

1 Tradeoffs between short-term air quality impacts and long-term forest health are recognized and  
2 will continue to be a management challenge.

- 3 ■ Document evidence of initial and continued compliance with local, State, and federal air quality  
4 permits for projects. Maintain the files for the duration of the activity. Provide resources for  
5 meaningful enforcement of permit compliance documentation.

## 6 Fire and Fuels

### 7 Background and Description

8 The Cibola National Forest's current species composition and fuel densities greatly differ from  
9 historical conditions. Changes in species composition and fuel densities are a result of wildfire  
10 suppression, livestock grazing, regeneration, and encroachment of early and/or late successional  
11 species. These conditions, especially when combined with drought and climate change, create a more  
12 continuous canopy cover, ladder fuels, and accumulations of live and dead woody material. As a  
13 result, the probability of large, uncharacteristic, stand-replacing fires continues to increase. These  
14 fires burn with more intensity and severity; cause higher tree mortality; degrade watersheds; sterilize  
15 soils; and threaten adjacent communities, forest infrastructure, and wildlife habitat. Examples of  
16 uncharacteristic wildfires on the forest include Ojo Peak, Trigo, and Big Springs, all of which  
17 occurred within 6 months of each other on the Mountainair Ranger District in 2007 and 2008. These  
18 fires burned a total of 26,156 acres.

19 The National Interagency Fire Center (NIFC) Guidance for the Implementation of Federal Wildland  
20 Fire Management Policy provides much of the current direction for managing wildland fire on  
21 Federal lands, including wilderness areas. This document provides definition of wildland fire used in  
22 this Plan. Wildland fire describes any non-structure fire that occurs in the wildland. Wildland fires  
23 are categorized into two distinct types:

24 **Wildfires:** Unplanned ignitions including human and naturally caused fires. These include  
25 prescribed fires that have been declared escaped wildfires.

26 **Prescribed Fire:** Planned ignitions.

27 Most of the Cibola's vegetation is adapted to recurring wildfires started by lightning from spring and  
28 summer thunderstorms. Frequent, low-intensity fire plays a vital role in maintaining ecosystem  
29 health of much of the Pinyon-Juniper, Ponderosa Pine, and Frequent-Fire Mixed-Conifer vegetation  
30 types. These three vegetation types cover a large portion of the Cibola. Grasslands are also adapted  
31 to frequent fire. Other vegetation types, such as Mixed Conifer with Aspen and Spruce-Fir, are also  
32 fire dependent, but have a historic fire regime of less frequent, mixed-severity fires.

33 Today, the Cibola contains uncharacteristically dense forests with many more young trees than were  
34 present historically. Tree seedlings have invaded forest openings, grasslands, and savannahs. The  
35 forest and woodlands are deficient in grasses, forbs, and shrubs due to tree competition, and are at  
36 high risk for insect and disease outbreaks. Combined with drought, hotter and dryer weather  
37 conditions, continuous canopy cover, and accumulations of live and dead woody material, the  
38 ecosystem becomes primed for large, high-severity wildfires. These fires burn with more intensity,  
39 have higher tree and seed mortality, degrade watersheds, change soil chemistry and structure, and  
40 threaten homes and community infrastructure.

41 Wildfire (managed for multiple resource objectives) and prescribed fire are the most cost-effective  
42 way to reduce the likelihood of a high-severity fire. To achieve a forest that is resilient to fire

1 disturbances even during dry and windy conditions, forest structure and composition need to  
2 resemble desired conditions. In addition to fire, thinning and tree harvesting can reduce tree density  
3 and canopy cover and promote the natural fire regime. The goal is to improve ecosystem health by  
4 restoring fire to the landscape in the form of planned and unplanned ignitions.

## 5 Desired Conditions

- 6 ■ Human life, property, and natural and cultural resources are protected within and adjacent to  
7 National Forest System lands.
- 8 ■ Wildland fire maintains and enhances resources and functions in its natural ecological role.
- 9 ■ Fuel reduction activities (thinning, fire) protect social, economic, and ecological values at risk  
10 from high-severity disturbance effects.
- 11 ■ Wildfire intensity and frequency are within the natural range of variability. Uncharacteristic  
12 high-severity fires rarely occur and do not burn at the landscape scale.
- 13 ■ Wildland fire is understood, both internally and by the public, as a necessary disturbance process  
14 integral to the sustainability of the Cibola National Forest's fire-adapted vegetation types.
- 15 ■ Fires function in their natural ecological role in designated wilderness areas.

