

**USFS Field Review
Rim Lakes Analysis Area
July 8, 2008**

Participants: Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests staff; White Mountains Stewardship Project's Multi-Party Monitoring Board (MPMB); Natural Resources Working Group (NRWG). Refer to attached list of attendees.

Field Review Objectives: To inform MPMB and NRWG of the proposed treatments in the Rim Lakes Analysis Area by visiting the Area and other past treatment sites. Site visits were intended to show both the current conditions of the Rim Lakes Analysis Area as well as sites that were treated similarly to treatments proposed in Rim Lakes. Apache-Sitgreaves staff also solicited input from MPMB and NRWG on proposed actions and discussed two primary issues which prompted this review (large-diameter tree removal and potential administrative processes that may or may not conflict with White Mountains Stewardship Contract).

Site Visits and Discussions:

1. Wiggins: A site previously treated under a group selection prescription with no diameter cap. Prior to treatment, mean dbh of trees on site was approximately 17" and basal area was 150 sq. ft./ac. The treatments included group selection, including some dwarf mistletoe clearings. The district concentrated on leaving large trees with multiple age classes, an example of uneven-aged management. Current basal area is approximately 80 sq. ft./ac. with all age classes represented.



Wiggins Post-treatment; group selection, no diameter cap

2. 9354 dispersed camping area: Site within Rim Lakes Analysis Area. This is an example of a pine/oak stand with restricted Mexican Spotted Owl habitat, dominated by large trees of multiple species (ponderosa pine, white pine, white fir). Proposed action would use group selection with a 24" diameter cap. Target basal areas would be 60 in the 5" – 12" diameter class range and 80 in the 12" – 18" range. Intent is to speed growth rates of VSS 4's to become VSS 5's and 6's. Regeneration openings would cover about 20% of the treatment area. Treatments would also favor white pine.

Comparison of proposed treatment and use of a 16" diameter cap was discussed. Apache-Sitgreaves staff indicated that if a 16" cap was implemented, the following impacts would occur:

- With a 16” cap a wild fire would take longer to get into the crowns but the fire would have a more continuous canopy and create a higher mortality in the stand.
- Openings could not be selected, they would occur by default in perhaps less-desirable locations;
- Similarly, locations for closed, denser areas could also not be selected;
- A cap would result in a more even-aged stand as most, if not all, of the trees <16” diameter would be removed;
- Some trees larger than 16” are in worse shape than some less than 16”;
- Most wildlife cover would be removed from ground-level to approximately 15’ height;
- Some large trees are stressing even larger trees;
- No ability to select to open up areas for oaks or other species;
- A cap would help eliminate most ladder fuels; however, the canopy would still be so closed that remaining larger trees are still vulnerable to increased mortality in fires.

Gayle Richardson indicated that the prescription would aim to leave the biggest and the best trees. The predicted number of trees >16” to be removed are equal to approximately 2 trees per acre across the Analysis Area.



9354 Road: Proposed group selection cut with 24” cap

3. Sanitation Stand: Approximately 800 acres of the Rim Lakes Analysis Area would be treated as sanitation stands. These stands contain high levels of dwarf mistletoe (DM), and are infecting younger trees. The treatment would result in about 40% of the area to be a regeneration cut. Selected overstory trees would be left, particularly those that are uninfected. Openings could be up to 4 acres. Treatment would remove trees with 3+ DM rankings, unless needed for seed. If the area had a 16” diameter cap, it was felt that DM would take off as trees increase their growth. DM moves at a slower rate in dense stands; more open stands tend to increase the rate of spread. If there was a diameter cap imposed, the A/S staff indicated they may not treat the area at all, or remove trees <9”. A return entry is also planned to remove infected trees once seedlings are established.

4. Little Springs: The group walked through an area which was treated with a 7” cap. However, the primary focus was to see the result of a 16” diameter cap treatment, directly west

of Forest Lakes. The result, while visually pleasing, showed a near 100% cover of 16+” trees. There was very little, if any, cover from the ground level to approximately 20’ height, which may not be suitable for many wildlife species. Very little diversity in age-class structure was evident. Due to high regeneration of pine, treatments would be expected to remove these small VSS 2 trees every ten years or so if diameter cap kept in place.



Little Springs: 16” diameter cap treatment



The lunch time discussion included the marketing concerns and perception of working outside of the White Mountain Stewardship contract. The district is currently working on the Environmental Analysis, to result in a decision. The NEPA decision does not include the decisions on who will remove the products nor the type of contract to be used to remove the products. The intent is to meet the Forest Health and Fuels objectives. The White Mountain Stewardship contract will have the first priority. The WMS contract provider does not always have the means to remove all the types of product or the interest, in which case the district will seek other methods of removal.

It was felt by Apache-Sitgreaves staff that they had to look at all tools possible for treating the Rim Lakes area. There are only 5 years left for the White Mountains Stewardship Project. The pace of treatment of another Black Mesa District project, Nagel, may provide an example of the anticipated length of time it would take to complete. The Nagel project, comprised of approximately 14,000 acres, has had 1,200 acres treated since 2005. The Apache-Sitgreaves staff indicated that they would not attempt to separate any components of the treatments; all treatments would fall under one contract. Whether that contract would be under the White

Mountains Stewardship Project, a timber sale, or a different process, there would not be a separation of the large-tree component from the roundwood/small-diameter trees.

Other discussion points: Steve Campbell from the NRWG and Sue Sitko from the MPM Board will work with representatives from various environmental organizations to set up a field review date for them, and coordinate with Apache-Sitgreaves staff for this review.

Attendees:

Kate Klein	Liz Wise
Beth Dykstra	Sue Sitko
Gayle Richardson	Dave Dorum
Brian Dykstra	Jon Cooley
Dave Maurer	Bill Greenwood
Bob Taylor	Gene Beaudoin
Jim Pitts	Steve Sims
Jeff Borucki	Lorna Thurman
Deryl Jevons	Larry Stephenson
Ed Collins	Jerry Brownlow
	Lloyd Wilmes
	Ken Butler
	Steve Campbell