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Comments: 1. The green islands present a treasure trove of genetic diversity that has been lost elsewhere in the forest. To supply restoration seeding and planting in burned areas, the USFS should draft efforts to collect seeds from trees, shrubs, flowering forbs, and grasses within the green islands - while leaving enough remaining to reseed those areas. According to the literature, the number 1 factor determining vegetative recovery of a burned area is distance to a seed source. The vast areas of land with 100% tree mortality will take significantly longer to recover without assistance bringing in seeds. The USFS must consider an effort to collect seeds from those areas, and strategically seed suitable areas of the burn scar with said seeds. Currently, the most severe areas of the burn scar I have seen are being colonized by disturbance-loving annual plants - native and non-native. There are some monotypic stands of plants such as mullein or fetid goosefoot, where other plants have not been given an adequate chance to colonize the soil. While annual and biennial plants are a valuable part of the post-fire succession process, as they add biomass and provide cover for the bare soils, their life cycle is short, by definition. Perennial trees, shrubs, forbs, and grasses provide these services on a longer time scale - grow forage for animals, attract beneficial insect pollinators (and predators that control pests), stabilize soil with their roots, shade soils to aid in water and nutrient retention, encourage the growth of beneficial soil microbes, fungi, and soil crusts (lichen, mosses, etc.). Encouraging this next stage in the successional process through direct or broadcast seeding would encourage the recovery of the entire system.

2. There is no mention of prescribed fire treatments. One reason for the severity and total devastation of the HPCC fire was the hundreds of years of fire suppression. A breadth of literature shows the importance of frequent low-severity fires in the mountains of NM - they cleared accumulations of litter, dead trees & grasses, etc. that therefore prevented those fuels from building up too much. Even in heavily burned areas, the trees killed did not burn up entirely, and there are still trees slowly dying due to cumulative stressors of fire and pests. This is ample fuel for another fire. There are areas with dense cover of annual plants, which will leave highly flammable tinder as they senesce. Some dense stands of resprouting aspen and oak look healthy, but some shoots will unavoidably outcompete the others - the unlucky ones will also become fuel. In order to prevent another fire of the magnitude of HPCC, the USFS must make efforts to return to a sustainable fire regime. To do better than their colonial forebearers. To return to a sustainable fire regime is to advocate for the health of the forest as well as the people who are connected with it.

3. The USFS must make efforts to work with local tribes in the recovery effort. The native people of New Mexico were instrumental in creating and managing the profitable ecosystem that persuaded so many Europeans to settle here. They have, over centuries, been stripped of their agency. The traditional ecological knowledge that still persists in tribal communities must be recognized and taken seriously. The tribes of NM must be given a seat at the table. Their leaders and elders should be heard by the federal government, and they should have a place in decision making in the recovery of their ancestral homelands. Recovery not just from the HPCC fire, but centuries of degradation and overextraction.

4. The items I advocate for above, as well as all items already included within the draft EA, require additional personnel. It is unfortunate that Congress has not allocated the necessary funds to the USFS to hire said personnel. If we are to do better for our ecosystems and communities, the USFS needs more educated and skilled professionals within their ranks. We are running out of time to combat the climate crisis. There is no more time. The unprecedented threats and changes to the climate requires all hands on deck!!!!!!!!!!!!