
Appendix F

Santa Fe Municipal Watershed Fuels Reduction Project

Briefing Paper

Background

The Santa Fe Municipal Watershed Project is a long-range collaborative plan to thin and burn approximately 6,400 acres within 7,270 acres in the Santa Fe Municipal Watershed Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS). In September 2001, the Santa Fe National Forest signed a decision based on the FEIS, which responded to the hazardous fuel loading in an area that serves as a primary source of water for the City of Santa Fe. Specifically, thousands of small diameter trees have replaced the more open and fire-adapted timber stands found historically. In early 2002, the Forest Service's Southwestern Regional Office upheld the decision following an appeal. By late January 2002, Forest Service personnel began clearing a fuel break on the southern ridgeline. Later that year, the Forest Service awarded a contract to Forest Rehab, a company from Santa Cruz, New Mexico. The contract calls for both mechanical and hand thinning of the project area at a cost of \$945/acre. Small trees (4" in diameter and below) are thinned and piled. Larger diameter trees may be cut, but are left on the slopes as logs to aid in erosion control. Because of limited access into the Watershed, (closed access by USDA and City of Santa Fe for protection since 1932), and because of the safety concerns of hauling thinned material through the very narrow residential area (Upper Canyon Road), the Forest Service could not open the area to the public for removal of forest products.

Current Status

To date, 4,650 acres have been treated through a combination of hand thinning and mechanical mastication (also called "chunking"). This has occurred ahead of the projected 5- to 10-year completion period originally expected. In Fall 2005, about 200 acres of first-entry broadcast burning was accomplished where previous treatment (piling and burning) had provided favorable conditions. Weather conditions during the last winter did not favor burning, so about 1,800 acres of piles still exist. To meet fuel hazard reduction goals for the project, these piles need to be burned. Depending on weather and other conditions, burning of the thinned acres will be accomplished in 2 to 3 years following the thinning. The contractor might resume machine thinning in the spring of 2006. About 600 acres of machine thinning may be accomplished during 2006, but no more piling is expected. A separate project (Thompson Peak Fuels Project) is in the planning stages to complete treatment in the 1,200 acres of non-wilderness in the watershed.

Key Points

The annual budget for the project is \$1.5 million. Funding is provided through the regular Forest Service budget appropriation process, with a large portion of that appropriation identified through Congressional earmark. Extensive monitoring is coinciding with the treatment process, as a means of comparing actual effects with those predicted. This will serve to guide an adaptive management process using the best information and technology available to get the job done. Forest Service personnel from the Española District, the Santa Fe Forest, the Southwestern Regional Office, and Rocky Mountain Research Station are conducting monitoring. A Technical Advisory Group of several partners, including the Santa Fe Watershed Association, the City of Santa Fe, NM Environment Department, Los Alamos National Laboratory, the College of Santa Fe, and the University of New Mexico, is doing additional monitoring. Result of its work is available on the Santa Fe Watershed Association website at <http://www.santafewatershed.org/>.

Unit/Contacts:

(505)753-7331

Sandy Hurlocker, Española District Ranger (Acting), **Lawrence Garcia**, District Fire Management Officer;

Dave Isackson, Assistant District Fire Management Officer Fuels, **Ruben Montes**, Santa Fe NF Public Affairs Officer (505-438-7877).

**SANTA FE MUNICIPAL WATERSHED FUELS REDUCTION PROJECT UPDATE
AS OF 3/23/06**

Approximately 6,400 acres within the 7,270 acres analyzed in the 2001 Santa Fe Municipal Watershed Fuels Reduction Environmental Impact Statement will be treated.

Acres of Santa Fe Watershed treated to date: 4,650

Acres treated in fiscal 2005: 1,760

Acres left to be treated in Fiscal 2006/2007: approximately 610

Costs per acre: \$945 per acre thinning
\$50 per acre (estimate) for burning

The Santa Fe Municipal Watershed consists of 17,384 acres:

Santa Fe National Forest15,493 acres

City of Santa Fe..... 1,124 acres

Private land.....767 acres

The upper 10,000 acres of the watershed lie in the Pecos Wilderness.