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Comments: Comments on the USFS Riparian Project:

The greatest threat to riparian areas of USFS land is the current state of the watersheds that supply riparian areas. Overgrowth in much of the USFS has degraded the forest health and placed these areas at risk of a catastrophic fire. The primary strategy to improve riparian areas should be watershed restoration. The USFS should institute permanent programs that utilize the key tools to address and eliminate the overgrowth in the forest: commercial logging, thinning, wood gathering, and controlled burning.

Prior to the 1980s, small and typically family-based logging companies thinned forest through timber contracts with USFS. They removed trees based on USFS direction, providing affordable building materials for the community, and contributed to the local economy. Environmental groups got injunctions in place that stopped logging, put small family logging enterprise out of business, and has led to the overgrown forest conditions this plan hopes to reverse. Understanding the challenges of small diameter timber, USFS needs to work with local and state government to create the facilities to process the harvested timber. A private example of this is timber/processing operation that Louis Bacon sponsored in Southern Colorado which is restoring the ecological condition of his private land and providing a processing facility for other small logging interests in the area. This is a win-win situation providing both ecological forest restoration and economic development. The same result is achievable in New Mexico with USFS and community partnerships.

Thinning projects should be selectively used to address areas unsuitable for logging within the catastrophic fire avoidance strategy. Wood gathering provides the dual benefit of removing opening the ground for plant growth and providing heating fuel for the community. USFS controlled burns reduce slash and fuel that would contribute to unwanted wildfire.

Improved water facilities for livestock and wildlife is another strategy that reduces impact to riparian areas. Water catchments located away from riparian areas serve to better utilize the grass resources for livestock and wildlife by concentrating animals on underutilized areas and improving the range.