

Decision Notice and Finding of No Significant Impact

Eastside Fuels Reduction and Forest Health Project

USDA Forest Service Peaks and 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 Final Environmental Assessment (FEA), for the Eastside Fuels Reduction and Forest Health Project. The Decision Notice documents my decision for this project. The FEA includes some corrections and clarifications to the original EA published October 9, 2006.

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 Peaks and Mormon Lake Ranger Districts of the Coconino National Forest, I have made the Eastside Fuels Reduction and Forest Health project a top priority, as it will reduce wildfire threat to the community of Flagstaff and several adjacent urban interface areas such as Heckathorn, Harold Ranch, Pine Canyon, Doney Park, Timberline, Cosnino and Walnut Canyon National Monument.

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 a return of fire's natural role in the landscape. The activities will result in forest vegetation that will be healthier, promoting increased species and structural diversity, and improved forage condition and diversity, and reduced susceptibility to insect attacks.

Most importantly, if a crown fire occurs and travels towards the communities of Flagstaff and the associated urban interface areas mentioned, 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.

While road management emphasis is being covered in the ongoing Travel Management Rule process, some 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 excess small diameter trees will be cut and removed, or burned in place, allowing more nutrients, sunlight and water, promoting growth for remaining trees.

This Decision Notice contains my decision to select the Proposed Action alternative and describes my rationale for selecting it. My decision is supported by and based upon analysis in the FEA. Copies of the FEA are available upon request from the Peaks and Mormon Lake Ranger Districts, or electronically at the Coconino Forest website at: <http://www.fs.fed.us/r3/coconino/nepa/index.shtml>.

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 Eastside Fuels Reduction and Forest Health Project proposed various silvicultural methods to treat forest vegetation, including uneven aged management, thinning, both by hand and mechanically, and prescribed burning, aspen restoration and protection, meadow and grassland restoration, 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 approximate 22,000 acre project area. The existing road system would be used, only 4.5 miles (consisting of 12 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 3,819 acres to achieve an average canopy cover of 40% in northern goshawk habitat with a range of 35-45% (3,411 acres), and an average of 45% in Mexican spotted owl habitat, with a range of 40-50% (408 acres). Mechanical thinning areas are designated where treatments and access may allow for product removal and hauling through timber sales, or as stewardship contracts. Under either operation product removal would occur. The various silvicultural treatments analyzed would reduce tree density, especially in excess small diameter trees and progress toward an uneven-aged forest structure, and reduce wildfire risk.
- Hand Thin approximately 3,404 acres, cutting up to 12" diameter breast height (dbh), to achieve an average canopy cover of 45%, with a range of 30 to 60. Hand thinning is designated in areas where access for mechanical equipment is limited or where the

impacts of mechanical thinning cannot be sufficiently mitigated to achieve resource objectives.

- To restore grasslands invading ponderosa pine trees will be removed on approximately 220 acres in those sites. Yellow Pine, regardless of size will not be removed in these treatments.
- Conduct initial prescribed burns on approximately 7,841 acres after thinning and on 12,356 acres without thinning (prescribed burn only), or a total of approximately 20,197 acres, to reduce fuel loads and reintroduce low to moderate intensity surface fire. Conduct follow-up maintenance burns on the 20,176 acres after initial prescribed burns to maintain fuel loads, as needed.
- Hand and mechanical thinning at the Elden Electronics Site on approximately 21 acres, to reduce wildfire threat to electronics sites.
- Construct a fuel break on approximately 377 acres (6.9 miles) in the pinyon/juniper (Woodland forest) surrounding urban interface areas adjacent to private property in the Cosnino area.
- Restore and provide fencing protection to approximately 10 acres of aspen forest.

The Proposed Action is described in detail in Chapter 2 of the Environmental Assessment.

