

Decision Notice  
& Finding of No Significant Impact  
**Pack Rat Salvage Project**

USDA Forest Service  
Mogollon Rim Ranger District, Coconino National Forest  
Coconino County, Arizona

## **Decision and Rationale**

### **Background**

In August of 2002, lightning struck the Mogollon Rim igniting the Pack Rat fire, which burned a total of 3,094 acres. The Pack Rat fire burned approximately 1,074 acres of mixed conifer forest on the Coconino National Forest, as well as 2,020 acres of chaparral and ponderosa pine on the Tonto National Forest.

The Pack Rat Salvage project area is located approximately 70 miles southeast of Flagstaff, Arizona along the Mogollon Rim and is comprised of roughly 550 acres of the Coconino National Forest. An Environmental Assessment (EA) documents the analysis of removing dead trees from 550 acres of the Pack Rat burn. The EA and project record (PR) are available for review at the Mogollon Rim Ranger District office.

### **Decision**

I have considered the range of effects outlined in the EA. The proposed action best meets the purpose and need for reducing safety hazards, aiding soil recovery, decreasing long term heavy fuel loads and minimizing the spread of bark beetle activity. Mitigation measures and project design have minimized or removed negative environmental effects. For these reasons, I have decided to implement the Proposed Action.

### **Other Alternatives Considered**

In addition to the Proposed Action alternative, I considered the No Action alternative. A comparison of these alternatives can be found in the EA on page 13 and in Chapter 3 (pages 16-70).

#### **Alternative 1**

##### **No Action**

Under the No Action alternative, none of the actions described in the proposed action would occur, including salvage activities, hazard tree removal and further soil stabilization (Figure 3). All forest roads currently open to public use would remain open. Rehabilitation activities would be limited to those which have already been completed by a Burn Area Emergency Rehabilitation (BAER) Team.

## **Alternative 2**

### **Proposed Action**

The proposed action will:

- Salvage dead trees 12 inches diameter at breast height (DBH) and greater on approximately 550 acres. A dead tree is considered to have no green needles.
- Fell hazard trees less than 12 inches in diameter along a 130-foot corridor adjacent to Forest Roads 300, 320, 141H and 501 where safety is a concern.
- Lop and scatter coarse woody debris (CWD) greater than 3 inches in diameter created by felling activities on all treated acres in high intensity burn areas.
- In areas of low and moderate burn intensity where total fuel loads (activity slash plus existing slash) are greater than 15 tons per acre, mechanically pile slash and burn.
- In areas of low and moderate burn intensity where total fuel loads (activity slash plus existing slash) are at or less than 15 tons per acre, lop and scatter slash to a 2-foot height.
- Open Forest Roads 9360L and 9266 for use during salvage activities and close after use (1.7 miles).
- Keep 1.0 mile of Forest Road 659 open and close 0.2 miles at alternate entrance to protect the General Crook Trail.
- Keep 0.1 miles of Forest Road 9266A open and close last 0.2 miles to restrict access to the Mexican spotted owl Protected Activity Center and the Mogollon Rim Botanical Area.
- Keep 0.1 miles of Forest Road 300J open and close last 0.1 miles to restrict access to the Mexican spotted owl Protected Activity Center and the Mogollon Rim Botanical Area.
- Construct 0.4 miles of temporary road for salvage activities and obliterate after use.

### **Public Involvement**

As described in the background, the need for this action arose in the Fall of 2002. A proposal to salvage dead trees in the Pack Rat burn was listed in the Schedule of Proposed Actions in April, 2003. The proposal was sent to approximately 170 individuals of the public, other agencies and organizations, including tribes, for comment during scoping from January 22, 2003 to February 22, 2003. In addition, as part of the public involvement process, a meeting with US Fish and Wildlife Service was held to clarify and discuss concerns expressed through scoping. A summary of this meeting is available in the project record, including topics discussed and recommendations from US Fish and Wildlife Service regarding this proposal (PR #17).

Seven responses to the scoping letter were received from the following organizations, tribes and agencies:

Zuni Heritage/Historic Preservation Office  
USDA Natural Resources Conservation Services  
Hopi Tribe, Hopi Cultural Preservation Office  
Navajo Nation  
Crooked H Ranch  
US Fish and Wildlife Service  
Arizona Game and Fish Department

Comments generated through scoping are available in the project record in summary form and as original responses (PR #12 and #23). No significant issues were raised during the public comment period that would generate additional alternatives.

The EA was available for comment from July 8, 2003 to August 8, 2003. One letter was received commenting on the Pack Rat Salvage EA from the Center for Biological Diversity (PR #35). The Mogollon Rim Ranger District's response to comments received from the Center for Biological Diversity is included in the EA as Appendix F and is in the Pack Rat Salvage Project Record (PR #38).

## **Finding of No Significant Impact**

After considering the environmental effects described in the EA, I have determined that these actions will not have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment considering the context and intensity of impacts (40 CFR 1508.27). Thus, an environmental impact statement will not be prepared.

### **Context**

I have determined that the Proposed Action is a site-specific action that by itself does not have international, national, region-wide or statewide importance. The discussion of the significance criteria that follows applies to the intended actions and is within the context of local importance in the area associated with the Mogollon Rim Ranger District.

### **Intensity**

#### Beneficial and Adverse Impacts:

My finding of no significant environmental effects is not biased by the beneficial effects of the action.

