



United States Department of Agriculture

COCOONINO

National Forest

2014 Stakeholder Report

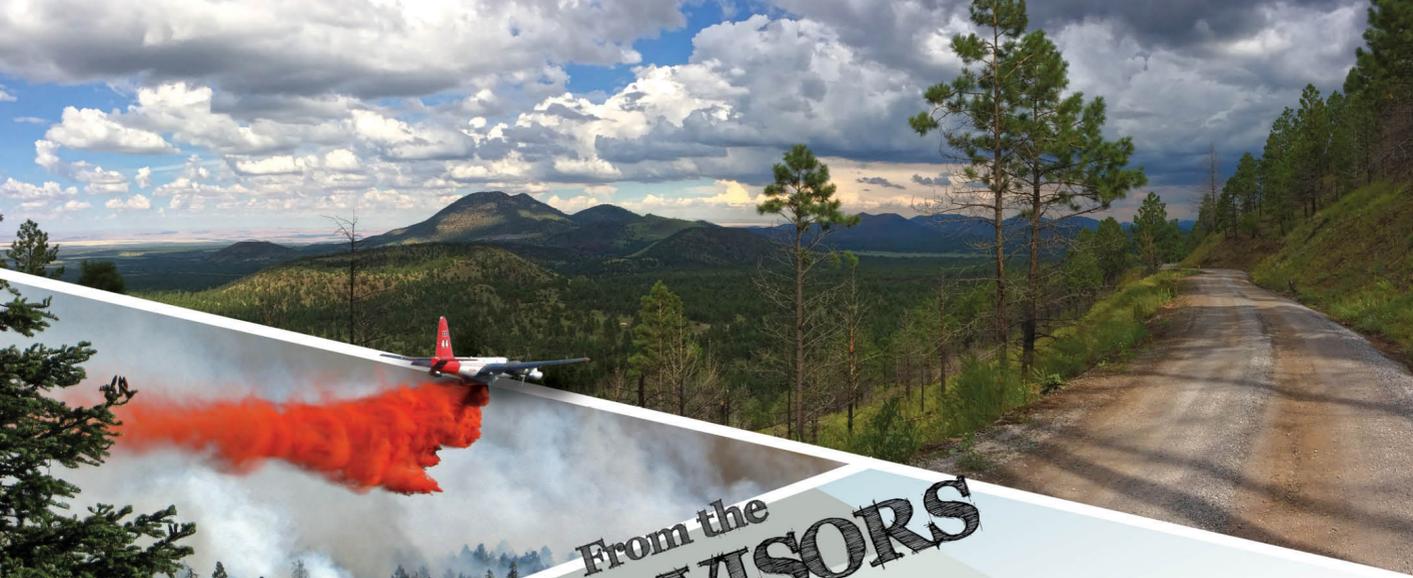


Forest Service

Southwestern Region

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From the FOREST SUPERVISORS

Watershed Protection

The **Flagstaff Watershed Protection Project** is another important effort that has benefited greatly from partner and public participation. This project is one of many that are focused on the potential fire and post-fire impacts on Flagstaff. The cooperative effort between the City of Flagstaff, Coconino County, State of Arizona, and Coconino NF on this project has been very productive. Similarly, the input from the community on the DEIS for this project is much appreciated and will result in a better outcome. We are working through these comments with the intention to have a Draft Record of Decision late spring 2015.

River Management

Work continues on the **Fossil Creek Comprehensive River Management Plan**, following the designation of Fossil Creek under the Wild and Scenic River Act. This process has taken longer than any of us would have liked, but the result has been an improved set of alternatives for management of this incredible natural area that is so popular. Once again, it has been the continued engagement by the Yavapai-Apache Nation, stakeholders, and others that has been the key to continued progress towards a really good and implementable plan for this special place.

Watershed Enhancement

An exciting new project on the Forest is the collaborative restoration project focused on the watersheds associated with the **C.C. Cragin Reservoir** (previously named Blue Ridge Reservoir). Built on the foundation of the Western Watershed Enhancement Partnership, between the Department of Agriculture and the Department of Interior, this project will focus on increasing the resilience and health of the watersheds that contribute to the water supply in C.C. Cragin. The City of Payson, Salt River Project, Bureau of Reclamation, National Forest Foundation, and the Forest Service have committed to working together in this effort and initial project planning is underway. More to come as this project takes shape.

While this is a summary of just some of the work being done on the Coconino National Forest, it does illustrate the really important role that you as partners, stakeholders, and publics play in the successful work being done. We want to thank you again for the investment you make in this and other National Forests. We are honored to serve in the role of administrators of these lands for you and look forward to continuing and strengthening the work we do together in 2015 and beyond.



M. EARL STEWART
Forest Supervisor



SCOTT RUSSELL
Deputy Forest Supervisor

It has been another great year on the Coconino National Forest, and we are pleased to be able to share a few highlights with you in this report.

And while this report only scratches the surface of all of the work accomplished on the Forest, in almost all cases that work was successful because of the involvement and contributions from partners, stakeholders, and volunteers.

Working together these accomplishments bring a new meaning to the term "the Public's lands." We want to thank all of you that have invested in so many ways in the Coconino National Forest (NF). The following are a few highlights of what we have been able to accomplish together.

Forest Plan Revision

The **Revision of the Forest Plan** for the Coconino NF continued in 2014 with good progress. The effort and thought put forth in people's comments on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) and Draft Plan illustrated the importance of the Coconino NF to the public we serve. We are working through consideration of your comments, and making sure that we take the time necessary to evaluate the comments and revise the Plan accordingly.

