

**BRIEFING PAPER**

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DISCUSSION: **Background**

The Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests comprise a significant portion of the largest contiguous Ponderosa Pine forest in North America and is now facing large-scale threats to its very existence. The suppression of fire over the last hundred years provided the breeding ground for very dense forests to develop. These forests that once were characterized by 20-60 trees per acre now average over 400 trees per acre. These current forest conditions are not stable and make the forest vulnerable to intense wildfire.

During June and July of 2002, the Rodeo-Chediski Fire Complex burned 469,000 acres on the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests and the White Mountain Apache Indian Reservation. Over 400 structures were destroyed in surrounding communities when the fires burned through adjacent private land. One of the factors that made the fires so difficult to control was the heavy concentration of fuels in the forest. One of the purposes of this Request For Proposals (RFP) is to seek out a method of reducing fuels on a landscape scale sufficient to make operational scale differences in the way that wildfires burn and the threat that they pose to nearby communities. In the past, separate contracts have been awarded for multi-product logging with related slash treatments, followed again later by another entry for noncommercial thinning with resulting slash treatments. Each of these was designed to meet the management objectives for a narrow range of resources. Fuel reduction, logging, and thinning were performed for a variety of management goals.

Characterization of the Project

The purpose of the Request For Proposals (RFP) is to combine all separate operations into one Stewardship Performance Based Service Contract, to maximize efficiency of operation and provide a for a healthier forest. This contract combines all of these operations into one contract to take advantage of the efficiencies of having one larger operation to meet multiple objectives. One of the major features of Stewardship is the ability to procure a long-term (10-year) complete set of services to accomplish landscape stand treatments for the variety of Forest Health issues. Specifically, Biomass Management treatments would be applied to promote healthier forests and to decrease the effects of wildfire. To accomplish the goal of reducing the effects of



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wildfire in and around the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI), this RFP is being procured under the Stewardship Authority granted in Public Law 108-7. Quality end results are the primary outcome intended from this RFP. We also hope to reduce the cost of the thinning from the current \$500-700/acre to under \$200/acre, and get better utilization of the wood and slash biomass.

Stewardship allows for the treatment of small diameter residue (non-merchantable trees and slash) to be offset by value of forest products authorized to be removed. The Performance Based Service Contract allows operators/contractors to propose a variety of methods and applications to efficiently produce the quality end results.

The area that comprises the Apache—Sitgreaves National Forests is challenged by limited social and economic infrastructure. The three counties affected directly by the Forest are among the poorest in the nation and currently offer little to residents in terms of educational and other developmental opportunities to diversify the economy. It is anticipated that a 10-year contract commitment will help to stimulate new small diameter log and biomass industries into the area, create new jobs and better utilize the byproducts of the thinning. Any response to this RFP shall incorporate a sub-contracting plan that utilizes existing local businesses and resources.

Industry Interest

We have attracted considerable interest from a variety of new and existing industries. The contract allows us to select one or several contractors depending on their proposal and product utilization potential. There is interest in building an Oriented Strand Board mill to chips small logs and make a chip board that can be used in place of plywood. Several bioenergy plants may be built to convert wood fiber into electricity. Existing small log companies may join together to bid on the contract. We anticipate 5-7 bidders. Community economic development is an important consideration in the selection of the successful bidder and proposals must include a subcontracting plan and explain how the proposal would train and employ local employees and support local businesses.

The contract was advertised and bids received June 18, 2004. We are hoping to award the contract by the end of July 2004. We have approximately 18,000 acres in the FY04 task order. There are a total of 30,000 acres covered by NEPA and 5,000 acres included in a recently released EIS. A central NEPA Team will complete the remaining NEPA using the new fuels NEPA tools available under the Healthy Forest Restoration Act and CE authorities. We will be working with



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the counties to help prioritize where the treatments occur and when, to closely coordinate with community fire protection efforts.

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