

# NEWS RELEASE

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Contact: [bonnie.stevens@nau.edu](mailto:bonnie.stevens@nau.edu)  
928-523-6228 or 928-380-4349

## Stakeholder Group Reaches Agreement in Historic Forest Restoration Effort

Flagstaff, Ariz. – After working together for a year, community leaders, governmental organizations, environmentalists, scientists, and private industry leaders have reached agreement on a proposed course of action to restore health to Arizona's degraded ponderosa pine forests. That proposed course of action is detailed in the now-finalized *Path Forward* document, which will be submitted to the Forest Service as part of its ongoing 4 Forest Restoration Initiative.

The *Path Forward* document is significant because it ties together the diverse interests of a large group of individuals and organizations, collectively known as the 4FRI Collaborative Stakeholder Group, into one clear vision to restore some 2.4 million acres in the Kaibab, Coconino, Apache-Sitgreaves and Tonto national forests.

“What this means is we are all focused on the same goal, ultimately to return health and sustainability to Arizona's forests,” said 4FRI stakeholder group member Ethan Aumack. “We are promoting the use of the best science available to restore ecological and economic health by reducing fire danger and protecting communities, returning our forests and rangelands to a healthier condition that can function with low-intensity natural fire, and providing opportunities to create jobs and stimulate local economies.”

Now that all the members of the 4FRI Collaborative Stakeholder Group have agreed to the *Path Forward* document, it is intended to provide guidance to the Forest Service to inform decisions that impact the long-term ecological restoration of the four forests.

The *Path Forward* also builds on years of collaboration throughout northern Arizona communities, and in the Governor's Forest Health Council and that council's landmark document, *Statewide Strategy for Restoring Arizona's Forests*, that serves as the framework for unprecedented landscape-scale treatments into the future.

The *Path Forward* outlines broad-based support for forest restoration treatments that will be designed to reduce high densities of small trees—the result of past fire suppression policies and other land uses. Those small trees will be used by wood products industries, which in turn helps create jobs, enhance local economies, and reduce restoration and fire management costs.

The White Mountain Stewardship Project, a contract between the Forest Service and private industry to advance forest restoration and reduce the risk of unnatural fire in eastern Arizona, is one example of a public/private partnership created to solve the problem of too many trees, unhealthy forests and not enough jobs. It came about after Congress authorized the use of stewardship contracts for up to a 10-year period in 2003 and after the half-million-acre Rodeo-Chediski Fire of 2002. Large stewardship contracts require a multi-party monitoring board to track the results of the contract. Currently the White Mountain Stewardship Project is coming up on its five-year review with nearly 38,000 acres treated.

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“The concept of a multi-party monitoring effort assures that a sharing of perspectives between multiple interests and stakeholders fosters understanding, incorporates the ever-growing body of science concerning our environment and results in better forest management,” said Monitoring Board Chairman Don Berry.

The 4 Forest Restoration Initiative seeks to treat approximately 50,000 acres per year over a 20-year period. Historically, only about 15,000 acres a year have been treated in northern Arizona forests. The first large project planning effort associated with 4FRI is expected to begin this fall. It will be designed to cover 750,000 acres on the Mogollon Rim, guided by a landscape strategy for the entire 2.4 million acres. Businesses that harvest, process and sell wood products from excess trees will play a critical role in the restoration treatments and offset the cost to the public through the Forest Service.

“This is a very exciting step forward for all of us who value and depend upon the health of our majestic forests. These efforts will set forests and local economies on a path of recovery, and will leave future generations with forested landscapes that will become assets, not liabilities,” said Co-chair of the Governor’s Forest Health Council Molly Pitts.

The 4FRI Stakeholder Group is open to any individual or organization interested in participating in the 4FRI effort. To learn more about 4FRI, contact stakeholder group members or the Forest Service directly. The 4FRI Stakeholder Group Steering Committee includes Ethan Aumack of the Grand Canyon Trust, Pascal Berlioux of Arizona Forest Restoration Products Inc., Ed Smith of The Nature Conservancy, Sarah Reif of the Arizona Game and Fish Department, Todd Schulke of the Center for Biological Diversity, Gila County Supervisor Tommie Martin, Navajo County Supervisor David Tenney, Steve Gatewood of the Greater Flagstaff Forests Partnership, Paul Summerfelt with the City of Flagstaff, Molly Pitts with the Northern Arizona Wood Products Association and Diane Vosick of the Ecological Restoration Institute at Northern Arizona University.

For more information visit the Kaibab National Forest website at <http://fs.usda.gov/kaibab>.

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