We expect to complete the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) and Draft Record of Decision (DROD) for the Coconino Forest Plan late in 2015.

Forest Restoration

The Coconino NF is one of four National Forests involved in the **Four Forest Restoration Initiative (4FRI)**, a large restoration project in Northern Arizona focused on restoration of the ponderosa pine forests and other associated ecosystems (such as riparian areas) on National Forest lands. This Initiative includes all of the restoration work being accomplished through a variety of means on these four Forests. This is a huge undertaking that has only been successful because of the involvement and dedication of the 4FRI Stakeholder collaborative group.

One aspect of 4FRI is the Phase I EIS for restoration activities on a large area on the Kaibab and Coconino NFs. The release of that FEIS and DROD in December of 2014 is a testament to the contributions of the 4FRI collaborative stakeholders.

Wildfire Response

Responding to the Slide Fire, and possible post-fire flooding, involved numerous partners and stakeholders, including Sedona Fire Department, Highlands Fire Department, Yavapai County and Coconino County.

Given a fire in the place everyone has worried about for decades, the outcomes of the Slide Fire were as positive as could be expected because of the strength of the relationships. To borrow a phrase from Jim Driscoll, Chief Deputy Sheriff for Coconino County, when all aspects and levels of government work so well together that is "good governance."



By the NUMBERS

Fire Management

Number of Wildfires in 2014
 (89) Lightning-Caused 13,720 acres
 (68) Human-Caused 23,858 acres

Significant Wildfires
 Slide Fire 21,227 acres

Wildfires Managed for Resource Benefits
 Bar M Fire 6,573 acres
 Pot Hole Fire 2,162 acres
 General Fire 2,086 acres
 Willard Fire 2,013 acres
 Kinder Fire 453 acres
 Island Fire 159 acres
 Rock Fire 73 acres
 Sawmill Fire 58 acres
 Point Fire 36 acres
 Walnut Fire 16 acres

Prescribed Fire
 Wildland Urban Interface 4,868 acres
 Non-Wildland Urban Interface 3,446 acres

Volunteer Hours

Flagstaff Ranger District
 14,966 hours = Dollar Value of \$331,486

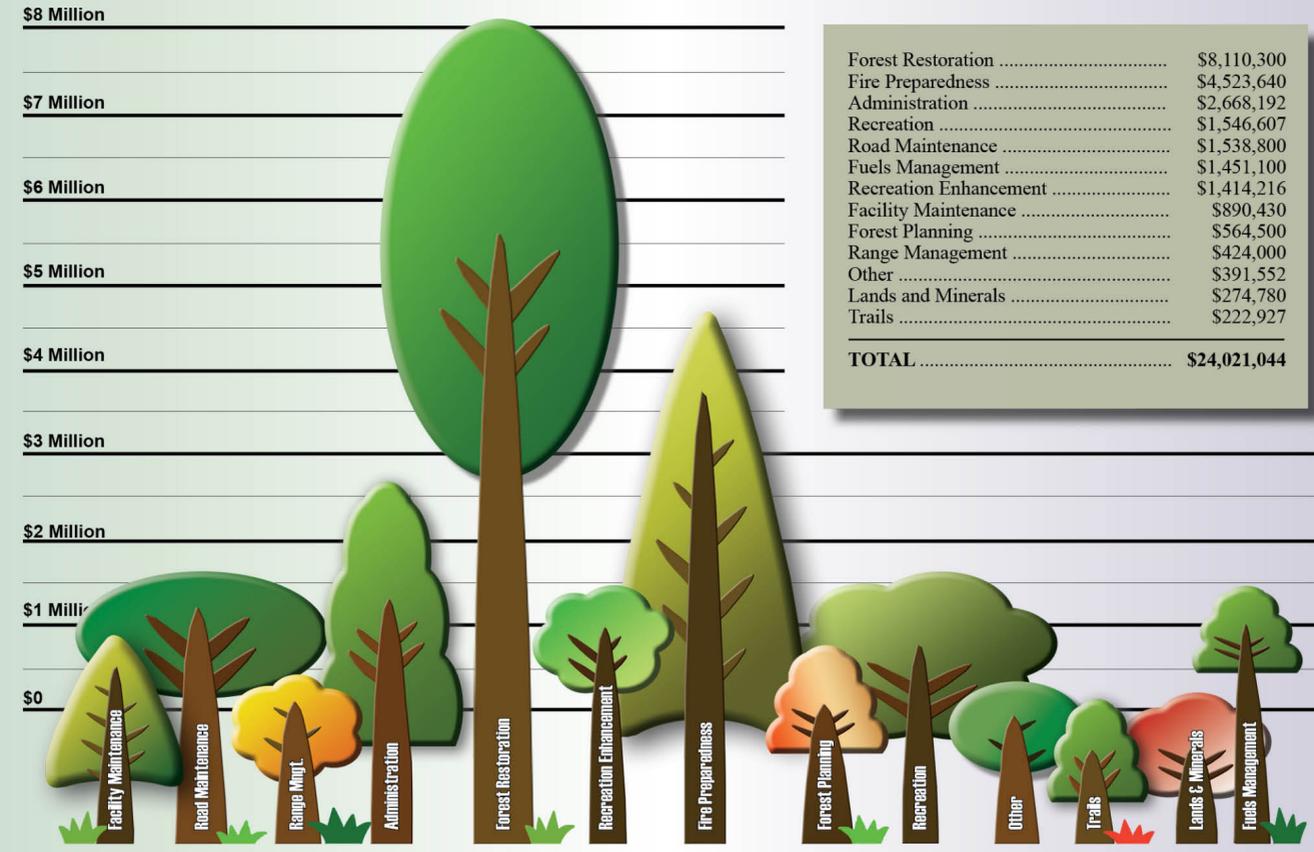
Mogollon Rim Ranger District
 15,279 hours = Dollar Value of \$344,541

