

Four Forest Restoration Initiative

A Collaborative Effort to Restore Forest Ecosystems on Four National Forests in Arizona
<http://www.4fri.org>



October 20, 2011

Coconino National Forest
Four Forest Restoration Initiative
1824 South Thompson Street
Flagstaff, Arizona 86001

Dear Forest Supervisors Bail, Stewart, Williams, Knopp, Blankenbaker, and the 4FRI ID Team:

On behalf of the Four Forest Restoration Initiative Stakeholder Group we want to thank you for the opportunity to discuss our comments of September 2nd, 2011 on the Proposed Action as it pertains to the Large Tree Retention Strategy (dated September 13, 2011).

The Large Tree Retention Strategy (LTRS) was crafted in order to move beyond the historical debate over diameter limits. The overarching goal of the Stakeholder Group is to move forward with landscape-scale restoration that is ecologically, socially, and economically viable. In order to move beyond the debate, the Stakeholder Group identified large tree retention and old growth protection strategies that are not based on strict diameter limits, but are based upon a 16 inch diameter threshold that, in combination with exceptions, are intended to retain pre-settlement trees and limit the cutting of trees larger than 16 inches to circumstances and criteria articulated in the LTRS. The intention of the exception process is to increase landscape heterogeneity and conserve biodiversity.

The dialogue on Friday, October 15th clarified the issues in the LTRS that are not appropriate for inclusion in the Proposed Action portion of the NEPA Analysis. However, a great deal of time has been spent developing the LTRS, with the intent that it be used as an integral part of the PA and subsequent planning through the NEPA process. We are committed to collaborating with the Forest Service to translate the substance and intent of the LTRS into NEPA documents and implementation strategies that provide clarity, transparency and predictability.

We understand that the Forest Service will attempt to map exception categories that lend themselves to geographical representation. We look forward to seeing how the Forest Service moves forward translating the LTRS into NEPA; consistent with the LTRS, we are committed to collaborate with you on additional areas and/or circumstances where large trees need to be removed to achieve restoration.

We appreciate the Forest Service sharing the Design Criteria and Best Management Practices, and Implementation Plan during the Friday meeting. These tools seem like promising vehicles for translating the LTRS clearly and predictably into the EIS and building confidence in the collaborative process.

Finally, we appreciate the ongoing effort of the ID team to keep us informed as the process move forward.

Sincerely,



Diane Vosick, Co-chair
Diane.Vosick@nau.edu



Ed Smith, Co-chair
esmith@tnc.org