



Forest Service  
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

## Biennial Monitoring and Evaluation Report Snapshot

### Santa Fe National Forest

#### 2022-2023

### Are we meeting our goals?

The Santa Fe National Forest is meeting Forest Plan direction for:

- Following state air quality regulations for prescribed and managed wildfires and remaining under National Ambient Air Quality Standards established by the Environmental Protection Agency.
- Forest management activities contributing toward the recovery of federally listed species.
- Providing resources important for subsistence and economic support for rural historic and tribal communities are available and sustainable.
- Providing education and interpretation opportunities for the public learning about, appreciating, and understanding cultural and historic resources, as well as resources significant to traditional communities.



Photo 1. Lewis' woodpecker. Photo credit: USDA Forest Service photo by Julie Luetzelschwab

**Considerations for future Forest Plan monitoring** – Improved monitoring methods are needed to monitor range, riparian vegetation, wildlife and aquatic species. Several monitoring questions need to be refined to use existing relevant monitoring and data sources, capitalize on existing partnerships, and apply best available science. Additionally, we could develop more meaningful monitoring questions or indicators for assessing recreation on the forest.

### Summary of Monitoring Results

#### Watersheds, Air Quality, and Soils

Activities to improve soil and water resources have been implemented on 8,733 acres. 170 miles of roads were maintained. We remained below the annual and 24-hour standards for particulate matter 2.5, and ozone concentrations were stable. Indications are we will continue to remain well below the EPA National Ambient Air Quality Standards. Based on the most recent measured visibility, the San Pedro Parks Wilderness is experiencing improvements in regional haze.

We are in the process of reassessing watershed condition of select watersheds due to known condition changes following the 2022 Hermit's Peak and Calf Canyon fire. This reassessment will be captured in the next biennial monitoring evaluation report.

## Ecological Processes and Conditions for Terrestrial and Aquatic Ecosystems

More than four and a half miles of stream restoration for aquatic habitat and 2,037 acres of terrestrial habitat was restored or enhanced. Over 174 acres of riparian focused soil and watershed activities were completed, and 2,128 acres of rangeland vegetation was improved. Partners inventoried more than 1,870 miles of trails and disturbed areas for invasive species.

We have lost one core population of Rio Grande cutthroat trout due to the fire effects from the Hermit's Peak and Calf Canyon fire. The remaining populations are intact.

A northern leopard frog was found where stream restoration efforts have created back waters, caught sediment and has created more complex habitat. It is believed the frogs from the Valles Caldera National Preserve found their way into restored habitat.

Two new post-fledgling family areas for northern goshawk were found and delineated in 2022. Timber sales that contain post-fledgling family areas are being monitored.

We are in the process of obtaining partners and focusing on avian monitoring methods within specific habitat types. Acoustical monitoring has been piloted on the Forest and we are working on designing a monitoring program.

We saw an exponential increase in the invasives identified and a rapid increase in invasive species mapped. This could be a result of increased awareness and education. The acres infested with invasive species are considerably higher than was used in the plan assessment during plan revision. We also identified a change in condition due to the Hermit's Peak and Calf Canyon fire. While we have significantly increased the invasives inventoried, we are grossly lacking the resources (certified staff, staff time and funding for contracting) for treating invasive species. We also know invasive aquatic species are becoming more prevalent and resources and focus to address those issues are largely lacking. However, instream habitat restoration work is moving in a positive direction.

## Fire and Fuels

The number of acres reported show we were unsuccessful at meeting desired conditions; however, the Hermit's Peak and Calf Canyon fire created a national prescribed fire pause. The Santa Fe National Forest took extra time to establish new more robust prescribed burning protocols and engage more with the public and partners prior to implementing prescribed fire.

Findings indicated unplanned natural ignitions provided almost twice as many treated acres versus prescribed fire within the ponderosa pine ecological resource unit, and over 7 times as many treated acres within the frequent-fire mixed conifer ecological resource unit.

Fuels treatment effectiveness monitoring (FTEM) examines interaction of a wildland fire occurring within a fuels treatment area. Positive fuels treatment interactions are a good measure that we are meeting objectives. The higher percentage of positive interactions are a gauge that fuels treatments are strategically located, and fuel loading and vegetation conditions are conducive to reducing behavior and the resulting fire severity. Several fires had positive treatment interactions.

## Species Conservation

Project activities are fully integrating habitat management activities promoting ecological conditions that contribute to the survival and recovery for at-risk species. We are meeting Forest Plan direction for species conservation and incorporating measures from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service recovery plan. Coming soon to the Santa Fe National Forest are radio or global positioning system devices that will assist in studies that seek to answer specific management related questions regarding the Mexican spotted owl and thinning and burning.

## Designated Areas and Progress Toward Meeting Recreation Objectives

Over 98 percent of customers report being satisfied with recreation facilities, services and settings. Reporting shows over 531,000 people that visited the Santa Fe National Forest were satisfied in 2023. According to the National Visitor Use Monitoring program, satisfaction for visits in undeveloped areas include 75 percent very satisfied with the feeling of safety, 89 percent very satisfied with the scenery, 27 percent very satisfied with signage adequacy, and 52 percent very satisfied with trail condition. Volunteers contributed over 10,555 hours to trail construction and maintenance. Wilderness data was impacted by wildfire activity. The Hermit's Peak and Calf Canyon fire impacted the Pecos Wilderness in 2022; the Cerro Pelado fire impacted the Dome Wilderness in 2022; and the Black Feather fire impacted the San Pedro Parks and Chama River Canyon Wilderness areas in 2023.

## Cultural Resources and Traditional Uses

More than 5,600 permits were issued in 2023 for firewood, vigas, latillas, posts, Christmas trees, boughs, wildlings or transplants, and ceremonial or traditional uses. We conduct quarterly consultation meetings with four federally recognized tribal governments. Going forward, an agenda topic will include how the collection of fuelwood and other forest products is progressing.

Four interpretive sites and 10 interpretive opportunities like talks, tours, and activities were provided in 2023. Monitoring efforts of more than 450 cultural resource sites showed no cultural resource sites were looted. Volunteers, trained members of the site steward group in collaboration with the Heritage program, contributed over 400 hours for routine monitoring of historic properties.



Photo 2. MOU signing event between the Ohkay Owingeh Tribe/SFNF/Carson/BLM Taos Field Office on 11/29/2023. Photo credit: USDA Forest Service photo by Reuben Montes

## Multiple Uses

Trends show that we meet or exceed annual volume targets by offering and authorizing forest products to forest products industry and public use to achieve Forest Plan objectives. We exceeded the annual volume target of forest products by 54 percent, while remaining under the sustained yield limit. We also achieved 52 percent of the projected wood sale quantity and facilitated more than 4,750 contracts and permits.

We are not reporting properly to capture a good picture of how we are managing range and providing grazing opportunities in support of local economies, however we are implementing some changes to gather digital data going forward. Anecdotal data shows we may be meeting the desired conditions for providing similar livestock grazing opportunities as previous years, however it is not conclusive enough to accurately represent the condition across the Forest.