Red Rock Ranger District
 55,064 Hours = Dollar Value of \$1,241,693

Law Enforcement

Fines Collected \$87,951
 Damage to Govt Property and Resources \$4,704
 Public Contacts 12,583
 Violations Issued 733
 Warnings Issued 388
 Arrests 48

Coconino National Forest Budget for 2014





SLIDE FIRE 2014

Slide Fire @ a Glance

STARTED
Tuesday, May 20, 2014 at approximately 4 p.m.

LOCATION
North of Sedona in Oak Creek Canyon, just north of Slide Rock State Park. The fire was named as the Slide Fire due to its location near Slide Rock State Park.

CAUSE
Human-caused wildfire

PERSONNEL
At the peak of the firefight, there were 1,236 personnel, including 13 Type I Crews, 15 Type II Crews, 4 large air tankers, 9 helicopters, 63 fire engines, 5 dozers and 19 water tender vehicles.

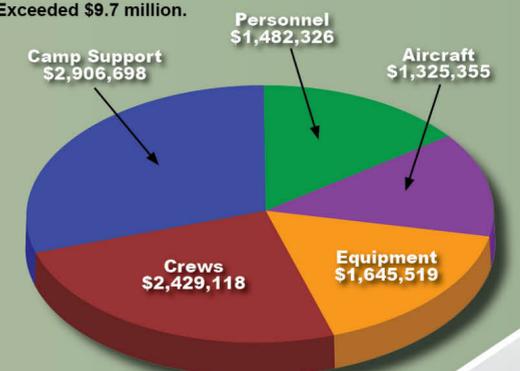
SIZE
21,227 acres

100% CONTAINED
On June 4, 2014. From start to finish, the fire burned for just over two weeks.

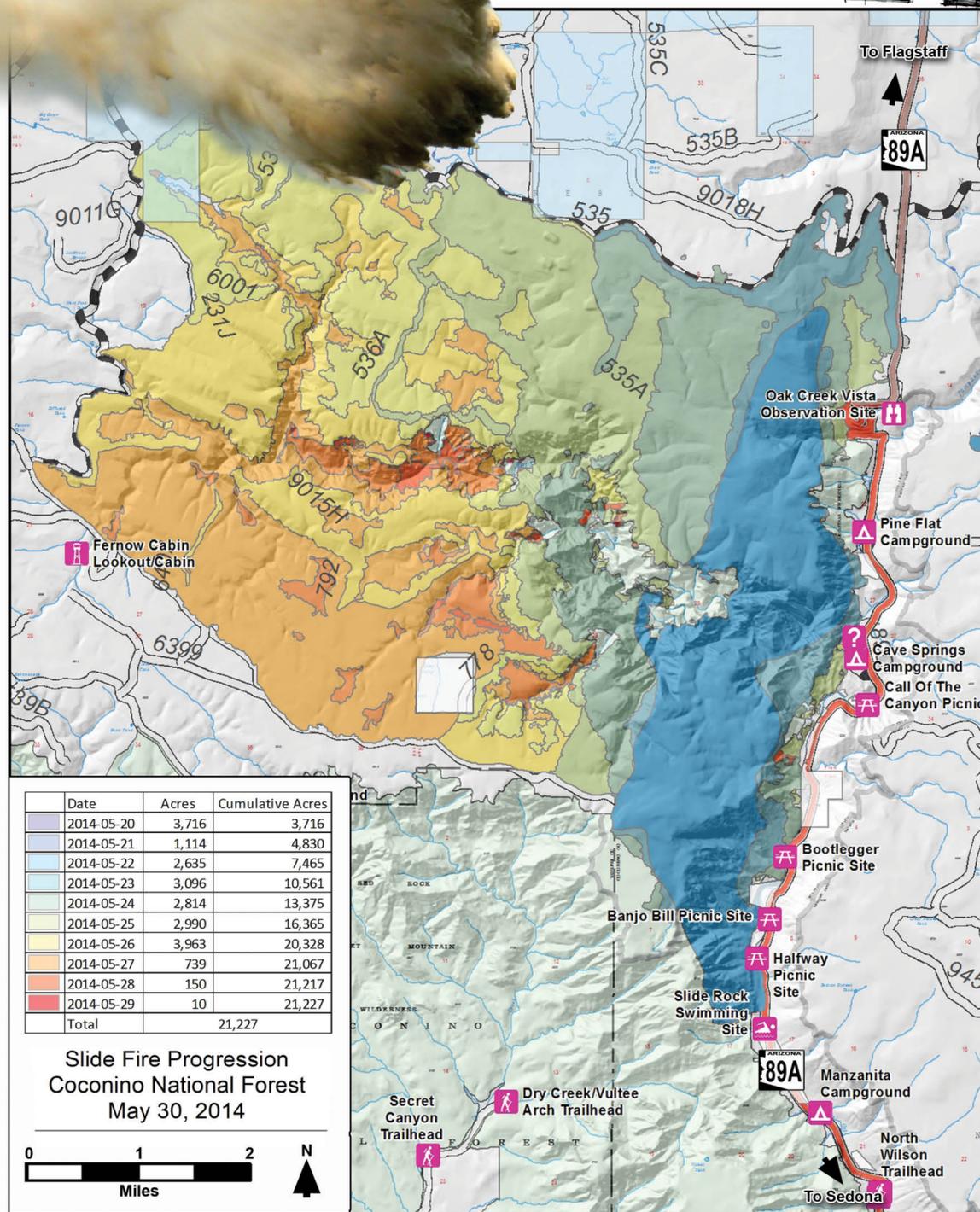
COST
Exceeded \$9.7 million.



