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Organization:

Title:

Comments:

Santa Fe Mountains Landscape Resiliency Project

Dear Staff of the Santa Fe National Forest,

I was very involved in writing the WildEarth Guardians and Defenders of the Wildlife comments, so I have gone into many of the issues relating to the SFMLRP Scoping Document and the project. The following comments are my personal comments.

I am strongly urging the USFS to complete an Environmental Impact Statement for this large-scale and clearly impactful project. NEPA law requires an EIS for projects that may have significant impact on the human environment, which this project will because many people, including myself, experience that the prescribed burn smoke negatively impacts our health. Thinning and prescribed burning takes away from the beauty and enjoyment of our local forest. We feel emotions ranging from sad, to devastated, to angry when we see stump fields and strewn cut up trees where a beautiful forest used to be. NEPA law also requires that an EIS be completed for projects that may have significant impacts on resources such as Inventoried Roadless Area, wildlife, riparian ways, air quality and recreation. It is clear there will be significant impacts, and this project is also highly controversial.

Analysis should be site-specific, it is not acceptable to use the condition-based approach, and likely not in accordance with NEPA law.

We need much more information than was contained in the Scoping Document, in almost every respect.

I have been deeply concerned about where this project is headed. I think there is a fairly high probability that if you go forward with the types of thinning prescriptions that have been done in recent years on the Eastside SFNF on a large-scale, or even with prescriptions that are a little better, some type of environmental disaster will occur. I fear for the forest. I am asking that you step back and re-evaluate many of the assumptions you are proceeding with. Take some time to plan a good project that promotes forest health instead of damaging it. Do an EIS and include a broad range of scientific research and perspective. Genuinely include the public in the process.

I understand that the forest is in trouble either way, whether we do fuel treatments or not, but I trust nature to find it's appropriate balance in order to recover from past damaging practices such as logging, grazing and unchecked OHV use in the forest, and from the warming and drying of the climate. And sometimes it will be very painful to see.

But humans going out and cutting down the vast majority of trees, trampling the fragile soil and demolishing the understory is so much worse. And then burning off whatever tries to come back. What right do we have to do that? What right do we have to demolish wildlife habitat, the habitat of the wildlife living in the forest right now-who are alive and sentient and feel pain. And trees are alive too.

Are you certain you know how to redesign the ecosystem? It's very complex. It's easy for it to go very wrong.

Here in Canada de los Alamos, when trees were thinned under the NRCS grant program, we saw that the pinons that were not cut started to look very unhealthy with short and sparse needles. They still do. That is important and should be considered, as well as the bark beetle outbreak that started from the slash left through the warm season. How will you prevent that from happening on a much larger scale? I am requesting that you try to understand the lessons of what happened here from thinning prescriptions almost identical to the prescriptions USFS silviculturists write.

I understand you are under a lot of pressure from up the USFS chain of command and some elected representatives to get the job done, and do fuel treatments over large areas of our local forest-and fast. If ever there was a time to stand up for what is right, this is it. It is unclear if our forests would recover from the impacts of such large-scale and heavy-handed treatments. Slow down and do full and thorough analysis.

The concept of cutting down the majority of trees, then burning periodically after that, so the forest understory never really recovers and the ground is dry and parched in-between the widely spaced individual leave trees, even if some grasses grow back until they are burned off again, is not an ecologically sound concept.

It's not respectful to the natural world which has order, value and life of it's own.

Please consider something much more light-handed, targeted and limited. Please enlist the help of environmental organizations who want to help. Please listen to the many people of Santa Fe who want to protect the forests from such extreme treatments. If you look at the comments coming in on the FS scoping comment reading room site, about 90% want the USFS to slow down, do the analysis and respect the "mind" and "knowing" of the natural world, and do an EIS. And some want you to stop entirely.

Please respect the understanding of those of us who choose to live among the trees and see them on a daily basis, and see that they are often very badly impacted by thinning treatments and the forest does not seem to be recovering from the impacts of thinning projects.

I request that the Santa Fe Conservation Alternative be fully analyzed and seriously considered as a more reasonable way to protect what we value, while being ecologically sound and respectful of the natural world-both during the environmental assessment you are in process of completing, and for a subsequent EIS.

Thank you,

Sarah Hyden
Resident of Canada de los Alamos