



March 23, 2022

U.S. Forest Service
Coronado National Forest
Safford Ranger District
Attn: George Garcia, District Ranger
711 S 14th Avenue
Safford, AZ 85546

Electronically submitted to: <https://cara.fs2c.usda.gov/Public/CommentInput?Project=56958>

RE: Pinaleño FireScape Project Draft Environmental Assessment

Dear Mr. Garcia:

The Arizona Game and Fish Department (Department) appreciates the opportunity to comment on the Pinaleño FireScape (PFS) project to authorize planned restoration/vegetation treatment actions aimed at achieving multiple resource benefits. It is the Department's understanding that treatments could include a mix of fire and non-fire treatments to improve conditions by decreasing vegetative fuel loading and promoting ecosystem health.

Under Title 17 of the Arizona Revised Statutes, the Department, by and through the Arizona Game and Fish Commission (Commission), has jurisdictional authority and public trust responsibilities to protect and conserve the state fish and wildlife resources. In addition, the Department manages threatened and endangered species through authorities of Section 6 of the Endangered Species Act and the Department's 10(a)1(A) permit. It is the mission of the Department to conserve and protect Arizona's diverse fish and wildlife resources and manage for safe, compatible outdoor recreation opportunities for current and future generations. For your consideration, the Department provides the following comments based on the agency's statutory authorities, public trust responsibilities, and special expertise related to wildlife resources and recreation.

The Department is supportive of this landscape-level effort which should benefit multiple species and habitats within the Pinaleño Ecosystem Management Area (EMA). In the current situation of drought, heavy fuel loading, and hotter and drier weather, catastrophic wildfire is a primary immediate threat to the EMA. In fact, before the Pinaleño Ecosystem Restoration Project (PERP) could be implemented, the Frye Fire preemptively changed much of the landscape. This project will increase resiliency for habitat for a wide range of species. The Department has supported funding this project through big game tag funds via our Habitat Partnership Committee (HPC) and referenced this project in the Pinaleño Land Snail Conservation Agreement as a means for fuel and fire management to restore and manage forest health. The goals of this effort are

azgfd.gov | 520.628.5376

TUCSON OFFICE: 555 N. GREASEWOOD ROAD, TUCSON AZ 85745

GOVERNOR: DOUGLAS A. DUCEY COMMISSIONERS: CHAIRMAN LELAND S. "BILL" BRAKE, ELGIN | JAMES E. GOUGHNOUR, PAYSON
TODD G. GEILER, PRESCOTT | CLAY HERNANDEZ, TUCSON | KURT R. DAVIS, PHOENIX DIRECTOR: TY E. GRAY DEPUTY DIRECTOR: TOM P. FINLEY

anticipated to provide conservation benefits to species as diverse as whitetailed deer, Gould's turkeys, and native land snails within the mountain range.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input on the Pinaleño FireScape Project. The Department looks forward to collaboration and providing our technical expertise as it relates to wildlife on this endeavor. For further coordination, please contact me at rvega@azgfd.gov or 520-628-5376.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Raul A. Vega". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Raul" being more prominent.

Raul Vega
Regional Supervisor, Tucson

cc: Luke Thompson, Habitat, Evaluation, and Lands Branch Chief
Ginger Ritter, Project Evaluation Program Supervisor

AZGFD # M22-02282344