ABOVE: The Slide Fire burns in a fork off of Oak Creek Canyon, called Sterling Canyon, near the Switchbacks.



Source: SWA Type I IMT Slide Fire Executive Summary



The Slide Fire began about 4 p.m. on May 20, 2014 just north of Slide Rock State Park in Oak Creek Canyon, Sedona and was human caused. Due to the size and complexity of the fire, a Type I Incident Management Team (IMT) was called in and took over management of the fire at 9 p.m. on May 21.

The fire moved quickly north up the canyon, prompting immediate mandatory evacuations in Oak Creek Canyon.

This included businesses and residents north of Slide Rock State Park for an approximate two-mile stretch and eventually up to the Switchbacks.

As the fire progressed up Oak Creek Canyon towards the Switchbacks and Pump-house Wash Canyon, a pre-evacuation notice was issued to the residents of Kachina Village and Forest Highlands the afternoon of May 21.

Had the fire moved into Pump-house Wash Canyon, it is likely it would have reached Forest Highlands since the wash leads directly to that community.

Fortunately, the fire was kept from moving into Pump-house Wash and several fuel treatment projects were noted as having a significant impact in aiding the firefight and keeping it west of Highway 89A and south of Forest Road 535 (just north of the Switchbacks).

Coconino National Forest issued a Closure Order for the area on May 25 and no injuries or structures were lost during the fire. Residents and business owners who had to evacuate were allowed to return to their properties on May 29 at 1 p.m. Costs of fighting the fire exceeded \$9.7 million and a Type III IMT took over management of the fire on May 31.

Post-fire effects quickly became the focus and what that would mean for visitors, business owners and residents in the area during monsoon. This required extensive coordination among many agencies.

Throughout the fire and aftermath, the Forest Service worked with and would like to thank partner agencies such as Coconino County, Yavapai County, the City of Flagstaff, City of Sedona, Sedona Fire District, American Red Cross, Salvation Army, Arizona Public Service, Arizona Department of Transportation, Arizona State Parks, Game and Fish Department, and the Department of Public Safety.

Rehabilitation efforts began almost immediately, but the effects of the rehabilitation work will be more evident in the coming years.



Photo courtesy: Ian Horvath

FIRE & SMOKE MANAGEMENT

Facts About Prescribed Fire & Smoke

Fire and smoke come with the landscape in the southwest. Fire is a natural and necessary part of the ecosystem, and therefore will occur. A fire manager not only suppresses severe wildfires, but also seeks opportunities to embrace fire's fundamental role, either through managing a naturally ignited wildfire or through applying prescribed fire to the land.

Southwestern soils do not receive nutrients from decomposition as wetter areas of the country do. Wood does not decompose readily in our soils, but frequent, low-intensity fire returns nitrogen to the soil, supplying it with the nutrients vital to vegetation growth.

It helps grow grasses and plants that promote wildlife habitat, reduce erosion, and protect watersheds. It also reduces the threat of catastrophic fire by reducing the accumulated dead fuels that would otherwise contribute to hotter and bigger fires.

Prescribed fires do not prevent wildfires, but they can change the behavior of an unplanned fire. In areas with less fuel to burn, fire behavior is less severe. Even during the Slide Fire which occurred in 2014, pockets of forest with less dense vegetation received less damage. The main focus of the prescribed fire program is the safety of communities and firefighters. Healthy forests are fire-resistant forests. Fire-resistant forests provide safer conditions for residents and firefighters in the event of an unplanned fire.

Types of Prescriptions

There are two types of prescribed burns:

Broadcast Burning involves applying fire along the forest floor. Flames are typically low to the ground, though some torching (a single or small group of trees burn) can occur.

Pile Burning is when crews ignite "slash piles"—branches, small trunks, and debris from forest thinning projects. Crews typically conduct pile burns after heavy rains or snow since the fuels are bigger and can burn hotter; moisture in the surrounding vegetation keeps the fire from spreading. Crews monitor conditions before, during and after ignition, watching ventilation, local smoke impacts, and fire behavior.



The Planning

Planning a prescribed fire begins with the creation of a larger-scale forest health project, where specialists from all disciplines—from archaeologists to wildlife biologists—work with fire managers to create a "prescription" for a particular piece of land.

Just like a doctor prescribes treatments for a sick patient, forest specialists prescribe treatments to improve forest health. Treatments include a variety of actions including thinning and prescribed burning.

The next step is for fire managers to begin planning individual burns—prepping the land with thinning and preparing boundaries to use during ignition. A list of conditions must be favorable before any burning can take place. These include fuel moisture levels, air temperature, wind conditions, and relative humidity levels.

Prescribed fires are also dependent on personnel availability, and approval from the Arizona Department of Environmental Quality (ADEQ).

