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Comments: RE: Salter Vegetation Management Proposal

On the surface, this project seems like an obvious win for the Forest Service. Thinning overgrown, tinder-dry forests is a massive undertaking; increased logging by local wood milling companies seems like a winning arrangement for both parties. However, absent regulation and oversight of the area's wood mills, the risk of wildfire may simply be transferred from deep within the forest to the more populous and equally fire-prone surrounding areas where the sawmills are located.

Fires at sawmills and forestry product plants are a very real threat. Currently, a fire is still smoldering at one of the sawmills included in the Salter Vegetation Management proposal. The Aspen Wall Wood fire began in December as a result of spontaneous combustion of their wood waste pile, which had been bulldozed off the cliff edge of their property for many years. The fire grew to 10 acres before it was contained, and could easily have spread into the surrounding forested areas had it not been for the swift response and cooperation of local firefighters, coupled with the good timing of a heavy winter snow-storm.

While the Cortez Journal reported that Aspen Wall Wood company has not been disposing of wood waste this way for many years, a recent drive-by the smoldering fire tells a different story. Curious about the status of the fire after the Journal's recent report on March 1st, I drove by the site the following day to check it out. I was dismayed to see a huge, fresh new pile of sawdust recently been pushed off the cliff's edge, right on top of known hotspots and a still-smoldering fire. This illustrates that the company has learned little from this fire, now burning for months (and causing neighbors to suffer from the constant smoke).

There are currently no regulations in Montezuma County for how sawmills should manage their highly combustible wood waste products. What will become of the waste from the products the wood mills will produce from logging operations in the Salter/Boggy Forests?

Please, Forest Service, please ensure that proper fire prevention plans are in place for the local sawmills that would benefit from this proposal.

Here are some links to articles in the Cortez Journal about the ongoing fire:

LINK ---- <https://the-journal.com/articles/196125-update-fire-threatened-entire-dolores-sawmill-owner-says>

LINK -- <https://the-journal.com/articles/196734-aspen-wall-wood-fire-continues-to-burn-and-smoke>

LINK --- <https://the-journal.com/articles/203682-wood-mill-fire-subsidies-smoldering-to-continue>

And a link with information about the general risk of fire at sawmills:

LINK ---- <https://www.biomassengineeringequipment.com/fire-safety-sawmills-forestry-plants-dust-hazard-assessment/>

