



May 31, 2020

Mr. Joshua Hall
Ecosystem Staff Officer
Santa Fe National Forest
11 Forest Lane
Santa Fe, NM 87508

Dear Mr. Hall:

I am writing on behalf of the Albuquerque Wildlife Federation (AWF), an all-volunteer organization founded by Aldo Leopold in 1914 and dedicated to protecting New Mexico's wildlife and habitat resources for present and future generations.

AWF submits these comments in response to the proposed Northern New Mexico Riparian, Aquatic, and Wetland Restoration Project Environmental Assessment (EA) for the Santa Fe, Carson and Cibola National Forests as well as the Kiowa National Grasslands. AWF is a long-time Forest Service partner, and over the past four decades we have organized riparian and wetland restoration projects in many of the areas covered by this EA.

We strongly support Planned Action Alternative B. We are in complete agreement that "There is a need to increase the pace and scale of riparian, wetland, and aquatic ecosystem restoration by providing a more efficient process for implementing projects that would aid in the recovery of threatened, endangered, and sensitive species, their associated habitats, watershed health, and water quality." (page 3)

We are very pleased that the Planned Action Alternative B would increase restoration project areas to 2,000 acres annually across all forests and the grasslands, increase the number of annual projects from 9-28 in No Action Alternative A to 24-51 in Proposed Action B (pages 12 and 17), and treat 5-20% of Hydrological Unit Code-6 sub-watersheds. AWF supports the Forest Service implementing as many restoration projects annually as possible, as we have observed that there are numerous wetland and riparian areas throughout these forests and grasslands that would benefit from this work.

We appreciate that the proposed flexible toolbox approach identifies processes, pages 19, rather than “form-based projects.” The projects that AWF organizes in partnership with agencies like the Forest Service all aim to be process-based, using streamflow, low-impact rock structures, and native vegetation to improve riparian and wetland habitat and restore the processes that sustain that habitat.

We also appreciate that the EA acknowledges the importance of collaboration with nongovernmental organizations, like AWF, in planning and implementing restoration projects (pages 19-20). We encourage you to maximize the effectiveness of these collaborations by allowing partner organizations to assist with monitoring and maintaining projects after they are completed, and even enhance them within the parameters of the approved EA.

We encourage you to approve and implement Proposed Action Alternative B, and AWF stands ready to partner with the Forest Service on expanded restoration projects throughout the Santa Fe, Carson and Cibola National Forests.

Thank you for considering our comments.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Cameron Weber', with a stylized, flowing script.

Cameron Weber, President
Albuquerque Wildlife Federation
P.O. Box 20225
Albuquerque, NM 87154