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Organization:

Title:

Comments: To: Debbie Cress, Forest Supervisor SFNF

From: Billie Bolton, concerned citizen, Dixon, NM

Re: The Santa Fe Mountains Landscape Resiliency Project

I frequently go to the Santa Fe National Forest for hiking and picnicking, as do thousands of other New Mexicans and tourists. I am also interested in forests from a climate perspective. Alarmed by the effects of global warming, my church in Santa Fe has actively been trying to find opportunities to plant more trees around the state. So obviously, I was shocked to discover, at a very late date, about the SFNF's plan to cut down the majority of trees on 50,000 acres just outside of Santa Fe in a proposed "thinning"! I am very disappointed that the specifics of this plan have not been aired more in the media so that we could learn more about it. To learn that only a small number of the 5,000 citizen comments submitted have been made available to the other citizens was also deeply disturbing. The Forest Service needs to be open and include the public to a greater extent on any forest plans that substantially change the ecology and health of the forest because the forest's health is inextricably linked to human health and well-being. After all, this is OUR FOREST TOO and it is in our community. We should be included more in the decision making process.

Gifford Pinchot, first chief of the U.S. Forest Service, often said: "Conservation is the foresighted utilization, preservation and/or renewal of forests, waters, lands and minerals for the greatest good of the greatest number for the longest time." It has become the agency's motto. Yet in the age of climate change, the Forest Service has failed to re-evaluate what exactly constitutes the greatest good for society. As far as I can tell from reading this plan, the only ones that will benefit are the logging companies. It certainly will not preserve and maintain the forest. It will remove thousands of trees that normally would clean the air and create more moisture in a very dry area. It will increase health risks from the smoke of repeated burnings. And the natural forest ecosystem will essentially be wiped out, affecting wildlife in a negative way.... And as we saw in California, thinning the forests near a town did not stop them from being burned down.

In view of the fact that the project will have significant impacts on the human environment in addition to damaging forest resources, then it

is absolutely necessary for a comprehensive Environmental Impact Statement to be done. The E.I.S. should include a full range of alternatives. It is a very controversial project, particularly because of how much it impacts the citizens of Santa Fe, and because of its mere size. The effects on the community's health and on forest resources has not been adequately analyzed. A range of alternatives is required. "Action" and "No Action" are not enough. There must be other alternatives, including a conservation alternative. A range of alternatives will provide options to find a solution that is acceptable to the public and beneficial to the forest ecosystem.

Below are my reasons for requesting the Environmental Impact Statement:

1) Forests clean the air, cool the temperature and attract moisture to the Santa Fe area. For this to work, we have to leave our

forests intact as a functioning forest. This plan does the opposite. I have seen photos of what the SFNF has already done in the name of

"thinning". What you have already done leaves a barren, non functional landscape where the forest ecology, soil ecology and wildlife habitat

are mostly wiped out. Essentially there is no "forest" left. This would not be a plan that Gifford Pinchot would approve.

The number of trees removed needs to be greatly reduced, by as much as 75%. We need more trees, not fewer! Forests that

are thinned and/or logged tend to burn more often and at a higher intensity, not at a lower intensity.

2) A broad range of the best available science must be incorporated in the planning and analysis of this project. Everything that I have read proves that, so far, this has not been done. We must take climate change into account! We must take overall tree health, soil health and wildlife into account. The current environmental assessment does not do that.

3) There is no analysis of the health effects of the increased amount of smoke the public will breathe due to prescribed burning. This is

a big concern. I am one of the people who were not able to leave my house this year due to the huge amount of smoke in the air from

wildfires in the west. It has not been proven that prescribed burns replace wildfire or that prescribed burns do not increase the amount of

smoke that we breathe. The Forest Service must do the analysis to determine how much more smoke the public will be breathing as a

result of this project, compared to the "No Action" alternative.

4) The following condition-based plan is totally UNACCEPTABLE. The parameters for treatments are so general in this plan that we do

not know where the treatments will occur or how they will be carried out in a site-specific way.

The Environmental Assessment says....

"There are maps that show potential thinning/burning units across the project area, but it is also stated that treatments may be implemented outside of the areas designated on the maps: "The actual location of forest treatments would occur where deemed appropriate at the time of implementation."

The treatment plan must be site specific.

5) Thinning from approximately 500 trees per acre down to 2-50 trees per acre is approaching a CLEARCUT! It leaves the forest too

open and dry. More trees can be blown down from high winds.

6) We need more information about where and how treatments would occur in roadless areas, which are intended to be preserved in a natural state. There are enough roads into the forest already. And more roads become more places for water to run off.

7) The Forest Service used studies done by scientists that agree with their aggressive ecological perspective and virtually none from scientists with

a conservation perspective, which should really be the Forest Service's perspective.

8) The areas of the project where thinning and repeated prescribed burning is done will no longer have an understory or overstory. There were no references in the environmental assessment to indicate that historical forests had no substantive understory. The existence of an understory

is a natural condition at this time, and beneficial to many wildlife species. Burning every 5-15 years is too frequent and does not allow the understory to grow back.

9) Aggressive thinning and burning does not improve the scenic quality of the forest; it degrades it. Since the forest attracts visitors to

the area, why do you want to degrade it? It is the place we all go to rejuvenate ourselves.

10) The project analysis assumes that proposed fuel treatments will be beneficial to the Mexican spotted owls when there are a

number of studies calling that into question.

11) The Forest Service did not allow the public to view any of the over 5,000 public comments online or even in person at the

Santa Fe Forest headquarters.. This has to change.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit my comments. I hope we, the public, can work more closely with the Forest Service

in the future.

Best regards,

Billie Bolton