



The Nature Conservancy in Arizona
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March 11, 2011

Coconino National Forest
Attn: 4FRI
1824 South Thompson Street
Flagstaff, Arizona 86001
Sent Via email to 4FRI_comments@fs.fed.us

Henry Provencio,
4FRI Team Leader
Mike Williams
Supervisor, Kaibab National Forest
Earl Stewart
Supervisor, Coconino National Forest

RE: Four Forest Restoration Initiative, 1st Phase Proposed Action

Dear Sirs:

The Nature Conservancy appreciates the opportunity to provide comments on the Forest Service's proposed action for the first analysis area. In general, we are very supportive of the proposal, and support the 4FRI collaborative group through our participation in the steering committee, in several working groups, and recently through signing the Memorandum of Understanding between the USFS and 4FRI entities.

We support the ambitious efforts of the USFS to comprehensively and ecologically restore ponderosa pine forests across a large proportion of the 750,000-acre analysis area. The goals of the 4FRI are an excellent balance of restoring forests, reducing fuels that could be hazardous to communities, and creating jobs for Arizonans. We agree that the strategic placement of treatments affords an opportunity for managers to meet multiple objectives synergistically while optimizing the return on investment. We are very interested in continuing to provide scientific information to inform this process through inclusion of model outputs, historical range of variation data, and climate change and wildlife habitat analyses.

Because some uncertainty remains about how much change will continue to occur in different locations, we encourage the USFS to continue being adaptive in all areas of management, including: prioritization of treatments, scenarios analyzed in NEPA, design and implementation of prescriptions, using economic data in designing contracts, and evaluation of post-treatment data and its incorporation into subsequent actions. We will continue to work with the USFS in the design and implementation of processes that allow the agency to respond quickly to rapid change and uncertainty. We are very interested in seeing this project move forward with the use of mechanical thinning as a means to reintroduce natural fire regimes across a large landscape to increase the resilience of its forests.

During the public workshops, we have been impressed with the sheer volume and quality of data that have been presented to stakeholders on silvicultural treatment options, potential fire behavior due to fuel conditions, and wildlife objectives. We look forward to continued collaboration on how these data will be integrated with an improved understanding of values-at-risk in designing more detailed treatment scenarios (size and type) that optimize placement to meet multiple objectives while minimizing treatment costs. We think that many within the stakeholder group agree with the USFS that this objective is critically important to achieving 4FRI goals in a cost effective manner.

The Nature Conservancy is dedicated to continuing to work with the USFS and partners to find efficient ways to effectively analyze large portions of the analysis area to find ecologically appropriate solutions to restoration needs. We are confident that the combined capabilities of stakeholders and USFS will allow 4FRI to move forward with confidence toward implementation in the coming months and years. We look forward to the next steps.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Tom Collazo". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Tom Collazo

Associate State Director
For Conservation Programs