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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**COUNTY LEADERS ENCOURAGED BY RELEASE OF FOREST SERVICE RFP, BUT  
CAUTION THAT WE ARE NOT OUT OF THE WOODS YET**

**HOLBROOK, AZ** – On June 15th, the United States Forest Service set a long-awaited and game-changing project into motion with the release of a new “Request for Proposal” (RFP), opening the first stage of the Four Forest Restoration Initiative (4FRI), a ground-breaking and nationally-recognized project designed to clean up Arizona’s four northern Ponderosa Pine forests and have private industry, not the government, pay for it.

The RFP will open an initial 750,000 acre swath of the Kaibab and Coconino Forests to industries that will harvest the smaller diameter trees responsible for cluttering the four forests. Currently, these small diameter trees are the primary cause for the devastation of the Wallow and Rodeo-Chediski Fires that have cost tens-of-millions of dollars to fight.

The RFP will be open for 60 days. Private businesses will submit their plans to the Forest Service for evaluation, and a 10-year contract will be awarded to the winner of that process this Fall. Since there is no large-scale restoration work being done in the Coconino and Kaibab Forests, the first phase of work will begin on those forests, while the existing White Mountain Stewardship Contract continues to thin the forests on the eastern side of the state.

The White Mountain Stewardship Project has been the pioneering effort to address the issue, and by many accounts it is the primary reason that damage to the communities of Eagar and Alpine was relatively low compared to the risk they faced. However, the RFP that has been released to kick-off 4FRI pushes the envelope to a whole new level. “The existing model for thinning the forest just doesn’t do the job as fast or as profitably as we need it too,” commented Navajo County Supervisor David Tenney. “We currently see anywhere from 5,000 - 15,000 acres thinned every year, but the trees on the Coconino, Kaibab, Apache-Sitgreaves and Tonto Forests stretch over 2.4 million acres. There is no way we are going to get the situation managed unless we start thinning at a landscape scale. We need to have 50,000 acres done every year to get things under control as fast as we possibly can.”

Tenney, and several other county supervisors, has been championing the 4FRI from its inception and has worked with an unprecedented collation of governmental, scientific, environmental and industry stakeholders to move the project from a good concept, to the doorstep of reality. “There is no other project in the entire country that has a better mix of stakeholders, a stronger game plan for creating jobs and buy-in from every level of government than 4FRI,” said Navajo County Supervisor Jerry Brownlow. “I am glad that we are going to finally have this project go to bid, and I am grateful to my fellow county supervisors and to Congressman Paul Gosar for lending their support to get us to this point.”

Because a project of this size and scope has never been attempted, there have been several delays in the release of the RFP. At the beginning of May, members of the project were told that there would be another delay, and Supervisor Tenney immediately reached out to District 1 Congressman Paul Gosar for help to get things on track. He got what he was looking for.

Shortly after Supervisor Tenney's initial communication with Congressman Gosar, the Congressman was speaking with the highest levels of the Forest Service in Washington D.C., and got the RFP process sped up. "I got a call from Congressman Gosar a few days later and he told me we were in business," said Tenney. "He believes in this project as much as we do, and he got in front of the right people to take us to this step."

The Forest Service plans to release two more RFP's that will cover the remaining 1.5 million acres of the 4FRI project, but the Counties are working with other 4FRI stakeholders on a new idea that may change that concept so there is just one more RFP to cover it all. "Under the current plan, new and existing businesses are going to be unintentionally pitted against one another," said Greenlee County Supervisor Richard Lunt. "There is a risk that the three-phase concept might prolong the process to such an extent that either the eastern or western portion of the forest will not have the supply of wood they need. The existing businesses of the White Mountains will need more wood to keep working once the Stewardship Contract finishes its term, and the new industry in the west will need wood to keep pace with the cost of building a new set of industries from scratch. It only makes sense to combine the remaining two areas while we have momentum on the project."

Making 4FRI a reality is a top priority for northern Arizona's county supervisors. The County Supervisors are very serious about making 4FRI a reality. They recently invited a group to Washington D.C. to communicate with Forest Service leadership, and educate policy makers at the Capitol. The group included supervisors from Navajo, Gila and Greenlee County, plus, representatives from NAU's Environmental Research Institute, the Center for Biological Diversity, the Grand Canyon Trust, Flagstaff's Arizona Forest Restoration Products and the White Mountain's Forest Energy. Members of the group met with Congressman Gosar, Forest Service Chief Tom Tidwell and Department of Agriculture Undersecretaries Harris Sherman and Robert Bonnie. During the meetings, the group expressed their gratitude for the upcoming release of the RFP, and discussed several key issues, particularly the two-phase RFP approach and the importance of awarding the first contract to a viable and preferably local bidder.

"It would make absolutely no sense to get all the way through this process and then give the bid to a company that falls apart two or three years after they start," said Supervisor Jerry Brownlow. "The counties asked Forest Service leaders in Washington to make sure that their best and brightest people were used to evaluate the bids, and we left their offices with an assurance that they understand what is at stake.

"4FRI is not just an Arizona project," said Supervisor Tenney. "Everyone who has a stake in the management of our public lands knows about what is happening here because 4FRI has changed the way we think about managing our forests. The release of this RFP is encouraging, but it's critical that we get the bid awarded to a company that can effectively implement all of the work that we have done thus far, and we get the final planning phases of this project wrapped up and out the door so we can put a stop to these unnatural and devastating fires."

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