Though the conditions are usually ideal in the spring and fall, prescribed burning is not particularly planned around a season.

Prescribed burning may occur any time during the year when conditions are appropriate.

The Smoke

Coconino National Forest fire managers are challenged with finding the balance between the critical need for reducing the risk of severe wildfires and the importance of minimizing smoke impacts to communities.

Fire Managers are very aware that smoke impacts the community. The men and women who conduct these burns put forth every effort to minimize smoke impacts.

Smoke from broadcast burning is typically heavier than that of pile burning.

Often, piles are completely consumed the same day as ignition, leaving little residual smoke, while broadcast burns typically continue to smolder and smoke for several days after ignition.

Smoke is heaviest the day of the ignition and the night following the burn with a steady decrease in smoke production each day thereafter.

Fire managers must find the moment when fuels are dry enough to burn as thoroughly as possible, without being so dry that fire activity is too severe.

Waiting for rainfall to conduct a broadcast burn would likely produce immense amounts of smoke without effectively burning the fuel on the ground.

Studies show that prescribed burns have less of an impact on the environment than large wildfires—which force massive amounts of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere and kill carbon-storing vegetation.

Prescribed burning can even help reduce our carbon footprint because of the carbon-storing abilities of healthy trees and plants.

Larger wildfires also produce much thicker smoke that is much more dangerous, lasts longer, and travels farther than smoke from prescribed burns.

The Coconino works with local fire departments under a partnership called the Ponderosa Fire Advisory Committee (PFAC), as well as neighboring forests to coordinate burn plans and lessen the impact of multiple projects on a single community.

In addition, PFAC partners will often team-up on one prescribed fire project. With more personnel, fire managers can burn a larger block of land in one day instead of several smaller blocks over several days. This reduces the overall number of days smoke is in the air.



PHOTOS ON THIS PAGE: Fire managers conduct prescribed broadcast burns.

How To Get Informed

We try to ensure that the public receives notification prior to prescribed burning. Because conditions can be unpredictable, we typically only know if and where we're burning a day or two in advance.

The Arizona Department of Environmental Quality monitors air quality during prescribed burns. For questions and information call (928) 779-0313 or go online to www.azdeq.gov.

The public can get prescribed fire information from the Coconino via the following:

