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News Release

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Kaibab National Forest seeks comments on grassland restoration project

Williams, Ariz., Aug. 9, 2016—For Immediate Release. Managers are seeking public comment on a proposed project to use mechanical treatments and prescribed fire to restore grasslands across a 550,000-acre project area on the Williams and Tusayan districts of the Kaibab National Forest.

Known as the South Zone Grassland Restoration Project, the effort would implement thinning, prescribed burning and other activities to restore the structure and function of grassland and pinyon-juniper grassland, also referred to as savanna, ecosystems in an effort to improve their resilience to disturbance and changing climate regimes.

The Environmental Assessment analyzing the potential effects to forest resources of implementing the proposed project and all other associated documentation are available on the Kaibab National Forest website at <http://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=44132>. In addition to potential environmental effects, the Environmental Assessment describes the project's background, outlines the purpose of and need for the project, describes the components of the alternatives under analysis, and summarizes consultation and coordination that has been completed throughout the life of the project.

The South Zone Grassland Restoration Project area encompasses about 269,000 acres of the Williams Ranger District and 281,000 acres of the Tusayan Ranger District. The project area consists of the portions of the South Zone located outside the Four Forest Restoration Initiative project boundary.

The Southwestern landscape, including the South Zone of the Kaibab National Forest, has been greatly altered over the past century by the encroachment of woody plants, particularly juniper, pinyon, and ponderosa pine, into areas that were formerly grasslands and open pinyon-juniper grasslands. These factors have eliminated the vegetation necessary to carry low intensity surface fires across the landscape, thereby altering the natural fire regimes and allowing uncharacteristic forest succession to take place. Encroachment can alter water and nutrient cycling, impact soil integrity, and negatively impact wildlife habitat.

Comments concerning this project must be in writing and may be delivered electronically or by mail, facsimile, or hand. Comments will be accepted for 30 calendar days following the publication of a legal notice in the Arizona Daily Sun, which is expected to occur today. For additional information on the project or to provide comments, visit the Kaibab National Forest website at <http://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=44132>.

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