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Nation's Largest Forest Health Project to Heal Local Economies *With 300 New Jobs!*

FLAGSTAFF, Ariz. – Economists working with the Ecological Restoration Institute at Northern Arizona University predict the nation's largest landscape-scale restoration effort will create 300 new full-time jobs in the woods.

The Four Forest Restoration Initiative is an ambitious effort to treat some 2.4 million acres of overcrowded ponderosa pine forest across the Mogollon Rim – 50,000 acres annually – during the next 20 years.

Researchers say the work of forest thinning is labor intensive. However, since the 1980s, the forest-based workforce and infrastructure, such as timber mills, required to accomplish the goals of the 4FRI have largely decreased. They say to be successful the 4FRI project will require a skilled workforce and new infrastructure investments.

"This analysis provides encouraging news for Northern Arizona where unemployment remains high. It is a true win-win situation that we can create hundreds of jobs *and* reduce the threat of unnatural wildfire to our communities and forests by moving forward on forest restoration," said Coconino County Supervisor Mandy Metzger.

To understand the 4FRI workforce needs, the ERI commissioned the Arizona Rural Policy Institute at NAU to study how many jobs in the wood harvest sector will be needed to achieve the goals of the 4FRI. Results reveal the likely workforce will include 69 Forest Service positions that are already in place and 422 private sector jobs that would include cutting, skidding, delimiting, slashing and loading. Of these 422, the study says about 300 will be new jobs in the woods. The 4FRI will generate hauling and manufacturing jobs as well; however, those jobs were not analyzed in this study.

"In order for forest restoration to be successful, people must be a part of the solution," said Ecological Restoration Institute at NAU Executive Director Wally Covington, Ph.D. "The Four Forest Restoration Initiative will create sustainable natural resource based economic opportunities and enhance the well-being of current and future generations of Arizonans."

"The 4FRI is one of the best examples of sustainable economic development I have seen in Arizona," said NAU's W. A. Franke College of Business Director of the Arizona Rural Policy Institute Wayne Fox. "It is impressive to see stakeholders who have not traditionally always been in philosophical agreement come together for the common good."

In the event that specialized workforce training is needed, communities will be looking to schools such as Coconino Community College and Northland Pioneer College.

The 4FRI is a collaborative effort of stakeholders including the Forest Service, conservation organizations, elected officials, private businesses and scientists. Goals include protecting the forest and communities from unnaturally intense wildfires, restoring important watersheds and wildlife habitat, and benefiting local economies.

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