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Organization:

Title:

Comments:

To: Mr. James Melonas, Forest Supervisor

Subj: Comments on SF Mountains Landscape Resiliency Project

I'm writing to express some ideas, suggestions, and concerns regarding the subject project.

1. The Forest. As you know, the Santa Fe National Forest extends over a great many different environmental regions. Where I live, near Ca[ntilde]jada de los Alamos, has been referred to as a "marginal zone" of the Forest. At 7800 ft, we are very near the southern edge of the Ponderosa forest. Due to the past 10-15 years of drought and high summer temperatures, this southern big-tree forest edge has been slowly moving north, following the rain and cooler temperatures. The understory and most ground animals have already largely disappeared. In essence, our part of the forest is thinning itself, and doesn't require much, if any, assistance to accelerate this process. I'd rather see attempts to nurture the remaining trees, slow the Forest's northward migration, and to restore the soil, understory, and wildlife habitat. On our own property, which abuts the Forest, we have completed several permaculture projects to slow water flow and soil erosion during monsoon rains. Essentially, we are attempting to keep the soil and water as high up-slope as possible. I'd like to see the Forest Service adopt similar goals for those parts of the Forest particularly susceptible to erosion. These actions will not necessarily stop high-temperature and drought-related changes to the Forest, but there is no reason for us to willfully accelerate these adverse effects by over-thinning. Another positive step would be to reintroduce beaver into Apache Canyon. Recently, I've hiked into this canyon with my wife and neighbor Dyan Oldenburg to see where beaver have partially dammed the creek and created a beautiful wetland meadow environment (35.62633 lat., -105.83827 long. See map.). This is an example of delicate part of our Forest which needs restoration and protection, not thinning.

2. Fire. I am greatly appreciative to the USFS for their fire fighting work. These are brave men and women, and they deserve our sincere gratitude. But I would not advocate thinning the entire Forest to protect those private properties (like mine) near to Forest boundaries. In our neighborhood, many have taken steps to firesafe our homes. These efforts include having metal roofs, creating defensible areas, completing multiple inspections (by individual home insurers and U.S. Forest Service representatives), and installing a 30,000 gallon fire suppression tank for neighborhood use. Those of us who choose to live near the Forest should, in my opinion, accept the major responsibility for making our properties as fire-resilient as possible. USDA/USFS efforts like the Wood Innovations Grant program are a great idea, and should be continued.

3. Emergency Egress. The USFS could also consider improving emergency fire egress routes. Included below is a map showing one suggestion near our home. It is a route from Forest Road 79 (35.61894 lat., -105.86119 long.) to La Barberia Rd. It is currently a hiking trail and crosses private property, but might be suitable for widening to accept AWD vehicles. If Ca[ntilde]jada Village Rd. is blocked, this route could potentially provide an emergency exit for my community to Old Santa Fe Trail.

4. Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). Finally, I'd like to encourage the Forest Service to conduct a full EIS. This project is just too large in scale, home to too many recreational activities, sensitive habitats, and surrounded by a property owners (like myself) who bought homes here because of access to a vast and beautiful forest. My wife and I take daily hikes into the Forest, and recently we've been wondering how the current vistas will appear post-thinning. To help answer that question, we hiked Black Canyon Trail to the Santa Fe Municipal Watershed, and were disheartened by the degree of thinning already accomplished there. Is that what we should expect along Forest Road 79 and Apache Canyon? Not having been provided specific information about the thinning planned near our home, it's all too easy to assume a worst case; i.e., 90%. That would be devastating to us personally, but also to the remaining animal habitat and carbon sequestering capability of our landscape. I doubt we would have purchased property here 5 years ago, if thinning to that degree had been completed or even seriously contemplated. It might be the case that the Forest Service has not shared a location-specific thinning plan because that plan has yet to be developed. If so, an EIS would allow a more complete specification of how much thinning is planned, of what type, and in what location.

Without such specifics, how can those of us living every day with the Forest assess the necessity and wisdom of this project?