

**Tusas-San Antonio Landscape Analysis- Tres Piedras Ranger District, Carson National Forest**  
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The project is an ongoing analysis within a 160,000 acre planning area on the Tres Piedras Ranger District. The focus of the project is restoring frequent fire ecosystems which occur on 70,000-80,000 acres. The analysis includes input from an informal collaborative group, formed through a Collaborative Forest Restoration Program (CFRP) grant with Gilbert Vigil (GIV) that was awarded in 2013. The group includes Quivira Coalition, The Nature Conservancy, New Mexico Department of Game and Fish, and Northern Arizona University (NAU) among others. The current emphasis is analyzing data from 1,500 common stand exam plots funded by the grant. Additional field work will be completed this summer and will result in a proposed action in September 2015 that will include proposed treatment areas and acreages. Approximately 15,000 acres within the project have archaeological clearance, and the district is working to clear an additional 30,000-40,000 acres through contracting. As the project progresses, the district will also look for opportunities to contract survey work for Northern Goshawk.

The project is located in the central portion of the Tres Piedras Ranger District, almost entirely in Rio Arriba County. Vegetation types within the project area range from sagebrush to spruce-fir, but the majority of the objectives for the proposed action will be within ponderosa pine and dry mixed conifer. There are portions of 13 6<sup>th</sup> code HUCs within the project area including all of Canada Biscara-Rio Tusas, and the majority of Canada del Aqua-Rio Tusas.

The district's current success in implementing prescribed fire and mechanical treatments will be key in scaling up treatment size after completion of the analysis. There are two operating mills, but landscape implementation success will depend on leveraging existing partnerships and new initiatives like the Water Fund, and biofuels/biogen efforts in the Chama area.

**Ranking Criteria:**

1. *Is this project part of a larger landscape-scale (50,000 plus acres) effort? Please briefly describe the strategy goals, the acres, location, and planning status. Please explain how your project fits into the overall strategy for the larger landscape.*

The project is a stand-alone landscape analysis. The analysis started with a 160,000 acre project area, but modeling showed frequent fire ecosystems were furthest departed from desired conditions. Common Stand Exams (CSE) were focused in these areas, and follow-up data is being collected to further narrow down the treatment areas and acreages. Northern Arizona University (NAU) is currently working with the District through the CFRP grant with GIV to analyze the CSE data. A proposed action with acreages is expected in September 2015.

2. *What can you contribute as cash or in-kind match or leverage through other sources of funding (how much, from whom)?*

The Forest Service is the largest contributor to the analysis, largely through employee time for data collection, review, and writing specialist reports for the environmental analysis. Forest Service time

will also be spent developing contract specifications, inspecting contracts, and inputting data. In the CFRP proposal, the estimated contribution of Forest Service time was over \$400,000, but that could easily increase depending upon comments and/or objections to the project. The project is the top priority on the Carson National Forest's five year restoration plan, and \$140,000 dollars have been put toward archaeological contracts over the last 2 years, with another \$90,000 to be awarded in 2015. The CFRP grant contributes \$360,000 of federal funds and \$90,000 of non-federal match. These funds paid for CSE plots and NAU's involvement in the project, and will fund a contract specialist report and a small amount of archeological clearance as the project progresses. New Mexico Department of Game and Fish has contributed \$25,000 for archaeological surveys, and has pledged to fund significantly more as the project progresses.

- 3. Please describe the scientific rationale for your proposed activity or prescription. For example, is the project designed to be in compliance with the New Mexico Forest Restoration Principles, the USDA Forest Service publication Restoring composition and structure in Southwestern frequent-fire forests: A science-based framework for improving ecosystem resiliency (RMRS GTR-310), or some other publications or data that supports your approach? For private and state managed lands, the NM Forestry Division's Forest Practice Guidelines must be followed.*

GIV's CFRP proposal for the project pledged to follow the New Mexico Forest Restoration Principles. The NEPA proposal specifics are still under development and subject to public input, but use of GTR-310 will likely be proposed. The Ecological Restoration Institute (ERI) is also working with the forest to develop reference conditions specifically for the project area. These reference conditions will help guide the design of proposed treatments as well.

- 4. Describe the engagement of local communities and agency cooperators (documentation in letters of commitment of a project plan). Provide specific examples of engagement.*

The 2013 CFRP proposal for the Tusas-San Antonio analysis contained 28 letters of commitment and support. The pursuit of these letters required substantial one-on-one conversation both within the local community and the greater conservation community. The letters are from conservation organizations, private landowners, grazing permittees, and all levels of government (a sample of letters are attached). Numerous stakeholder meetings and field trips have been held in the early part of the analysis, and at least two of these will be held per year through the life of the grant (2017). As the project continues to develop, public meetings aimed more specifically at the surrounding community will take place. These will continue through the completion of the NEPA process, and into implementation, especially prior to large prescribed burns.

