

Restoration of Frequent Fire-Forests

Attendees of this technical field tour visited sites on the Cibola National Forest, in western New Mexico, where the US Forest Service is working with the National Wild Turkey Federation (NWTF), the Forest Stewards Guild, the Center for Biological Diversity, and other partners on the Bluewater Stewardship Project. The project is designed to restore the ecological function of frequent, low-intensity fire by reducing stand densities and stand structure, which reduces the risk of high-intensity, stand-replacing fires while improving habitat for wild turkey and other wildlife and providing economic opportunities for the local forest-products industry. NWTF is the project contractor.

The project area had been heavily logged beginning with the advent of railroad logging in the early 1900s. Less than 10 percent of the trees were left as seed sources. Subsequent even-aged management left stands susceptible to crown fire. Under the current plan, large, mature trees are retained and younger stands are thinned, with trees left in groups.

“The product off of the [Bluewater Stewardship] project is not timber,” said Scott Lerich, a NWTF senior regional biologist. “It’s a healthier forest, a healthier watershed, better wildlife habitat, more resistance to wildfires, and more jobs.” **FS**



The harvest in this area is designed to leave groups of vigorous ponderosa pine with space between them, restoring them to historic conditions and leaving the stand more resistant to high-intensity fire, explains Shawn Martin, a silviculturist with the Cibola National Forest.



The Bluewater Stewardship Project has been crucial to Mt. Taylor Manufacturing, a sawmill in Milan, New Mexico, a town of about 3,500 people, said Scott Lerich, National Wild Turkey Federation (NWTF) senior regional biologist: “The mill supports 45 jobs in this community, which needs every job it can get.” NWTF is the project contractor.



A delimeter processes ponderosa pine logs destined for Mt. Taylor Manufacturing, a sawmill in Milan, New Mexico, that produces dimension lumber, cants, wood pellets, playground chips, animal bedding, and other products.