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**File Code:** 1950  
**Date:** May 10, 2023

Dear Friends and Neighbors of the Coronado National Forest:

I am writing today to inform you of the proposed **Peloncillo FireScape** project, a proposal to authorize restoration actions to achieve multiple resource benefits and increase resiliency of vegetation within the Peloncillo Mountains on the Douglas Ranger District of the Coronado National Forest in Cochise County, Arizona and Hidalgo County, New Mexico. We are inviting you to submit comments to help refine the proposed activities disclosed in this letter. The Douglas Ranger District is currently preparing an environmental analysis of this proposal and seeks your assistance to better identify issues, concerns, and opportunities. Pursuant to 36 CFR 218.7(a)(2), this proposed project implements the land management plan and is subject to §218 subparts A and B.

### **Background**

Fire has played an important ecological role in the history of the grassland, woodland, and forest ecosystems of southeastern Arizona and southwestern New Mexico. Regular intervals of naturally occurring fire restrict the growth of shrubs in grasslands, thin forests of fire-intolerant trees, increase stream flows, decrease extent and severity of insect and disease outbreaks, and renew wildlife habitat. Beginning in the early 20th century, the frequency of natural fire decreased dramatically. This decrease corresponded with an increased demand for wildland fire suppression to protect life and property, reduction of fine fuels by livestock grazing, and timber and mineral extraction. This change in land use and management resulted in areas of dense, overgrown vegetation, and heavy accumulations of fuel with altered species composition.

In 1997, with the support of the Bureau of Land Management, Arizona State Land Department, and New Mexico State Forester, the Coronado National Forest assumed the lead role in developing a programmatic fire management plan for the Peloncillo Mountains. Planning included coordination with local government officials in Cochise County, AZ and Hidalgo County, NM, and with ranchers, other landowners, and grazing permittees, all of whom have interests in the project area.

The programmatic Peloncillo Fire Management Plan (PFMP) was developed to be compatible with a new federal fire management policy at the time – the Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy and Program – jointly issued by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and Department of the Interior (DOI) in 1995. To reflect the 1995 federal fire policy, planning efforts focused on expanding outside the outdated policy of “total suppression” to one that would allow naturally ignited wildland fires<sup>1</sup> to burn within specific guidelines. The purpose of the new policy was to foster the restoration of natural fire’s role in defining the vegetation and ecosystems of the Peloncillo Mountains.

Around the same time the PFMP was conceived, the Malpai Borderlands Group came into existence. This grassroots group of local ranchers and scientists came together with the purpose of rangeland conservation, with the return of a natural fire regime serving as a major focus in achieving that goal. This shared vision of stewardship allowed for greater success with planned treatments and management of wildland fires under the PFMP. Prescribed fires occurred across multiple jurisdictions, including private property. Coordination with Malpai Borderlands Group is ongoing when evaluating management actions for naturally ignited fires.

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<sup>1</sup> “Any non-structure fire that occurs in vegetation or natural fuels. Includes Wildfires and Prescribed Fires.” (USDOI 2009)



As fire and fuels management evolved under changing conditions, the Coronado National Forest began developing landscape-scale treatments that included a suite of tools to address ecosystem restoration needs. These “FireScape” treatments have been developed, analyzed, and implemented successfully across the Coronado National Forest since 2009, including in the Huachuca, Whetstone, Galiuro, Santa Catalina, Rincon, Santa Rita, and Chiricahua Mountains. The proposed Peloncillo FireScape project intends to build off the PFMP, which currently allows for prescribed fire and the management of naturally ignited wildland fires to accomplish resource management objectives across the landscape. The proposed Peloncillo FireScape project would incorporate supplementary treatment methods to help further promote and maintain desired conditions where they exist, as well as facilitate and accelerate the restoration of native, fire-adapted vegetation communities into the future.

### **Project Location**

The Peloncillo mountain range stretches approximately 70 miles from the U.S.-Mexico border north to the Gila River. The project area is situated southeast of the Chiricahua Mountains and just north of the U.S.-Mexico border. It is located approximately one hour east of Douglas, AZ and one hour south of Lordsburg, NM. The mountains rise abruptly from a sea of desert grassland, contributing to the Coronado’s “sky island” character. Elevations range from 4,570 feet to 6,647 feet. The project area straddles the Arizona-New Mexico border, with 81 percent occurring in New Mexico. The 19,056-acre Bunk Robinson Wilderness Study Area and the 12,163-acre Whitmire Canyon Wilderness Study Area flank the Geronimo Trail Road to the south and north, respectively. The 3,436-acre Guadalupe Canyon Zoological Area forms part of the Peloncillo Ecosystem Management Area’s southern boundary and is almost entirely contained within the Bunk Robinson Wilderness Study Area.