#### Public Health and Safety:

There will be no significant negative effects on public health and safety because the Proposed Action minimizes the threat to public safety by removing dead hazard trees in high use areas and along travel corridors (see EA pages 64-65).

#### Unique Characteristics:

There will be no significant effects on unique characteristics of the area because project design and mitigation measures reduce effects on the General Crook Trail and visual integrity of the Mogollon Rim Management Area (MA 19). Other unique areas have been excluded from the project area, such as the Mogollon Rim Botanical Area (MA 17) and the nearby Mexican spotted owl Protected Activity Center, thus these areas are not effected by the proposed activities. (see EA pages 29-31, 50-51, 59-60, 62-63 and Appendix B).

#### Controversy:

The effects on the quality of the human environment are not likely to be highly controversial from a scientific or technical standpoint. These effects are documented in the EA and are typical for the action proposed.

Uncertainty and Risk:

We have considerable experience with the types of activities to be implemented. Several salvage projects have been implemented over the last 10 to 15 years in the area. The effects analysis shows the effects are not uncertain, and do not involve unique or unknown risk (see EA pages 19, 21, 29-31, 33-34, 47, 51, 62 and 64).

Precedent:

The action is not likely to establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects.

Cumulative Effects:

The cumulative impacts are not significant (see EA pages 19, 23, 25-27, 30-31, 36-37, 44-45, 47-52, 55-60, 62-65 and 67).

Significant Scientific, Cultural or Historical Resources:

The action will have no significant adverse effect on districts, sites, highways, buildings, structures, or objects listed on or eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places, because project design and mitigation measures minimize effects to the General Crook Trail (see EA pages 60-63). The action will also not cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources due to project design and mitigation measures (see EA pages 60-63). The Forest has consulted with the Arizona State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) and interested American Indian tribes regarding the effects of project activities on cultural and historical resources, as well as mitigation measures (PR #21). This consultation fulfills the obligations under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 and 36 CFR Part 800.

Threatened and Endangered Species or Critical Habitat:

The action is likely to adversely affect the Mexican spotted owl (MSO), but is not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of the MSO. This is due to the proximity of a MSO Protected Activity Center (PAC), however no project activities will occur in the PAC. The action is not likely to adversely effect the Little Colorado spinedace or its critical habitat because proposed activities are not within 1 mile of perennial streams, will not occur in snowmelt drainages and are expected to increase soil stabilization in the Pack Rat burn area.

Detailed analysis and findings are documented in the Wildlife Specialist Report (PR #31), Biological Assessment and Evaluation (PR #34), and the US Fish and Wildlife Service Biological Opinion (PR #40). The analysis included in the Wildlife Specialist Report is summarized in the EA in the Wildlife section (see EA pages 38-52). Implementing the Proposed Action will not have significant effects on threatened, endangered, candidate or proposed species, or Forest Service listed sensitive species other than the MSO. The Proposed Action is not likely to destroy or adversely modify proposed critical habitat of any species.

Federal, State and Local Laws:

The action will not violate Federal, State, and local laws or requirements for the protection of the environment. Applicable laws and regulations were considered in the EA (see EA page 8). The action is consistent with the Coconino National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (See EA page 2 and Chapter 3).

## Implementation Date

This project will not be implemented sooner than five (5) business days following the close of the appeal filing period established in the Notice of Decision in the *Arizona Daily Sun*. If an appeal is filed, implementation will not begin sooner than 15 calendar days following a final decision on the appeal if the decision is upheld. Implementation means actually doing the ground disturbing activities described in this notice. Preparation work may proceed.

## Administrative Review or Appeal Opportunities

This decision is subject to administrative review (appeal) pursuant to 36 CFR Part 215 (June 4, 2003). The appeal must be filed (regular mail, fax, email, hand-delivery or express delivery) with the Appeal Deciding Officer. Written comments must be submitted to:

Nora Rasure, Forest Supervisor  
Coconino National Forest  
2323 E. Greenlaw  
Flagstaff, Arizona 86004  
Fax: (928) 527-3620

The office business hours for those submitting hand-delivered appeals are 7:30 am to 4:30 pm Monday through Friday, excluding holidays. Electronic comments must be submitted in a format such as an email message, plain text (.txt), rich text format (.rtf) and Word (.doc) to [appeals-southwestern-coconino@fs.fed.us](mailto:appeals-southwestern-coconino@fs.fed.us). The appeal must have an identifiable name attached or verification of identity will be required. A scanned signature may serve as verification on electronic appeals.

Appeals, including attachments, must be filed within 45 days from the publication date of this notice in the *Arizona Daily Sun*, the newspaper of record. The publication date in the *Arizona Daily Sun* is the exclusive means for calculating the time to file an appeal. Those wishing to appeal this decision should not rely upon dates or timeframe information provided by any other source.

Individuals or organizations that submitted substantive comments during the comment period specified at 215.6 may appeal this decision. The notice of appeal must meet the appeal content requirements at 36 CFR 215.14.

## Contact

For additional information concerning this decision or the Forest Service appeal process, contact Larry Sears, District Ranger, Mogollon Rim Ranger District, Coconino National Forest, **Pack Rat Salvage Project Environmental Assessment**, HC 31 Box 300, Happy Jack, Arizona 86024.

/s/Larry G. Sears

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Larry G. Sears  
District Ranger  
Mogollon Rim Ranger District

10/24/03

Date

