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RE: Encino Vista Landscape Restoration Project

I am a multigenerational traditional farmer from Cañones. My family has lived, farmed, hunted, gathered wood, and survived off of the land, water, and forests that surround us. We are heirs to the Juan Bautista Valdez Land Grant. And our Genizaro and Native ancestors called these mountains home.
Growing up on the land, conversations about water, drought, fire, and the changing climate circulated around the dinner table. My father was a logger, and we spent a lot of time every summer in the high country running around the mountains. He has an understanding of forest ecology, and would focus his efforts on dead and downed trees by clearing away potentially hazardous material. What we learned in the mountains we also used on our ranch, where the topography is extremely varied. We created berms and swales to slow down water from both rain and acequia flood irrigation. As well as planted trees on contour to benefit from flood water, and to prevent erosion.
All that being said, I have personal experience seeing these practices be successful on a small scale.
My main concern for the Environmental Assessment for the EVLRP is that the steep topography of our canyons, and the fragility of our watershed has not fully been taken into account. Using fire in steep terrain can be very difficult to quell if it gets out of control. I think it's important to strategically analyze our watersheds keeping this issue in mind to create the best possible plan.

I suggest the following when working within our steep terrain and deeply gullied creeks.
Evaluate the entire river network before treatment. Understand how the topography changes,where it widens out, where there might be natural firebreaks, and where it is the most dangerous.
Listen to local knowledge about how our very large watershed can create a huge creciente, or runoff even with a small localized weather event.
Do not treat one area too heavily. Spread out treatments over time and size to prevent large scale devastation downstream due to excessive erosion from one area.
Create buffer zones around the water on contour to prevent erosion in case of fire or extreme weather during treatment.
This can be done using downed trees, laying them perpendicular to the slope. Potentially securing them with other materials that are available in the canyon. This would make walking easier for forest service workers and encourage regrowth of perennial species to hold the soil.
Do not disturb any beaver activity.
Install simple Beaver Dam Analog Devices to slow down river flow and encourage small wetlands that will be natural firebreaks. This will also encourage future beaver activity, by encouraging the growth of willows. Which will also be imperative to slow down water flow when our rains come.
https://www.anabranchsolutions.com/beaver-dam-analogs.html

An interesting outcome to growing up working with fire to clean acequias and debris, as well as during the Cerro Grande Fire, is that I know how smoke moves through our canyons. In regard to prescribed burns I suggest the following.
Please Do NOT BURN DURING THE SPRING, both the Cerro Grande Fire and the Hermits Peak fires were prescribed burns that happened during the windiest part of the year. Please Please Please refrain from burning on windy days. Please refrain from burning in the spring.
Only burn in the morning. Our canyon's topography and weather patterns are such that all the smoke will fall into the canyon at night as the temperatures drop. If the burning starts early and ends earlier in the day, it allows

time for the smoke to be distributed in the atmosphere before it cools at night. At night the temperature inversion holds the smoke down in the valley,  in our homes, and  lungs.
When burning, consider not burning everyday. Or create a plan with the community to figure out  which days are the best to burn to not interrupt life too much, and at what intervals.
Communicate with the community on your burning plan.
Work with the community on a communication plan. There is no cellphone service in the canyon. Not everyone has access to wifi. And our electricity and landlines have a tendency to go out when there is bad weather. We need to have a way to know what is happening so we can prepare accordingly.
Create an emergency plan. There is only one way in, and one way out of Cañones. We need to have a collective plan about what to do if there is an emergency, how we evacuate and where. There are also many elderly residents that also need to be taken into account.
Create a recovery plan. In case of a catastrophe, what will be done to help the people? How will our watersheds be repaired? How will people's homes and property be compensated? Note, we do not have a fire department close by, which means people cannot have fire insurance on their homes.
Create a regeneration plan for the burned areas to help the watershed.  There are opportunities to purchase and plant seedlings of native trees. This could be a project that the YCC or local schools could help out with and learn from.
https://www.emnrd.nm.gov/sfd/seedlings/

In the EVLRP the area to be prescribed burned is way bigger than that to be open to timber sale. I understand that there will be some burning, but I encourage creativity to be able to utilize timber, firewood, and latillas that are in the area. The traditional subsistence economy in our community included gathering firewood and timber from our mountains. Ours is  a  rural area with few economic resources, but with the support form the forest service, restoration logging has the potential to support multiple families economically. In regard to restoration logging I suggest the following.
The use of the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program (CFLRP) to help jumpstart an economic opportunity for local loggers.
Provide training for local folks, and offer allotments for them to cut and export firewood.
Work with the community to find creative and safe ways to pull timber out of difficult to reach places.
Support the community with connections to local sawmills if needed to process extracted wood.
Work with Juan Bautista Valdez land grant and local acequia associations to share information about logging opportunities.
Educate local youth about restoration logging, provide field trips to see how restoration logging is restoring the health of the forest. And to share about potential careers in restoration and sustainable forestry.
Help support communities within the project watershed to help get fuel wood for the winter, especially elders and families with small children. Similar to the "Wood for Life" program in Arizona.
https://www.fs.usda.gov/inside-fs/delivering-mission/deliver/wood-life-partnership-provides-wood-communities

Thank you for reading through my ideas and considerations.

~Ana Maria Salazar,
Community Member, Cañones