The Peloncillo Mountains contain many of the vegetation communities (Ecological Response Units<sup>2</sup>) found on the Coronado National Forest, from grassland communities at the lower elevations (from approximately 4,570 feet) rising to Madrean pinyon-oak in the highest elevations (up to 6,647 feet; **Error! Reference source not found.**; Figure 1; Wahlberg et al 2019).

Table 1. Relative area of Ecological Response Units in the Peloncillo Ecosystem Management Area (EMA)

<b>Ecological Response Units</b>	<b>Percent of EMA</b>
Juniper Grassland	12%
Madrean Encinal Woodland	27%
Madrean Pinyon-Oak Woodland	7%
Pinyon-Juniper (PJ) Evergreen Shrub	24%
Semi-Desert Grassland	29%
Riparian (All)	< 1%
Interior Chaparral	< 0.1%
Chihuahuan Desert Scrub	< 0.1%

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<sup>2</sup> Ecological Responses Units (ERUs) are ecosystem mapping units defined by site potential where plant associations, structure, and ecosystem process characteristics would occur when natural disturbance regimes and biological processes prevail (TNC 2006).

## **Management Direction**

The 2018 Coronado National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan), provides general guidance on how to manage National Forest System lands. Proposed activities are designed to be consistent with desired conditions, objectives, standards, and guidelines defined in the Forest Plan.

The Forest Plan objectives for the Peloncillo EMA state “every 10 years treat the vegetation using wildland fire (planned and unplanned ignitions), prescribed cutting, and mastication on at least 35 percent of the Peloncillo Ecosystem Management Area to create resiliency to disturbance. Treatments will be consistent with the objectives for forestwide vegetation communities and resources” (Forest Plan, p. 136). The Forest Plan defines the wildland-urban interface (WUI) as, “those areas of human populations and their residences at imminent risk from wildfire, as well as human developments having special significance (Forest Plan, p. 23). The desired conditions for the WUI include “as a result of vegetation management, most wildfires in the wildland-urban interface are low- to mixed-severity fires that result in limited loss of structures or ecosystem function. Patterns of treatments are effective in modifying fire behavior” (Forest Plan, p. 23). The Forest Plan objective for the WUI states to “treat 5,000 to 10,000 acres in the wildland-urban interface using wildland fire (planned and unplanned ignitions), prescribed cutting, and mastication every year to reduce fire hazard and risk to communities and the forest” (Forest Plan, p. 23). Implementing multiple methods of fuels treatments would help achieve Forest Plan management objectives for both the Peloncillo EMA and the wildland-urban interface. Forestwide objectives for riparian areas are to treat uplands with vegetation treatments or soil and watershed restoration treatments to maintain watershed stability, and thereby, the structure and function of streams, flood plains, and riparian vegetation (Forest Plan, p. 52).

The Forest Plan also recommends “collaborating with the Malpai Borderlands Group” as a Management Approach for the Peloncillo EMA (Forest Plan, p. 137). While collaboration with the Malpai Borderlands Group has been ongoing since the group’s inception in 1994, the Peloncillo FireScape project will build upon the previous PFMP and the relationships it helped to establish. This project will allow for greater flexibility in the tools available to further the shared goal of managing a healthy, unfragmented landscape that supports a diverse, flourishing community of human, plant, and animal life.

Proposed activities for wildland fire treatments will comply with the Forest Plan, the Fire Management Reference System (USDA Forest Service 2017a), and the National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy (National Strategy; USDOJ 2014). The National Strategy sets broad, strategic, and national-level direction as a foundation for implementation actions at the local level. The three goals of the National Strategy are: 1) Resilient Landscapes; 2) Fire Adapted Communities; and 3) Safe and Effective Wildfire Response. The proposed treatments in Peloncillo FireScape will work toward the Vision of the National Strategy, “To safely and effectively extinguish fires when needed; use fire where allowable; manage our natural resources; and as a nation, to live with wildland fire”.

