals more closely resembling pre-settlement frequencies (see EA Chapter 3, pages 40 – 189 and Appendix E).

There will be no significant effects on public health and safety, because standard Forest Service requirements will be used for all activities. There are no known adverse impacts to public safety as stated in Chapter 3 of the EA.

1. There will be no adverse effects on unique characteristics of the geography, such as cultural resources and wetlands. Ecologically critical areas such as park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, etc. do not exist in the project area. Although cultural resources exist, they are similar to sites found throughout the region and consist of prehistoric lithic scatters, historic logging camps and railroads, and late 19th to 20th century pioneer homesteads. All sites will either be avoided or mitigation measures implemented to reduce the risk from wildfire while protecting site integrity. The project will increase protection of sites from wildfire and associated suppression activities through these mitigations (see EA pages 159-160).

2. The effects on the quality of the human environment are not likely to be highly controversial because there is no known scientific controversy over the impacts of the project. The effects of the project are limited to the Mountaineire HFRA project area. While some people have disagreed with certain parts of the project, no person has provided evidence that the environmental effects of the project have been wrongly predicted; therefore the effects are not likely to be controversial.
3. We have considerable experience with the types of activities to be implemented. The effects analysis shows the effects are not uncertain, and do not involve unique or unknown risk. The actions described in this decision are not new. The Forest Service has a long history of implementing these activities on this and other areas of the Coconino National Forest. These actions have been applied elsewhere on similar soil and vegetation types. The effects are not uncertain, unique or unknown. (see EA Chapter 3 pages 40 - 189).
4. The action is not likely to establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects, nor does this represent a decision in principle about a future consideration. A decision to implement this decision does not establish any future precedent for other actions within or outside of the project area. Future actions will be evaluated through the NEPA process and will stand on their own as to the environmental effects and project feasibility. This finding is demonstrated through the analysis in EA Chapter 3.
5. The cumulative impacts are not significant. These actions are not related to other actions that, when combined, will have significant impacts. Cumulative effects are documented in Chapter 3 of the EA. There is no off-site soil erosion, impacts to the overall watershed or changes to forest vegetation that would be cumulative to impacts from other activities. Effects to air quality are monitored and controlled through ADEQ regulations. There are no adverse effects to cultural resources and therefore no cumulative effect. Effects to wildlife habitat are described in detail in Chapter 3 of the EA and are generally minor and do not cause significant effects when considered with other activities in the general area.
6. The action will have no significant adverse effect on districts, sites, highways, or structures because there are none of these resources in the project area. Concerning objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, there are 25 sites that are considered eligible historic properties under the National Register of Historic Places. The EA identifies actions to reduce the threat to these sites from wildfire and suppression actions. The EA provides for site-specific recommendations to reduce heavy fuels build-up that occur on some of these sites and provides protection from mechanical treatments. The EA identifies that hand treatments are a desirable activity on these sites (see EA pages 159-160 and PR #242, Archaeologist Specialist Report and ISA Report 99-91 B which lists specific management actions by site). The action will also not cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources, and will increase protection from the threats of wildfire. An Archaeological Clearance Report signed by the SHPO September 28, 2004 is located in PR # 83A.
7. The US Fish & Wildlife Service has completed a Biological Opinion supporting that this decision may affect, likely to adversely affect, the bald eagle and may affect, not likely to adversely affect, the Mexican spotted owl or its critical habitat. Possible effects of the

project to Federally listed wildlife species were analyzed in the Forest Service's Biological Assessment and Evaluation. The US Fish and Wildlife Service's Biological Opinion states that the project will not likely result in jeopardy to the bald eagle. The Forest Service will implement the "reasonable and prudent measures" and "terms and conditions" as described in the Biological Opinion. These include minimizing direct and indirect affects. Therefore, no significant effects to threatened or endangered species of plants or animals or habitat critical for the management of these species, are anticipated. A summary of effects is located in *Chapter 3* of the EA. The No Action Alternative A contains deleterious trends associated with existing vegetative structure and fire hazard; the consultation with US Fish and Wildlife Service's determination acknowledges these existing conditions and provides for reduced fire hazard to threatened communities in the wildland urban interface and restored health to a fire adapted ecosystem.

8. The action will not violate Federal, State, and local laws or requirements for the protection of the environment. Applicable laws and regulations were considered in the EA (see EA page 16). The action is consistent with the Coconino National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (See EA page 18).

I find that implementing Alternative 3 does not constitute a major Federal action that would significantly affect the quality of the human environment in either context or intensity. I have made this determination after considering both positive and negative effects, as well as direct, indirect, and cumulative effects of this action and reasonably foreseeable future actions.

I have found that the context of the environmental impacts of this decision is limited to the local area and is not significant. I have also determined that the severity of these impacts is not significant.

Findings Required by Other Laws and Regulations

My decision to implement Alternative 3 with the modifications I have identified above is consistent with the intent of the forest plan's long term goals and objectives. The project was designed in conformance with land and resource management plan standards and incorporates appropriate land and resource management plan guidelines for the applicable Management Areas that occur within the Mountaineer project. Table 1-1 of the EA, page 14 describes those Management Areas. Specific and applicable Standards and Guidelines that help guide the intensity, timing and extent of the activities included in this decision are identified in the Coconino Forest Plan in both the Forest Wide and Management Area specific sections of that document. The Mountaineer HFRA project meets the requirements of an authorized hazardous-fuel reduction project, as defined by the HFRA (Section 101(2), for National Forest Service lands analyzed in an EA.

Implementation Date

The Mountaineer project was analyzed under the Healthy Forest Restoration Act (HFRA) authority and thus is not subject to appeal (36 CFR 215.12 and 218.3) Implementation may

occur immediately following publication of a legal notice in the Arizona Daily Sun announcing the decision.

HFRA Section 105(a) of the HFRA replaces the USDA Forest Service's administrative appeals process with an objection process. A 30-day objection process for the Mountaineer project was initiated in December 2005 with the issuance of a legal notice of the EA in the newspaper of record, (Project Record #260, 12/02/2005) and closed on January 3, 2006. On January 6th, 2006 an objection was received from the Center for Biological Diversity with a proper post-mark of January 3, 2006. All requirements for response to the objection by the reviewing official have been met.

Contact

For additional information concerning this decision, contact Gene Waldrip, District Ranger, or Alvin Brown, Environmental Coordinator, Peaks and Mormon Lake Ranger Districts, 5075 N. Hwy 89, Flagstaff, AZ 86004, (928) 526-0866.

 /s/ Gene Waldrip
GENE WALDRIP
District Ranger
Mormon Lake Ranger District

April 20, 2006
Date

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