## 16 Standards

- 17 ■ Initial action on human-caused wildfire will be to suppress the fire at the lowest cost with the  
18 fewest negative consequences with respect to firefighter and public safety.
- 19 ■ Managers will use a decision support process to guide and document wildfire management  
20 decisions. The process will provide situational assessment, analyze hazards and risk, define  
21 implementation actions, and document decisions and rationale for those decisions.

## 22 Guidelines

- 23 ■ Response to unplanned ignitions that cross jurisdictional boundaries should be coordinated and  
24 managed to meet the responsible agency's objectives.
- 25 ■ Planned ignitions should create conditions that enable future unplanned ignitions to mimic their  
26 historical role or to serve as a tool to achieve resource objectives.
- 27 ■ Fires suppression activities should be conducted in a manner that avoids disturbance to critical  
28 species and impacts to cultural resources.
- 29 ■ Minimum impact suppression tactics should be utilized in wilderness areas to help preserve its  
30 natural character.
- 31 ■ Aerial retardant drops should avoid threatened, endangered, proposed, or candidate, identified  
32 sensitive species, waterways, riparian areas, and wetlands.<sup>11</sup>
- 33 ■ Natural ignitions may be managed for multiple objectives.

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<sup>11</sup> For species-specific information including which individual sensitive species are identified, see the Nationwide Aerial Application of Fire Retardant on National Forest System Land, Final Environmental Impact Statement. USDA Forest Service.

- 1 ■ Fire operations within wilderness areas should not compromise wilderness character.
- 2 ■ Firelines and spike camps (i.e., a remote camp usually near a fireline) should not be constructed  
3 adjacent to trails or camp areas in designated wilderness areas to protect wilderness values.
- 4 ■ In recommended wilderness areas, prescribed fire should be considered to reduce the risks and  
5 consequences of uncharacteristic wildfire if necessary to meet fire management objectives.  
6 Naturally occurring fires should be allowed to perform, as much as possible, their natural  
7 ecological role.
- 8 ■ Fire camps, helispots, and other temporary facilities should be located outside the recommended  
9 wilderness to protect wilderness character within the recommended wilderness area.
- 10 ■ Unplanned fires should be extinguished as soon as possible if a danger to the Research Natural  
11 Area, using means that would cause minimal damage to the area (FSM 4063.41). Natural fires  
12 should be allowed to burn only within a prescription designed to accomplish objectives of the  
13 specific natural area. (FSM 4063.2)
- 14 ■ Unplanned fires in the foreground (up to ½ mile) of the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail  
15 should be managed using minimum impact suppression tactics, or other tactics appropriate for  
16 the protection of values and resources for which the trail was designated.
- 17 ■ Effects from prescribed fire on scenic resources should be considered during project planning  
18 and implementation. Blackened and scorched vegetation may be visible in project areas in the  
19 short term following treatments, but scenic integrity objectives should be met in the long term.  
20 Efforts should be made to minimize high intensity fire in areas with high scenic integrity such as  
21 along system trails and scenic vistas.