Proposed activities within federally listed species habitat would apply habitat management objectives, design features, and conservation measures from approved recovery plans and US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) consultation. Additionally, proposed activities would include design features which meet Forest Plan guidance for the protection of sensitive species (Forest Plan, pp. 67-68, 136-137).

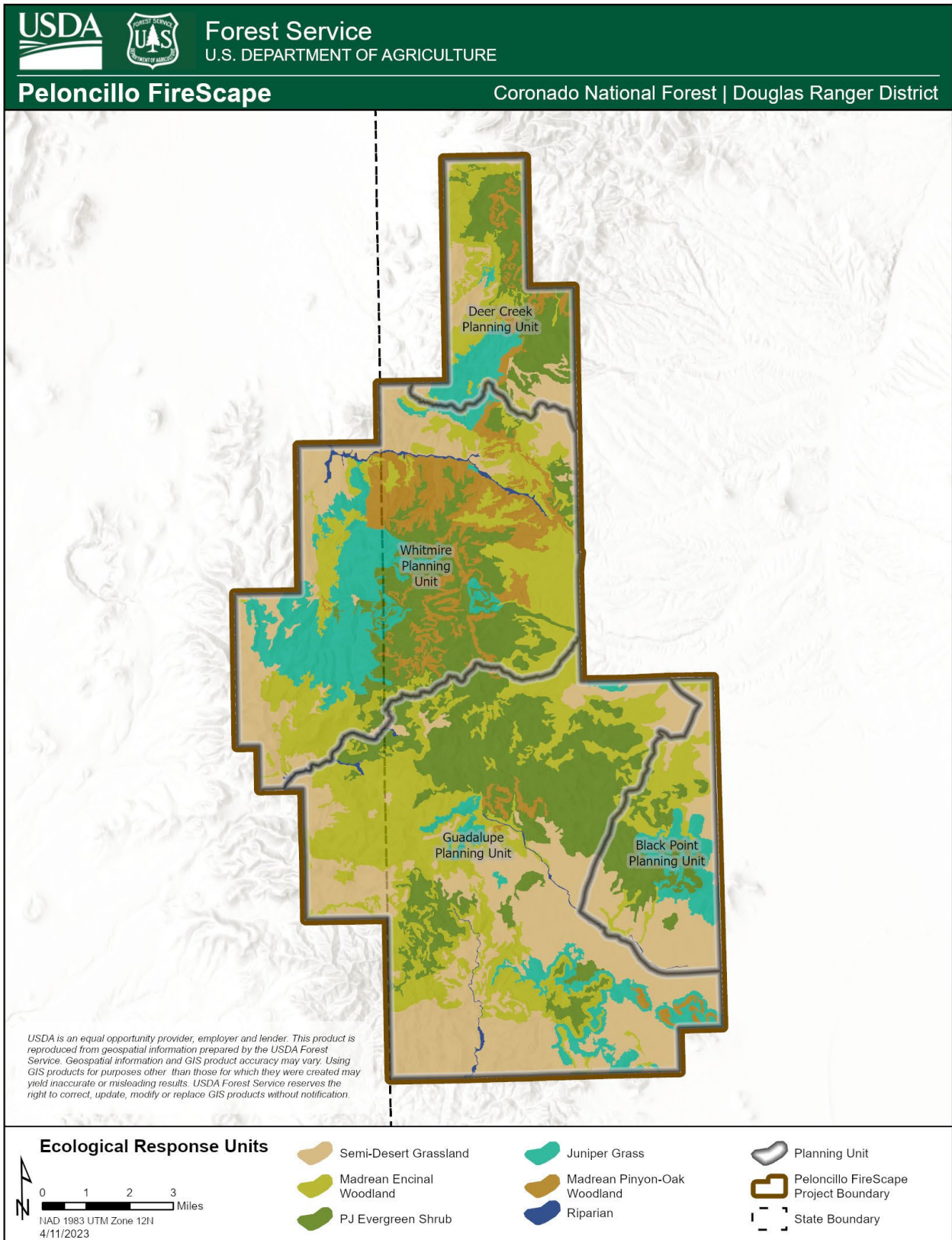


Figure 1. Ecological Response Units within the project area

## **Purpose and Need**

The purpose and need for this project is to:

