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May 18, 2010

Corbin Newman, Regional Forester
U.S. Forest Service, Southwestern Regional Office
333 Broadway SE, Albuquerque, NM 87102

Re: Southwest Jemez Restoration Project; NMDGF Doc. No. 13348

Dear Mr. Newman:

The New Mexico Department of Game and Fish (Department) strongly supports the implementation of the proposed Southwest Jemez Restoration Project. The primary goal of this project is to implement a landscape scale, cross-jurisdictional forest restoration strategy based on criteria in the Forest Landscape Restoration Act. If selected, the strategy will identify and prioritize restoration activities over a 10-year period to 1) reduce the risk of uncharacteristic fire; 2) improve water quality, watershed function, and wildlife and fish habitat; 3) maintain or restore old growth stands and maximize retention of large trees to the extent that it promotes fire-resilient stands; and 4) decommission and rehabilitate roads and trails.

The Jemez Mountains have a high degree of biological diversity, and have been identified by The Nature Conservancy as a landscape of highest risk in New Mexico to the potential adverse effects of climate change. This high degree of risk is evident from the relatively recent catastrophic wildfires such as the Cerro Grande and Dome Fires. This project, if selected, would be funded by the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program, and would treat over 200,000 acres of the Jemez River watershed in the southwest portion of the Jemez Mountains. Landowner partners include the Santa Fe National Forest's Jemez Ranger District, Valles Caldera National Preserve, Pueblo of Jemez, The Nature Conservancy, and the New Mexico Forest and Watershed Institute.

The Department was involved in the development of the Southwest Jemez Restoration Project proposal. We appreciate the inclusive and transparent planning process conducted by the Santa Fe National Forest to develop this proposal. We concur that landscape-level thinning treatments and prescribed fire are needed within the Jemez River watershed to return ponderosa pine and mixed

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conifer forests, woodlands and riparian areas to more natural conditions to protect wildlife, wildlife habitat, water quality, and human communities.

We look forward to working with the Santa Fe National Forest and other project proponents if and when this project is selected. Please let us know if we can be of further assistance regarding support for this important project.

Sincerely,



Terra Manasco
Assistant Chief, Conservation Services Division

TLM/mlw

xc: Wally Murphy (Ecological Services Field Supervisor, USFWS)
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