## 22 Management Approaches

- 23 ■ Wildland fire objectives are based on factors such as desired conditions, fuel conditions, current  
24 and expected weather and fire behavior, topography, resource availability, and values to be  
25 protected. Social and economic considerations (for example, smoke and evacuations) may also  
26 affect objectives, as well as adjoining jurisdictions having similar or differing missions and  
27 directives.
- 28 ■ Management response to a wildland fire on Federal land is based on objectives established in the  
29 applicable land/ resource management Plan and/or the fire management plan.
- 30 ■ Wildfires may be concurrently managed for one or more objectives (for example, protection and  
31 resource enhancement) that can change as the fire spreads across the landscape. Strategies  
32 chosen for wildfires include interdisciplinary input to assess site-specific values to be protected.  
33 These strategies are used to develop incident objectives and courses of action to enhance or  
34 protect those values. Managers use a decision support process to guide and document wildfire  
35 management decisions that provide for firefighter and public safety, minimize costs, and  
36 resource damage, and are consistent with values to be protected and management objectives.
- 37 ■ The signed NEPA decision will serve as a prescribed fire's decision document. To meet the  
38 Plan's treatment objectives using prescribed fires, site-specific burn plans are developed which  
39 guide implementation. All prescribed fires are conducted in accordance with the New Mexico  
40 Air Quality Bureau Smoke Management Program and Bernalillo County smoke management  
41 regulations. Both of which ensure compliance to the Clean Air Act. Thorough review of other  
42 sections in this Plan will help with prescribed fire project design and implementation.
- 43 ■ Wildland fire is one tool in the process of restoring the Forest's fire-adapted ecosystems; in areas  
44 departed from desired conditions, the use of fire is often most effective when combined with

- 1 mechanical treatments that further restore forest structure. Mechanical treatments are costly, so  
2 the capacity to implement such treatments across the landscape is limited. Strategic placement  
3 and design of mechanical treatments increases their effectiveness in protecting values to be  
4 protected.
- 5 ■ Wildland fire may be the only viable tool in areas such as steep rugged terrain or remote areas  
6 where mechanical treatments are not feasible. Objectives in these areas may include higher fire  
7 intensities and higher levels of mortality to achieve vegetation structural changes that would not  
8 occur through other means to move toward desired conditions. Fire and fuels specialists, forestry,  
9 silviculturists, and other resource specialists will work to ensure land management objectives are  
10 met. Joint silviculture prescriptions and burn plans may be produced.
  - 11 ■ Management of wildland fire is coordinated across jurisdictional boundaries whenever there is  
12 potential for managing a wildfire or a prescribed fire on more than one jurisdiction (for example,  
13 Federal, State, county, local, Tribal governments, and land grants, etc.). This includes water  
14 sources, access, and land use agreements; and is done with the understanding that fire-adapted  
15 ecosystems transcend jurisdictional boundaries.
  - 16 ■ Community wildfire protection plans, or similar assessment and management plans, should be  
17 regularly integrated with Federal, State, county, local, Tribal governments, Land Grants, and  
18 private lands within the Cibola's boundary in order to mitigate negative impacts of wildfire.  
19 These plans identify and prioritize areas for treatment based on input from communities and  
20 multiple stakeholders. These plans help determine treatment priorities and encourages  
21 communication between agency and partners.
  - 22 ■ Information, education, and transformational processes should be utilized to inform the public  
23 about fire danger and prevention. Children and adults should be encouraged to report new  
24 ignitions immediately. They should also understand their responsibility for reducing the number  
25 of human-caused wildfires. Providing public information in the form of signage, public contacts,  
26 and fire-use restrictions should also be emphasized in the prevention program.

## 27 Range and Grazing

### 28 Background

29 There is congressional mandate to allow grazing on suitable lands (Multiple Use and Sustained Yield  
30 Act of 1960, Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resource Planning Act of 1974, Federal Land Policy  
31 and Management Act of 1976, National Forest Management Act of 1976).

32 Forage-producing National Forest System lands will be managed for livestock grazing and the  
33 allotment management plans will be prepared consistent with land management plans (36 CFR  
34 222.2). Unless otherwise specified by the Chief of the Forest Service, all grazing and livestock use  
35 on National Forest System lands and on other lands under Forest Service control must be authorized  
36 by a grazing or livestock use permit (36 CFR 222.3).

37 The Cibola administers a total of 86 active grazing allotments on the Mount Taylor, Magdalena, and  
38 Mountainair Ranger Districts. (There are no allotments on the Sandia district.) Livestock grazing  
39 contributes to the livelihood of the permittees and to the economy of local communities and counties.  
40 Livestock management on National Forest lands has shifted to an adaptive management philosophy  
41 that allows timely changes in livestock numbers or time to be made in response to changing  
42 conditions involving changes in forage production, water availability, and precipitation patterns. As a  
43 result, livestock numbers have declined over the last 20 years, because the Forest has balanced