



File Code: 1900

Date: March 10, 2017

Dear Sir or Madam,

The Mount Taylor Ranger District of the Cibola National Forest and National Grasslands (Cibola NF&NG) proposes mechanical thinning, prescribed fire, and other restoration activities throughout the project area that would make forests and grasslands more resilient to natural disturbances such as fire, insects and disease, and climate change. The Puerco Landscape Restoration Project is located on the western end of the Zuni Mountains on the Mount Taylor Ranger District in portions of Cibola and McKinley Counties. The proposal includes watershed restoration activities such as protection of springs and road decommissioning, and also improving distribution of water developments to improve watershed benefit range and wildlife across the project area. Proposed treatments are needed to maintain or restore forest structure and pattern, the desired fire regimes, and watershed and ecosystem function.

This project was initiated in 2016, as part of the Zuni Mountain Priority Landscape set forth in the Forest Leadership Team (FLT) priorities as a follow-up to the Bluewater Landscape Restoration Project. The Puerco Landscape Restoration Project continues that ecosystem restoration effort on about 81,000 acres covering the western portion of the Zuni Mountains on the Mount Taylor Ranger District of the Cibola NF&NG. The proposed commercial treatment area is approximately 43,000 acres, and up to an additional 29,000 acres of non-commercial thinning, which includes about 8,000 acres of shrub and grassland restoration. The appropriate level of National Environmental Policy Act documentation, Environmental Assessment or Environmental Impact Statement (EA or EIS) will be based on the initial analysis and comments received from the public.

### **Purpose and Need**

The purpose and need for the Puerco Landscape Restoration Project was determined by comparing the existing conditions in the project area to the desired conditions in the land and resource management plan (forest plan)<sup>1</sup> related to forest and ecosystem function and resiliency. In addition, relevant research, the best available science and information, and the landscape restoration criteria found in the Omnibus Public Land Management Act of 2009 (P.L. 111-11, Title IV Forest Landscape Restoration) were used to develop the purpose and need. These criteria for landscape-scale restoration address community, wildlife habitat, and forest protection while retaining as many large trees as possible.

The purpose of the Puerco Project is to reestablish and restore forest structure and pattern, forest health, and vegetation composition and diversity in forest ecosystems to conditions within the natural range of variability, thus moving the project area toward the desired conditions. The outcome of improving structure and function is increased ecosystem resiliency. Resiliency allows for the ability of an ecological system to absorb disturbances, such as fire, insects and disease, and climate change, while retaining the same basic structure and ways of functioning and the capacity to adapt to stress and change (FSM 2020.5). This project is needed to:

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<sup>1</sup> The Cibola NF&NG is in the midst of revising its Forest Plan, this project will apply the 1985 Cibola Forest Plan (as amended), and the Forest is expecting to have a final revised plan in 2018, but will incorporate Draft Revised Forest Plan guidance where it does not conflict with the existing Forest Plan direction.



- Increase forest, shrubland and grassland resiliency and sustainability
- Reduce the risk of uncharacteristic fire effects
- Improve wildlife and aquatic species habitat
- Improve the condition and function of watersheds
- Improve the condition and function of riparian areas, wet meadows, streams, and springs
- Improve water developments

### **Providing Input**

The Mount Taylor Ranger District will be hosting a public meeting to discuss the Puerco Landscape Restoration Project on April 5, 2017 at the Cibola County Meeting Hall at 515 W. High Street in Grants, NM from 5:00-7:30 p.m.

We value your interest and ideas for management of the Cibola NF&NG. If you have specific concerns or comments on this proposal, titled Puerco Landscape Restoration Project, please send them to me at the address listed above or on-line (e-mail) to: [comments-southwestern-cibola-mount-taylor@fs.fed.us](mailto:comments-southwestern-cibola-mount-taylor@fs.fed.us). Although always welcome, responses submitted by April 14, 2017 would be most helpful.

Additionally, pursuant to 7 CFR 1.27(d), any person may request the agency to withhold a submission from the public record by showing how the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) permits such confidentiality. Persons requesting such confidentiality should be aware that, under the FOIA, confidentiality may be granted in only limited circumstances, such as to protect trade secrets. The Forest Service will inform the requester of the agency's decision regarding the request for confidentiality, and where the requester is denied, the agency will return the submission and notify the requester that the comments may be resubmitted with or without name and address within seven days.

A detailed project summary proposed action and maps for this project can be found at: <http://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=50987>. For additional information about this proposal, please contact Alvin Whitehair at 505-287-8833 or Shawn Martin at 505-346-3856. Thank you for your interest in the Mount Taylor Ranger District and Cibola NF&NG.

Sincerely,

Elaine Kehrman  
Forest Supervisor