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 Eastside Fuels Reduction and Forest Health 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 Eastside Fuels Reduction and Forest Health 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 Eastside 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 (January, 2006). While the Need for Change Report is broad in nature and covers many different resource areas within the project area, this Eastside Fuels Reduction and Forest Health 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 for:

- Site density values and structural arrangements that meet the desired conditions for forests, woodlands and meadow:
- Restored historic vegetative structural patterns in forests and grassland areas:
- Clumped and grouped spatial arrangement of trees;
- Reduced threat from bark beetle attack through improved tree vigor and resistance;
- Move vegetative structural stage (VSS) distribution towards values listed in Table 1-2 of the Environmental Assessment while creating an uneven-age structure in forested stands;
- Openings that provide for understory diversity and early vegetative structural class initiation;
- Reduce fire hazard ratings to low and moderate levels;
- Reduce flame lengths in ponderosa pine forests to 2-3 feet and low probability of transforming to a crown fire;
- Reduce fuel loads to 5-7 tons per acre in ponderosa pine forest;
- Increase crown base heights to 20 feet or greater; in ponderosa pine forest;
- Conditions where prescribed surface fires can be safely executed in ponderosa pine forests;
- Conditions in pinyon/juniper woodlands that reduce the risk of fire spreading to other areas.

Decision

Based upon my review of all alternatives, I have decided to implement the Proposed Action 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 FEA including the description of the Proposed Action and the Design Features/Mitigation Measures, and Monitoring sections.

This selected action would include: (See FEA, Figures 2.1 and 2.2)

- Mechanical thinning on 3,819 acres and Hand thinning on 3,404 acres for a total of 7,223 acres of treatment as described in the Proposed Action. Table 2-1 pages 20-21 describes the acres for the various mechanical and hand treatments.
- Restoration of 220 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 black barked, typically stunted and of poor form, invading the meadows due to fire exclusion. No yellow pine trees would be removed.
- Restoration of 10 acres of aspen, by removing encroaching ponderosa pine, including fencing for browse protection.
- Hand and mechanical thinning with follow-up prescribed burning on 21 acres at the Elden Electronics Site to reduce fire hazard to this important communications site.
- Fuel Break construction on approximately 377 acres (6.9 miles) in the pinyon/juniper woodland type adjacent to the Cosnino area. Additional acres of treatments in the pinyon/juniper woodland are included in the mechanical and hand thinning acreage. These treatments are generally associated with treatments around the Turkey Hills, the Forest Service Island near Slaton Ranch road, and along the Townsend-Winona road.
- Prescribed burning treatments as described by the Proposed Action. Total prescribed burn acres with this decision are 20,197 acres. In addition to those acres that will be prescribed burned following mechanical and hand treatments, fuelbreak construction, and grassland restoration, (7,841 acres), 12,356 acres will be treated with prescribed burn only.
- Prescribed fire maintenance burning following initial prescribed burning continues to occur on 20,197 acres as described in the proposed action.
- Build 4.5 miles (12 segments) of temporary road that will be closed and obliterated after use.

One objection was filed on the project (Center for Biological Diversity, E. Ryberg, PR # 190). In response to the EA review for objection, this decision includes the following actions as directed by the Appeal Reviewing Officer (Letter, December 8, 2006, PR # 191) that made corrections to the EA, the Wildlife and Silviculture Specialist Reports, and the Project Record.

- Correct the wildlife report to reflect the 2005 requirements under the Planning transition language at 36 CFR 219.14.

Action Taken: The wildlife specialist report was updated to reflect the correct planning rule reference to the current 2005 requirements under the Planning transition language. The wildlife specialist verified that all analysis had been done correctly for the current rule.

- Add the Forest MIS report to the record.

Action Taken: The Forest MIS report has been added to the project record, (PR # 2A).

- Demonstrate compliance with Forest Plan standards and guidelines for old growth allocation.

Action Taken: To better demonstrate compliance with the Forest Plan standards for old growth allocation the silviculturist reviewed each 10K area associated with the project. There were portions of seven 10K areas included in the project area. This analysis involved verification that allocations within the project area were on the best acres and the most advanced in progressing toward meeting requirements for old growth, and that acres and suitable existing or recruitment old growth habitat areas existed in the 10K, outside of the project area. Using extensive analysis, 10K acres outside the project area were analyzed for suitability and availability for inclusion as old growth allocation. Extensive analysis included the silviculturist knowledge of the area in combination with aerial photo interpretation. Sample field verification to ensure interpretations were accurate was conducted.