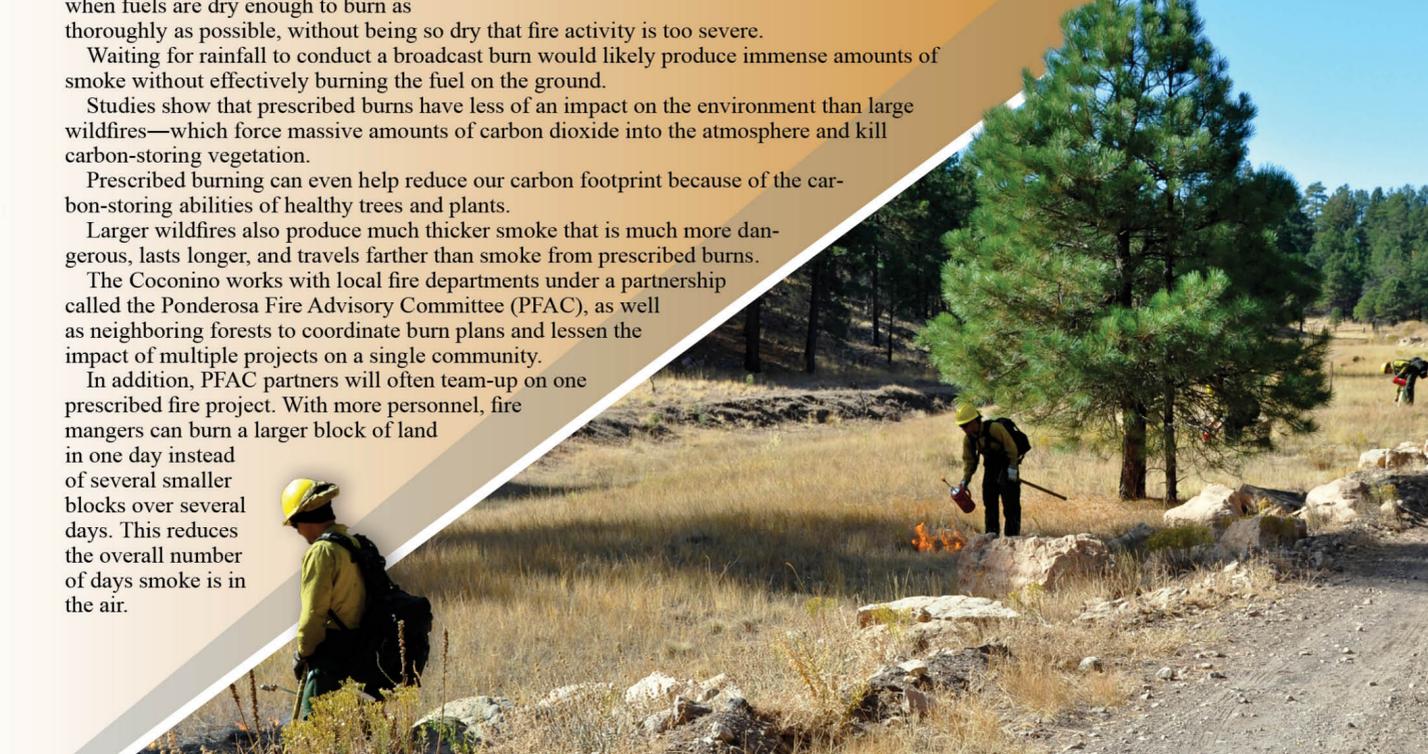
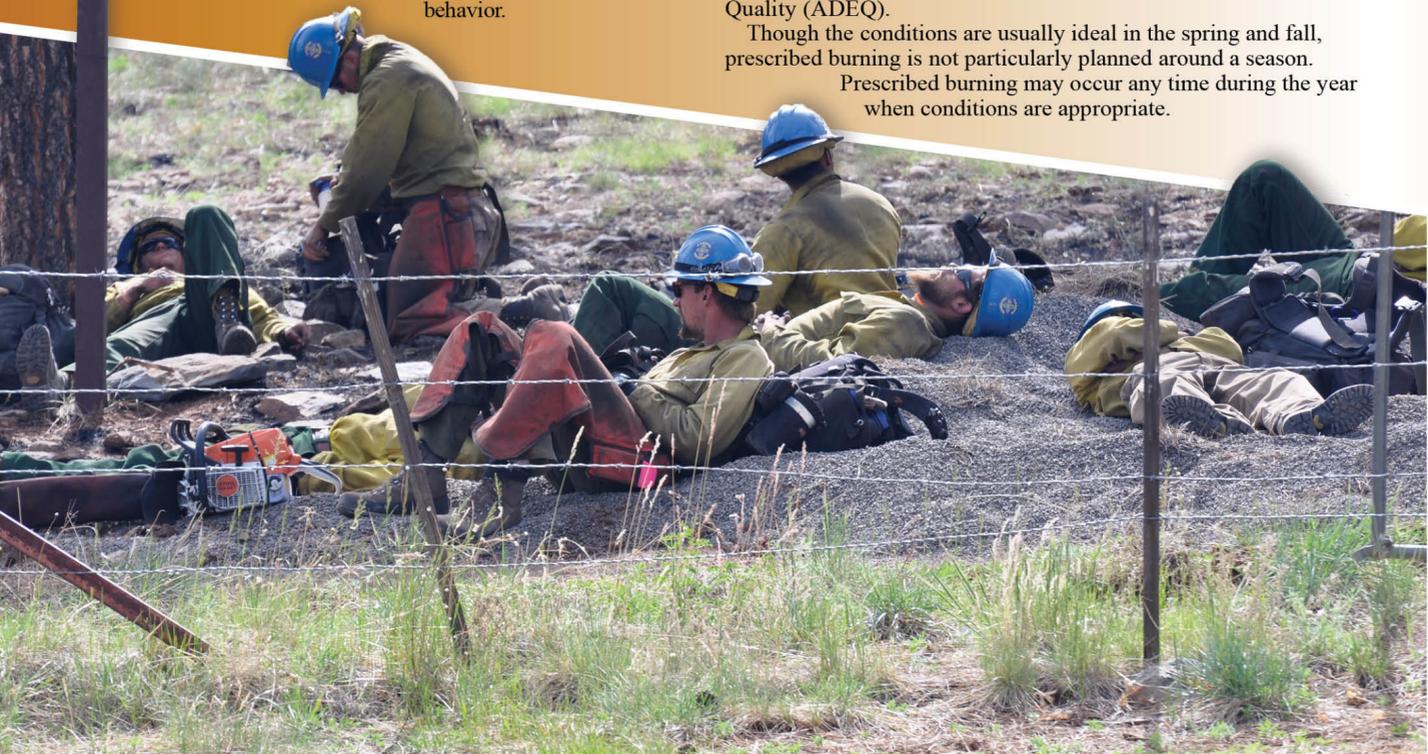
► Online: www.coconinonationalforest.us.

► Prescribed Fire Hotline: (928) 226-4607.

► Follow us on Twitter: www.twitter.com/CoconinoNF

► Monitors: to view data from various monitors that is updated hourly go online to www.phoenixvis.net/PPMmain.aspx

► For health concerns related to smoke, call the Coconino County Health Department at (928) 679-7272 or visit them online at www.coconino.az.gov/health.





WATERSHED PROTECTION

Flagstaff Watershed Protection Project

Partnering with the community to reduce risk of severe fire and flood around Flagstaff

In 2012, Flagstaff voters approved a \$10 million bond supporting efforts to reduce the risk of severe fire and post-fire flooding to Flagstaff and Lake Mary.

Since then, the Coconino National Forest, City of Flagstaff, State of Arizona and Coconino County have been hard at work.

On the Forest Service side of the project, three main efforts occurred in 2014:

- **In-depth analysis and planning** under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) for 10,544 acres of the project area,
- **Extensive road work**, and
- **Thinning and prescribed burning** in areas where treatments have already been approved under the NEPA process.

Our partners have been also implementing treatments on state and private lands.

NEPA Planning

In 2014, the Forest Service completed the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS), a key step in the NEPA planning process.

The DEIS presented a range of potential treatment options – from prescribed burn-



ABOVE: In 2014 crews treated approximately 120 acres with thinning and 150 acres with prescribed fire on National Forest land off Mt. Elden Road above Flagstaff. Treatment efforts will accelerate upon the completion of the Environmental Impact Statement in 2015.

ing and traditional thinning on flatter slopes only, to options less common to the southwest such as cable and helicopter logging on the steep slopes.