- 5. How does your project contribute to reducing wildfire risk in a large landscape? Show the strategic placement of your project and your assumptions about why it will be effective.*

The primary underlying goal of restoration in frequent fire ecosystems within the project area is reducing the risk of catastrophic wildfire. All of the ponderosa pine and dry mixed conifer stands are currently under consideration for treatment. These potential treatment acres will be narrowed down considering road access, slope, wildfire risk, and other factors. With the exception of a few isolated

pockets, the vast majority of ponderosa and dry mixed conifer on the entire 388,000 acre Tres Piedras district will be considered for treatment through this analysis. Modeling done as part of the analysis will help determine treatment priorities within the project area.

6. *Will there be access for removal of forest products (yes, no, how, how much) Do you have the ability and authority to remove products? If you have identified a market for the products, please describe how they will be utilized.*

There are opportunities for removal of commercial forest products, personal fuelwood, and commercial fuelwood within the area. Much of the area has gentle topography suitable for ground-based logging operations, and there is an extensive road system from historic operations. The Gulch Integrated Resource Contract is ongoing, and will result in the removal of 6,000 CCF of commercial material, plus timber stand improvement and slash treatments. The Willow Stewardship contract is expected to be advertised this summer. Additionally 1,500 cords of personal-use fuelwood permits were sold on the district this past year. Kuykendall and Sons Sawmill currently operate in Tres Piedras, and under ideal conditions, could process around 6-8million board feet of lumber per year. Olguin's Sawmill in Taos and various mills in Colorado have also bid and done work on past projects.

***Why is this project urgent? (What is at risk?)***

7. *Are there communities, municipal or agricultural water sources or water infrastructure investments at risk?*

The project falls within the San Juan/Chama Focal Area, and watersheds within the project area have a "high" focal area score, according to the Rio Grande Water Fund Comprehensive Plan (RGWFCP). Watersheds within the project area also rank as "high" in the Overall Wildfire Risk model that was run as part of the RGWFCP. Catastrophic fires have occurred within close proximity to the project area, and persistent drought conditions, closed canopies, and high fuel accumulations put this area at high risk for a large fire. Small communities and downstream water users bear the majority of the risks. The Overall Water Quality and Supply model that was done as part of the RGWFCP shows watersheds within the project area at high risk (4 out of 5). There are no municipal water sources within the project area, but numerous acequias and downstream communities on the Rio Grande would be affected by a catastrophic fire.

8. *Are there communities or concentrations of homes at risk from wildfire, post-fire flooding or disruptions to water supplies?*

Small communities within and around the area, private inholdings, as well as community and private water supplies and infrastructure would be susceptible to fire, fire effects, and post-fire flooding. A high intensity fire could threaten numerous small communities including Tres Piedras, Vallecitos, and Las Tablas.

***What are the risks to and opportunities for economic development? Describe how your project will address them. Please provide details on the following elements:***

9. *Are there recreation, tourism and/or cultural heritage areas with significant economic value at risk? Please describe*

Hunting and fishing provide the primary tourism opportunities within the area. The project area encompasses New Mexico hunting game unit 52 which is within the home range of one of the largest elk herds in New Mexico. Approximately 18,000 to 22,500 head of elk that potentially use the project area; 23.5% of all bulls and 21.5% of all cows harvested in New Mexico were taken from this herd unit in 2009. Crucial Habitat as modeled in the Comprehensive Plan shows the project area as a moderate risk (3 out of 5).

10. *Will your project supply wood to existing wood processing businesses OR is there potential for new wood-using industry?*

The project will supply surrounding wood processing businesses as described under item 6 above, and there is room to supply commercial fuelwood operations and biofuel/biogen efforts if they become available. Overall Economic Opportunity as modeled in the Comprehensive Plan is shown to be high (5 out of 5) for the project area.

11. *Is there a workforce available? Please describe the nature of the workforce, including existing skill level and numbers.*

There is very little workforce within the immediate community, but the project is within commuting distance of Espanola, Taos, Chama, and Antonito CO among others, which possess a variety of skill sets in processing wood products at varying levels.

12. *Is your project in areas used for traditional and community wood supply? Are you willing/able to provide a portion of the product removed during restoration as free or low-cost firewood to local communities? Please estimate the percent of the volume removed you are willing to offer.*

Wood supply for the communities will always be a focus. It is a very important feature of the project, and the 1,500 cords currently removed per year could be increased as more wood becomes available. The local mill also has a fuelwood processor that makes good use of material that isn't suitable for saw timber. Timber stand improvement treatments and slash from commercial timber removal will likely provide more fuelwood opportunities than the public can effectively utilize.

**Familiarity with the project area:**

As district ranger since 2011, I have been at the center of the formation of an informal collaborative that led to GIV's CFRP award and started the Tusas-San Antonio Analysis. I have been very involved with the data gathering phase, and have helped make decisions to keep the analysis on track as conditions have changed. The district has also been successful at implementing smaller projects within the Tusas-San Antonio project area including securing grants and agreements from Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, NMDGF, CFRP, Coca-Cola, and Secure Rural Schools. I led an effort that resulted in the award of the forest's first stewardship contract, and a second contract award is expected follow soon. I initiated the analysis for a 17,000 acre restoration analysis that will be signed this year. Once signed it will allow for large landscape burning that will reduce fuel loading within the Wildland Urban Interface within the Tusas-San Antonio project area, and result in mechanical treatment of 3,500 acres.