In summary four of the 10K areas (10K # 221, 10K # 217, 10K # 316, and 10K # 505) meet or exceed 20% allocation, when allocations for the Eastside project are combined with allocations made under previous analysis, with the following adjustment. An additional site was allocated in the Woody Ridge EA area in 10K # 316 as it had greater potential to meet old growth requirements versus selecting additional sites within the Eastside project area. A recent treatment under the Woody Ridge Timber Sale was field verified to be consistent with promoting and advancing the site toward old growth. The Woody Ridge EA will be appended with a letter to the file to document the additional allocation.

The three remaining 10K's (10K # 209, 10K # 212, and 10K # 213) require additional allocation to meet 20 percent guidelines. Two of these 10K's (10K # 209 and 10K # 213) are currently under analysis through the adjoining Jack Smith/Schultz Fuel Reduction and Forest Health Project. There is currently enough intensive survey information to conclude that the balance of required old growth allocation will meet or exceed the 20 percent standard and guidelines for these areas when that analysis is completed in early 2007.

The remaining 10K (10K # 212) only has a small portion within the project area (approximately 1584 acres of forested land out of 12,176 acres of forested land for the 10K). However, extensive analysis of the area outside the project confirms that that portion of the 10K in the Eastside project area contains most of the better growing sites, and thus approximately 55 percent of the forested acres within the Eastside project have been allocated for this 10K. The remaining forested acres in this 10K are in the cinder hills volcanic field a large portion of which includes the Cinder Hills Off Highway Vehicle (OHV Area) Recreation Area. We have made allocation to the greatest extent possible outside of the OHV area, thus leading to the substantial over allocation within the project area. A detailed acreage assessment is included in the Vegetation Specialist Report, PR # 195, however the following is a summary of acreage allocation by 10K:

Summary of Old-growth Allocations

10K	10K Total Acres	10K Forested Acres	20% of Forested Acres 10K	Project Forested Acres/ (% of 10K)	Current Existing or Designated Old-growth 10K	Designated Old-growth, Project Area/ (% of 10K)/ Project %	Total Old-growth allocated – 10K	Balance Of Acres
221	16,059	1,379*	276	1,379/ (100%)	0	555 (40%)/ 40% Project	555	+279
217	8,629	6,790	1,358	6,521/ (96%)	365	1526(22%)/ 23% Project	1,891	+533
316	37,605	4,440	888	1,206/ (27%)	500	388 (9%)/ 32% Project	907	+19
505	11,173	9,399	1,880	1,427/ (15%)	1,841	683 (7%)/ 48% Project	2,524	+662
209	16,123	13,028	2,606	3,160/ (24%)	899	749 (6%)/ 24% Project	1,648	+4**
213	14,350	13,499	2,700	3,358/ (25%)	214	724 (5%)/ 53% Project	938	0 Plus**
212	12,208	12,176	2,435	1,584/ (13%)	0	869 (X)/ 55% Project	2,435	0 Plus

*Forested acres based on Ponderosa Pine. Remaining acres are Pinyon/Juniper Woodland (PJ) or non-forested. PJ Old-growth not allocated with this action. No treatments in Proposed Action affect PJ old growth.

**Remaining allocation currently being assessed under Jack Smith/Shultz Project.

- Correct the discrepancies in Forest Plan standards for canopy cover within the EA.
- Action Taken: Specialist from the ID Team reviewed canopy cover standards used in the EA (RE: Table 1-3). It was determined that the standards used for Northern goshawk were accurate and that percentages used for Mexican spotted owl habitat were not derived from forest plan standards, however they were intentional. Canopy cover percentages used for Mexican spotted owl habitat were derived from critical habitat primary constituent elements (PCE), related to forest structure. The team worked with these percentages with the partnership and USFWS to describe desired future condition. An explanation of how these percentages were derived has been added to the footnote on FEA page 6.
- Revise the vegetation effects analysis to compare current conditions to Forest Plan standards and to be consistent with the wildlife effects analysis.

Action Taken: The silviculturist and wildlife specialist met and compared reports and EA, Chapter 3 analysis, and corrected any discrepancies between tables, definitions and descriptions in the FEA. Differences were determined to be caused from errors in transfer from the specialist reports to the EA, except one definition on page 56 (FEA, page 61) that is

discussed in the next section. Specialist verified that discrepancies were editorial and caused no changes to the analysis.