Intensive outreach efforts, including open houses, neighborhood meetings, booths at local events and media coverage, successfully encouraged the public to provide feedback on these options, resulting in the submission of over 530 individual comments specific to the project.

Public comments will shape the decision and what will ultimately happen on-the-ground, so this level of interest is both encouraging and helpful to the process.

The team managing the project drafted responses to every one of these comments in the fall and have since been utilizing the input to edit their reports and draft a decision.

The final decision will include a blending of the three action alternatives presented in the DEIS, according to the values identified by the public, as well as the overall objectives of the project.

Upcoming planning landmarks include formal consultation with the Fish & Wildlife Service, the publication of the Final EIS and draft Record of Decision, and completion of the objection process.

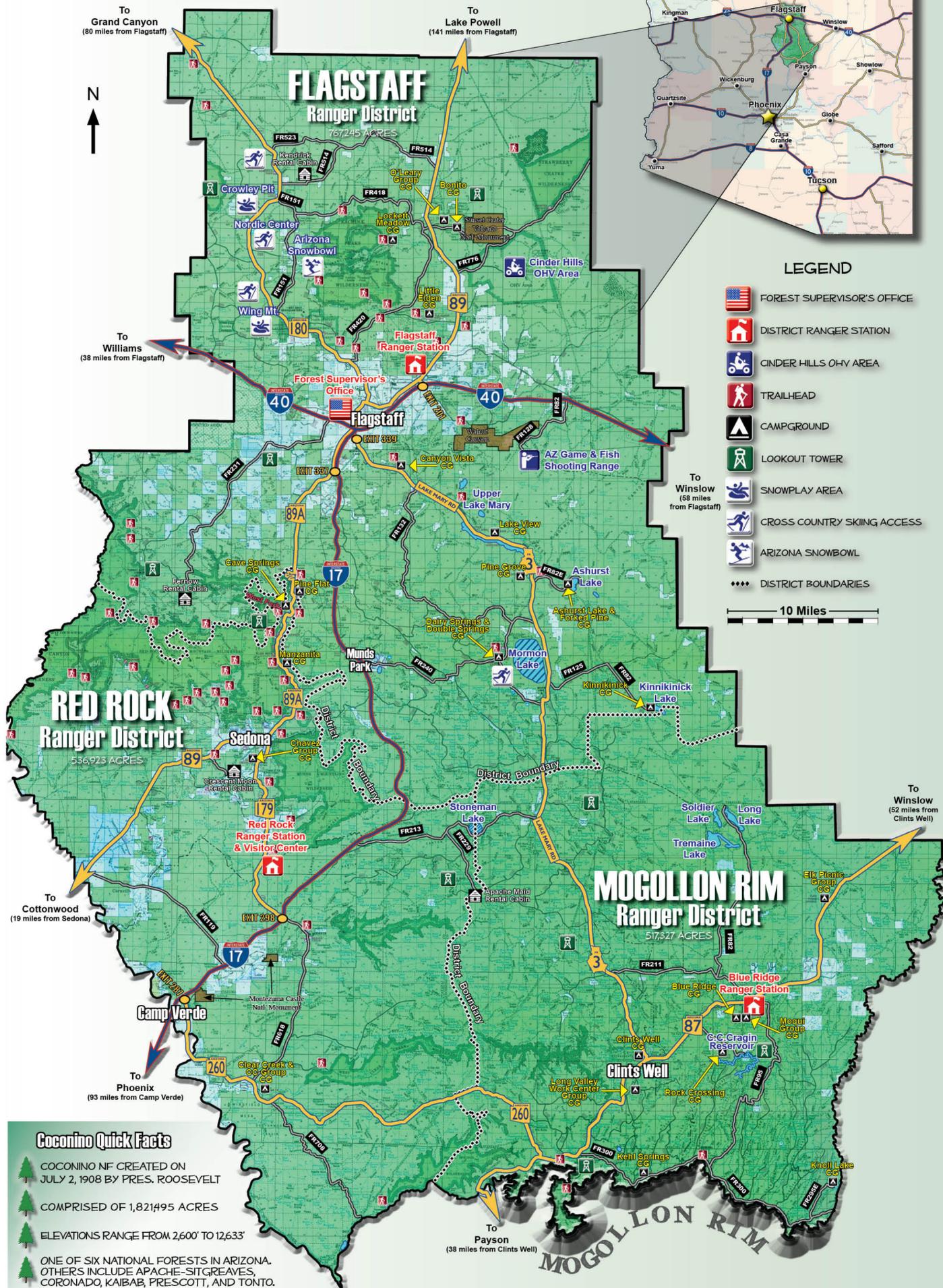
At the conclusion of the objection process, a final decision will be issued, anticipated fall 2015, with implementation to begin thereafter. Regardless of the type and specific location of the various treatments in the final decision, big changes are coming to the landscape around Flagstaff.

Expect some visual effects, smoke and heavy equipment, and temporary impacts to trails and roads, but anticipate a lower risk of severe wildfire and flooding.



ABOVE LEFT: Numerous public outreach efforts such as public meetings, letters to residents, and even building and installing informational kiosks (including this hand-made one by Forest Service volunteers) are ongoing. **ABOVE RIGHT:** The forest has been working on resurfacing roads within the FWPP to prepare them to sustain the traffic from heavy equipment and logging trucks.

COCONINO National Forest



Note: Full-size, detailed maps of the Forest can be purchased at any Ranger Station.



