Dear Friends and Neighbors:

The Pecos/Las Vegas Ranger District of the Santa Fe National Forest proposes to create a shaded fuel break along Forest System Road (FR) 375. The number of acres proposed for thinning is approximately 850, and the number proposed for burning is about 960.

This project is to be accomplished under the authority of the Healthy Forests Initiative categorical exclusion (FSH 1909.15, 31.2, category 10). These five blocks are located in a wildland-urban interface area, have been identified through a collaborative process, and are not located in or near wilderness areas. The proposed action does not include the use of herbicides or pesticides or the construction of new roads or permanent infrastructure, and is consistent with departmental procedures and the Santa Fe National Forest Plan.

The District would like your comments and issues regarding this project. To be the most helpful, please send your comments by August 30, 2004 to Joseph Reddan, District Ranger, Pecos/Las Vegas Ranger District, P.O. Drawer 429, Pecos, NM 87552. You may also send an e-mail to comments-southwestern-santafe-pecos-lasvegas@fs.fed.us (.doc, .rtf, or .txt only). If you have questions about the technical aspects of the project, please call Duane Archuleta at 505-757-6121.

Sincerely,

JOSEPH G. REDDAN
District Ranger
Enclosures

Purpose and Need

The purpose of the project is to reduce the potential for a large-scale, high-intensity, crowning wildfire to spread to or from the Glorieta Lifeway Conference Center, the communities of Glorieta and La Cueva, Dalton Canyon, or the Santa Fe Watershed. As such, treated stands need to:

- Have flame lengths of 4 feet or less;
- Have a torching index greater than 35 miles per hour; and
- Not support active crown fire.

To achieve these objectives, there is a need for fewer small diameter trees that act as abundant ladder fuels, less underbrush, less natural slash and activity slash, and more open crown spacing in the canopy. The fuel break would be comprised of five sections, Blocks A through D and the Alamitos thinning (see map). The blocks differ in their current composition of species and structure, and would differ once treated. In other words, not every block has the same desired condition, as illustrated below.

Existing Condition

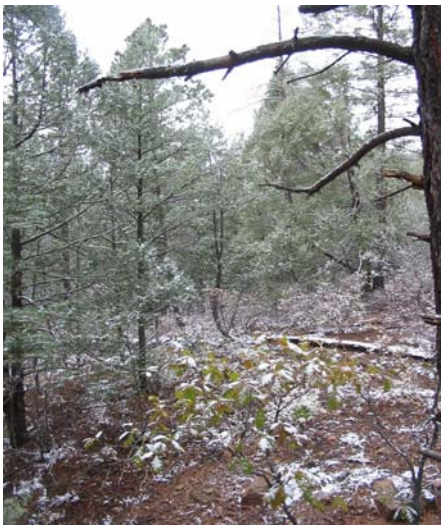
Block A – has a substantial amount of mistletoe (see photo). The portion of the block southwest of FR 375 (see map) has abundant white fir, the most of the five blocks. The basal area of the block averages about 120. The fuel model is 10.

Example of mistletoe-infected stand, Block A. November 2002

Block B – Northeast of FR 375, the basal area is at the upper end of the desirable range (about 80). Southwest of FR 375, the basal area is higher (see photo below and map). The block is comprised primarily of ponderosa pine trees and short needle conifers (white fir) aged about 70 years old, interspersed with some smaller pinyon-juniper and white fir. The fuel models are 8 and 9.

Example of stand conditions, Block B.
May 2004

Block C – is a transitional zone from pinyon-juniper to ponderosa pine. The basal area is at the upper end of the desirable range (about 80); however, ladder fuels are prevalent (see next photo). In addition, there is some mistletoe. The fuel model is 9.


Example of stand conditions, Block C.
November 2002

Block D – was ponderosa pine, but is being encroached upon by pinyon and juniper. The ponderosa pine component has a large number of stems per acre. With the pinyon-juniper acting as ladder fuels, this stand has two stories. The fuel model is 6. The fuel loading is approximately 7 to 10 tons/acre. (Map reference)


Example of stand conditions, Block D.
November 2002

Alamitos Thinning – This area was thinned in 2003. The block is comprised of ponderosa pine trees. Due to the thinning, slash is approximately two feet deep spread evenly across the block.


Green slash in Alamitos, January 2002.


Example of desired future condition in ponderosa pine (40-60 basal area).

Desired Future Condition

Block A – Southwest of FR 375 would have a basal area of about 60 and fewer white fir trees. Larger ponderosa pine, Douglas-fir, and aspen trees would remain in the stands. Northeast of FR 375 would have a basal area ranging from 60 to 80. The residual spacing would range from 18 feet by 18 feet (135 trees per acre) or 20 feet by 20 feet (109 TPA). The fuel model would be 8.

Block B – The basal area of this block would average about 60. There would be less understory vegetation. The residual spacing would be 20 feet by 20 feet and be based on terrain. In other words, rather than having trees spaced evenly apart, there would be clumps of trees with more open spaces between them. The fuel model would be nine 9.

Block C – would have fewer ladder fuels, especially in the ponderosa pine. The basal area would average 40. Most large Douglas-fir trees would remain, and smaller ponderosa pine and mistletoe-infected trees would not be dominant. The fuel model would be 9.

Block D – would be a one-storied stand dominated by ponderosa pine. There would be very few pinyon or juniper trees located on steep slopes. The canopy closure would be from 20 to 30%. The fuel loading, comprised mainly of material greater than three inches in diameter, would be about 5 to 7 tons per acre. The fuel model would be 9.

Alamitos Thinning – The fuel loading would be about 5 to 7 tons per acre, in 3 inch and larger pieces.


Example of desired future condition in mixed conifer (80 – 90 basal area).

Proposed Action

The District would use a variety of treatments and treatment tools to achieve our desired future condition, such as thinning by hand or by machine, piling slash by hand or by machine, burning piles, and broadcast underburns.

Block A – Remove white fir (up to 24 inches in diameter) and target small (< 9") and medium (< 18") trees of other species; or any size tree (up to 24") of any present species depending upon its crown spacing by using timber sale contracting or service contracting. After thinning, slash would be piled and burned, either by hand or with heavy equipment, followed by a broadcast burn.

Block B – For the northeast portion of block B, perform an underburn. In the southwest portion of Block B, thin target tree species from below to create firewood for public consumption. Since two roads easily access this portion, it would be opened to the public to collect firewood. Slash less than four inches in diameter would be piled by machine and/or hand and burned. Finally, a broadcast burn would eliminate smaller vegetation and seedlings.

Block C – Thin the ponderosa pine trees from below, leaving the larger Douglas-fir. Ponderosa pine and Douglas-fir infected with dwarf mistletoe would also be removed. Activity slash will be hand and/or machine piled and burned followed by an underburn.

Block D - Thin most juniper and small pinyon and ponderosa pine trees in this stand. After thinning, the block would be open to the public to collect firewood. Activity slash will be hand and/or machine piled. The piles would be burned, and then followed by a broadcast underburn.

Alamitos Thinning – The activity slash resulting from the thinning operations and public firewood operations would be piled by hand or machine. The slash piles would be burned. After the piles are burned, a broadcast burn would clean up any remaining slash and litter.