- Correct the discrepancies in the definitions of restricted habitat in the EA (page 56 should be consistent with page 84).

Action Taken: It was determined that the definition on EA, page 56 was in error due to using an improper or incomplete canopy cover range requirement. The definition on page 56 (FEA, page 61) was corrected to be consistent with page 84 (FEA, page 89). Specialist verified that this was an editorial mistake and that there was no effect or change to the analysis.

- Add the Community Wildfire Protection Plan for Flagstaff to the record.

Action Taken: The Community Wildfire Protection Plan has been entered into the record, PR # 5B.

- A number of typographical errors were discovered and corrected and the District used this opportunity to also further describe or clarify a number of actions and topics within the FEA, including aspen restoration treatments, and Inter-agency coordination with the National Park Service. Appendix E has been revised to more closely describe Best Management Practices applicable to the Eastside project. These changes, combined with the actions taken in response to the changes requested by the Appeal Reviewing Official have resulted in the FEA for the Eastside Fuels Reduction and Forest Health Project.

RATIONALE FOR CHOOSING THE PROPOSED ACTION ALTERNATIVE

The Proposed Action alternative when compared to no-action 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 the alternative progresses, the desired condition of the reintroduction of low to moderate intensity surface fire will be realized

In addition to making progress on fire hazard reduction and improved health and function of ponderosa pine forest, aspen and grassland ecosystems are restored.

The Proposed Action alternative 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 and interagency coordination.

Interagency coordination measures with the National Park Service at Walnut Canyon National Monument have been included to encourage joint implementation efforts across agency boundaries where vegetation treatment projects are being conducted at the boundaries of both

units of land. Timing treatments across the boundaries, to occur simultaneously as much as possible will lessen visual differences between the land units. Also, mitigation requirements have been identified, in coordination with the Monument associated with the use of the Walnut Canyon National Monument entrance road, which will be a primary haul route for projects between Walnut Canyon and the south boundary of Flagstaff. These mitigations will include contract clauses to address timing restrictions on both, time of year and daily hauling operations, traffic control, signage and road maintenance, (see FEA, page 41).

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, cliff rose protection and 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 FEA page 16 and 17. In addition to these laws and orders, the Eastside project was analyzed under the 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 FEA – Appendix B. 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 C of the FEA discusses the relationship of this project and the CWPP.

Other Alternatives Considered

In addition to the selected alternative, one additional alternative was considered but eliminated from detailed study. This alternative was proposed by the Center for Biological Diversity that had an upper diameter limit of 16” diameter breast height for mechanical treatments (See discussion on FEA page 18). Also, a similar suggestion was made in comments, by the Friends of Walnut Canyon, except the upper diameter limit that was advocated for was 12”. These issues associated with diameter limits were not developed into alternatives considered in detail. In addition to an artificial diameter cap affecting the ability to meet the projects Purpose and Need and Desired Future Conditions, this authorized fuel reduction project is planned in the Wildland/Urban Interface (WUI), no farther than 1 ½ miles from the boundary of an at risk community, and the Proposed Action implements the recommendations of the Community Wildfire Protection Plan, as noted in section 104, subsection d of the Healthy Forests Restoration Act, the Districts are not required to study, develop, or describe any alternative to the Proposed Action in the Environmental assessment, pursuant to Section 102(2) of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (42 U.D.C. 4332(2), (See discussion on FEA page 18-19).

The Effects No Action

No Action, where current management plans would continue to guide management of the project area was used to disclose and compare the existing and projected future conditions against the Proposed Action. No Action or no treatment does not reduce fire hazard, which keeps the community of 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. No Action, does not meet any of the goals of the Purpose and Need for the project. The analysis of no action as compared to the Proposed Action is discussed in detail in Chapter 3 of the FEA.

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 2006. In addition, as part of the public involvement process, the agency held public meetings in Flagstaff and Doney Park 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. Issues such as noxious and invasive weed management, various concerns specific to thinning and prescribed burn treatments, old-growth management, effects to archaeological resources, rare plants, and large tree management were identified. These issues have been addressed through the Proposed Action, project design features, monitoring activities, and effects analysis located in Chapter 3, and as described under alternatives not considered in detail. Concerns identified during the objection process regarding old-growth allocation, Management Indicator Species, and Forest Plan standards for canopy cover for northern goshawk and Mexican spotted owl habitat have already been addressed above.