Potato Lake

FOREST RESTORATION

Potato Lake Area Rehabilitation



In June 2014, employees of the Mogollon Rim Ranger District installed a number of "Road Closed" signs and moved downed woody material to block a number of undesignated and user-created roads surrounding Potato Lake. This was done to reduce unauthorized motor vehicle use on closed logging roads and protect the area surrounding Potato

Lake and its natural resources. The lake, which resembles a large pond more than a lake, is a heavily-used recreational destination on the rim and includes important habitat for the threatened Mexican spotted owl, black bear, bats and Neotropical migratory birds. The efforts are expected to provide better information to the public as to which roads are open for motor vehicle use and are expected to improve enforcement efforts to reduce motorized use that may damage forest resources in this area.

Restoration of Poverty Flat Area



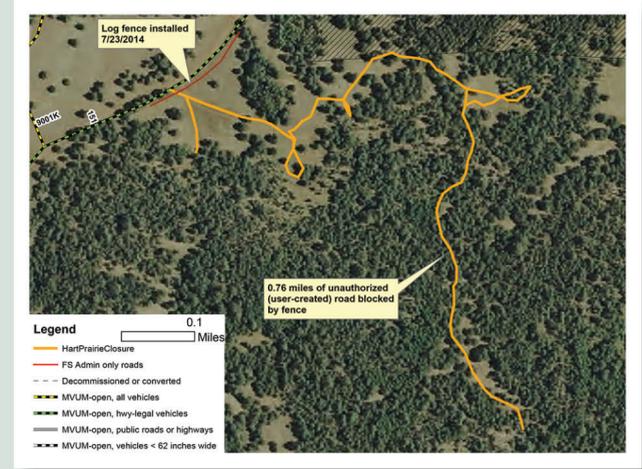
In early August 2014, the Forest Service led a group of volunteers to install log pole fencing along Forest Road 147 to restrict motorized access to a series of meadows known as Poverty Flat on the Mogollon Rim Ranger District. Despite numerous signs along the road that borders the meadows were identified as no off-road travel, there was occasional motorized intrusion into the meadows resulting in damage to natural resources, visual scarring and the establishment of new roads going through the middle of the meadows. The area includes important sensitive habitat for a number of threatened and endangered species and makes up a portion of the headwaters for East Clear Creek. The log fencing is an effective way to prevent unauthorized motor vehicle use in this area to protect wildlife, water quality, soils and vegetation.

Hart Prairie Road Rehabilitation

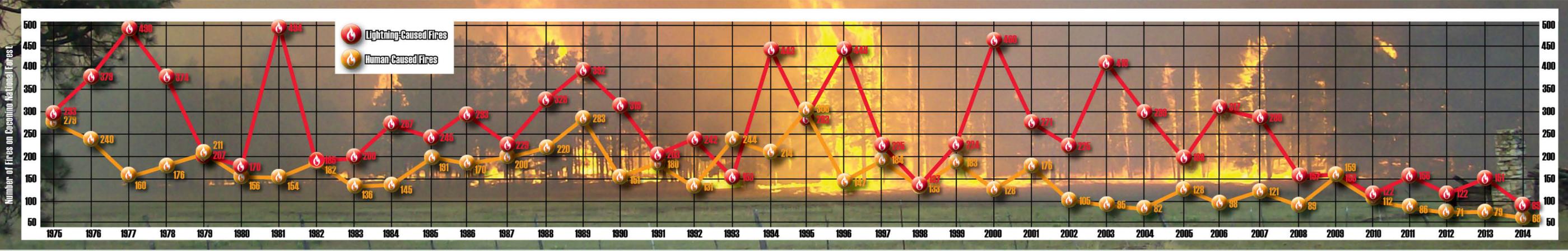
During the summer of 2014, the Flagstaff Ranger District held a work day to build a log fence along Forest Road 151 to block a high-elevation meadow and aspen stands from continued unauthorized motor vehicle use. The area appeared to receive regular motor vehicle use from hunters and from motorized camping in the summer and fall. While most of the use appeared to stay on an existing unauthorized road 0.76 miles in length, there were several areas where tire tracks could be seen driving off of the road into the surrounding meadow, leading to new established campsites. This unauthorized road was identified from public comments as a "problem area" where fences or signs were needed to discourage regular unauthorized motor vehicle use, and had been requested for route designation to allow access to motorized campsites along the road. Currently the road is not designated for motor vehicle use and occurs in a rare high-elevation meadow and aspen habitat types. Due to the importance of the habitat, ongoing unauthorized motor vehicle use, and evidence of increasing impacts from motor vehicle use, the District prioritized this area for the installation of a fence to eliminate unauthorized motor vehicle use and promote rehabilitation of the unauthorized road to grassland habitat.



ABOVE & BELOW: Forest Service personnel construct a log fence across an unauthorized user-developed road off Forest Road 151 near Hart Prairie.



40-YEAR FIRE TIMELINE



Supervisor's Office

1824 S. Thompson St.,
Flagstaff, AZ, 86001
(928) 527-3600

Flagstaff Ranger District

5075 N. Highway 89,
Flagstaff, AZ, 86004
(928) 526-0866

Red Rock Ranger District

P.O. Box 20429,
Sedona, AZ, 86341
(928) 282-4119

Mogollon Rim Ranger District

8738 Ranger Road,
Happy Jack, AZ, 86024
(928) 477-2255

Photos of Coconino National Forest are online at www.flickr.com/photos/coconinonationalforest.

For more information, visit us online at www.coconinonationalforest.us.

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