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Contact:

Historic Agreement Reached to Restore Southwestern Forests

Flagstaff, Ariz. – After decades of devastating wildfires and a year of discussing how to go about restoring health to Arizona’s degraded ponderosa pine forests on a magnitude never before attempted, the Forest Service, other natural resource agencies, community leaders, environmentalists, scientists, and private industry leaders have reached an historical turning point with the Four Forest Restoration Initiative.

This afternoon, the group signed an agreement to begin the process of restoring some 2.4 million acres in the Kaibab, Coconino, Apache-Sitgreaves and Tonto national forests. Today’s symbolic event builds on years of collaboration in the Governor’s Forest Health Council and that council’s landmark document, *Statewide Strategy for Restoring Arizona’s Forests*, that serves as the framework for landscape-scale treatments into the future.

“What this means is we are all focused on the same goal, ultimately to return health and sustainability to Arizona’s forests,” said Four Forest Restoration Initiative chairman? Ethan Aumack. “We’ll be applying the best science available to restore ecological and economic health by reducing fire danger and protecting communities, returning our forests and rangelands to a healthier condition that can function with low-intensity natural fire, and providing opportunities to create jobs and stimulate local economies.”

Forest restoration treatments will reduce high densities of small trees—the result of past fire suppression and other land uses. Those small trees will be used by wood products industries, which in turn helps create jobs, enhance local economies and reduce restoration and fire management costs.

The White Mountain Stewardship Project, created after the half-million-acre Rodeo Chediski Fire of 2002, is one example of a public/private partnership created to solve the problem of too many trees, unhealthy forests and not enough jobs. Congress authorized the use of stewardship contracts for up to a 10-year period per contract. Currently, the White Mountain Stewardship Project is coming up on its five-year review.

“The concept of a multi-party monitoring effort assured that a sharing of perspectives between multiple interests and stakeholders would foster understanding, incorporate the ever-growing body of science concerning our environment and result in better forest management,” said _____.

The Four Forest Restoration Initiative seeks to treat some 50,000 acres per year during a 20-year period (??). Besides the White Mountain Stewardship Project, the first large treatment is expected to begin in spring 2011 on the Mogollon Rim.

“This is a very exciting step forward for all of us who value and depend upon the health of our majestic forests. These efforts will set forests and local economies on a path of recovery, and will leave future generations forested landscapes that will become assets, not liabilities,” said _____.

The landscape-scale restoration effort is expected to be used as a model to that will be replicated and applied to ecosystems across the West. For more information about the Four Forest Restoration Initiative, log on to _____.

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