Finding of No Significant Impact

After considering the environmental effects described in the FEA, 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).

1. My finding of no significant environmental effects is not biased by the beneficial effects of the action. As described in the FEA in Chapter 3 and Appendix's D and E – Best Management Practices for the Eastside Fuels Reduction and Forest Health 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 FEA, Chapter 3, pages 46 – 184 and Appendix D).

2. 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 FEA.
3. 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. The project shares boundary with Walnut Canyon National Monument along the southeast corner of the project. The Forest Service and National Park Service have closely coordinated to ensure that there are no adverse effects on National Monument lands. The National Monument is also working on reducing fire risk within the Monument boundaries and the two agencies have agreed to work closely together with timing and blending of treatments. They have also identified the intention to share implementation timing and resources when possible. Though there are some short term impacts from activities on associated Forest Service lands, due to prescribed burning activities and product hauling, both agencies recognize that the benefits of reducing the fire risk and hazard to this national treasure, more than outweigh the short term impacts, (see FEA, page 41). 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.
4. 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 Eastside Fuels Reduction and Forest Health 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.
5. 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 FEA, Chapter 3, pages 46 - 184).
6. 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 FEA, Chapter 3, pages 46 – 184.

7. 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 FEA. 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 FEA and are generally minor and do not cause significant effects when considered with other activities in the general area.
8. The action will have no adverse effect on project area districts, highways, or structures because there are none of these resources in the project area. Concerning historic and prehistoric cultural resources sites. Project implementation and project area specific requirements are addressed in six separate reports: Campbell Mesa (2005-57), Elden Base (2004-46), Limestone (2004-28), Schultz (2004-270), Timberline (2003-41) and Turkey Hills (2004-47). Each of these reports identifies site eligibility, survey coverage, site types, fire tolerant and intolerant sites, and other information specific to those surveys. All fire intolerant sites will be avoided and protected. No ground disturbing activities will be allowed within any eligible archaeological properties. Fire tolerant sites are identified in each individual report and describe the conditions and mitigations required before treatment. 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 through fuel reduction in and or around eligible historic properties. An Archaeological Clearance Report signed by the SHPO July 17, 2006 is located in PR # 118
9. The action will not adversely affect any endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species act of 1973. Possible effects to Federally listed wildlife species were analyzed in the Forest Service's Biological Assessment and Evaluation (PR # 177).and in Chapter 3 of the FEA. T&E species were addressed through consultation with USFWS. The USFWS has concluded that implementation of the project "may affect, but is not likely to adversely affect", the threatened bald eagle, and the threatened Mexican spotted owl and its critical habitat. Therefore, no significant effects to threatened or endangered species of plants or animals or habitat critical for the management of these species, are anticipated, (USFWS Letter of Concurrence, PR# 188, 10/27/2006).
10. 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 FEA (see FEA page 16-17). The action is consistent with the Coconino National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (See FEA page 18).

I find that implementing the Proposed Action 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

This decision to implement the Proposed Action 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 included in the Eastside project. Table 1-1 of the FEA, page 3 describes inclusive 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 Eastside Fuels Reduction and Forest Health project meets the requirements to be an authorized hazardous-fuel reduction project, as defined by the HFRA (Section 101(2), for National Forest Service lands analyzed in and FEA.

Implementation Date

The Eastside project was analyzed under the Healthy Forest Restoration Act (HFRA) authority and thus is not subject to the 215 Appeal Regulations. 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 Eastside project was initiated October 10, 2006 with the issuance of a legal notice of the EA in the newspaper of record, (Project Record #185, 10/09/2006) and closed on November 8, 2006. On November 08, 2006 an objection was received from the Center for Biological Diversity with a proper post-mark of November 08, 2006. All requirements for response to the objection by the reviewing official have been met. The objector has established the right to Judicial Review as defined in Title I of the HFRA, Section 106(a).

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
Peaks and Mormon Lake Ranger Districts

January 8, 2007
Date

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