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Organization: Forest Stewards Guild

Title: Southwest Assistant Director

Comments: Rooted in our recognition of the intrinsic value of our native landscapes, the Forest Stewards Guild has been practicing and promoting responsible forestry for over 25 years. As a founding member of the Greater Santa Fe Fireshed Coalition, we advocate for active ecological management in the Southwest and beyond. We support the proposed use of thinning and prescribed fire in The Santa Fe Mountains Landscape Resiliency Project to protect important ecological and human values within this priority landscape from increased wildfire and drought associated with changing climatic conditions and to restore forest and watershed health.

As the global climate changes, temperature increases and overcrowded forests from a century of fire suppression have changed the structure and composition of the forests surrounding Santa Fe, increasing their vulnerability to insect outbreaks, disease, and high severity wildfire. The susceptibility of adjacent forests to high severity wildfire, of our watersheds to dramatic post-fire flooding and erosion, and of our local economy to the disruption wreaked by these natural disasters translates to vulnerability of our communities. These projected environmental conditions also create cascading effects in the water-limited state of New Mexico, making it critical that we do everything in our power to protect our water resources. Almost half of The City of Santa Fe's municipal drinking water comes from the forested mountains that surround us. Protecting this clean water source from high severity fire requires the ecologically-sensitive and science-driven forest management that is proposed in this project.

We acknowledge that managing wildfire hazard is not the only consideration on federal forestland, and we support the landscape-scale scope of this 50,566 acre vegetation management project. The project aligns with the Fireshed Coalition's stated mission to "use a proactive collaborative approach to improve the health and long-term resilience of forested watersheds and communities" [by] identify(ing) and implement(ing) high priority on-the-ground projects that make the Fireshed and its communities more resilient to wildfire while maintaining and restoring resilient landscapes." The Guild is actively collaborating with diverse partners to carry out this mission, including developing the Multiparty Monitoring Plan that is intended to complement and support Forest Service monitoring and community engagement in the Santa Fe Mountains Landscape Resiliency Project. The Guild will support the final planning and implementation of the Santa Fe Mountains Landscape Resiliency Project as an integral landscape resiliency project.

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