- Reduce fuel accumulations and treat vegetation composition and structure in the Peloncillo EMA that contribute to the risk of uncharacteristic wildfire and the associated negative effects of habitat loss, soil erosion, and flooding.
- Maintain existing fuel loading and vegetation composition and structure where desired conditions occur.
- Create fire management opportunities within the project area to provide for public and firefighter safety and the ability to manage natural ignitions to achieve desired Forest Plan objectives.
- Create or maintain conditions that enable unplanned ignitions to play their natural role within the EMA.
- Provide protection to values at risk within the project area, including, but not limited to, cultural heritage resources; threatened, endangered, and sensitive species habitat; wetlands and other natural water sources; USFS infrastructure; and adjacent private ranch infrastructure.
- Recover, restore, and sustain ecological processes to retain and enhance the overall health and resiliency of watersheds and desired native plant and animal species and communities.
- Improve habitat quality, quantity, and connectivity of threatened, endangered, and sensitive wildlife species.

## **Proposed Action**

We are proposing to use a mix of fire and non-fire treatments to improve and/or maintain desired vegetation conditions in the Peloncillo EMA (Table 2; Figure 2) with the goal of decreasing the risk of uncharacteristic high-severity wildfire by reducing vegetative fuel loading, therefore promoting improvement in ecosystem health. Attaining these project goals would make progress toward vegetation conditions that support a more historic low to moderate intensity natural fire cycle, which, in turn, would lessen the probability of high intensity fires. For planning purposes, four planning units were identified using Potential Operational Delineations (PODs) to define the Peloncillo landscape (Figure 2). PODs are fire management and planning units whose boundaries are defined by potential control features that can be leveraged for fire containment during a wildfire or prescribed fire. Typical POD boundaries are a combination of roads, rivers, major ridges, barren areas, waterbodies, major fuel changes, or other locations that facilitate control.

## **Description of Proposed Treatments**

The following sections provide brief descriptions of treatments proposed to move towards the wide range of desired conditions specified in the 2018 Forest Plan. Treatments are designed to restore ecosystem structure and function by reducing surface fuels, ladder fuels, density of trees and shrubs, and promoting watershed stabilization and regeneration of desired species (Table 2).

Weather, limited operating periods, recent fire events, and available funding would dictate the amount and type of activities that might be applied in any given year. Anticipated restoration treatments include wildland fire treatments (natural unplanned ignitions and prescribed fire), prescribed cutting (hand thinning and mechanical treatments), herbicide application, and watershed improvement (erosion control techniques, planting, and seeding).

In addition to the actions described below, land managers would also have the choice of managing naturally ignited wildland fires for the protection and enhancement of Forest values. Specific design features will be developed in consideration of issues identified during public and internal scoping.

Table 2. Proposed Treatment Types by Ecological Response Unit

Treatment Tool		Condition for Use	Semi-Desert Grassland	Juniper Grassland	Pinyon-Juniper Evergreen Shrub	Madrean Encinal Woodland	Madrean Pinyon-Oak Woodland	Riparian (All)
Prescribed Burning	Broadcast Burning	Primary treatment where vegetation or fuel structure are departed from desired conditions, needed to maintain desired conditions, or following prescribed cutting treatments to remove slash.	•	•	•	•	•	•
	Pile Burning	Secondary treatment following hand or mechanical treatments to remove slash.	•	•	•	•	•	•
Prescribed Cutting	Hand Thinning	Primary treatment where vegetation and fuel structure exceed desired conditions.	•	•	•	•	•	•
	Mechanical Treatment	Primary treatment where vegetation and fuel structure exceed desired conditions, and where mastication and grubbing are used to reduce density of undesired woody resprouters, where operable.	•	•	•	•	•	
Herbicide Application		Primary treatment or secondary treatment following fire and non-fire vegetation treatments to reduce density of undesired woody resprouters.	•	•	•	•	•	•
Watershed Improvement	Planting and Seeding	Primary treatment where natural regeneration of desired species is impaired from disturbance. Secondary treatment following prescribed burning where watershed improvements may be required for site success.	•	•	•	•	•	•
	Erosion Control	Primary or secondary treatment where soil function is impaired.	•	•	•	•	•	•



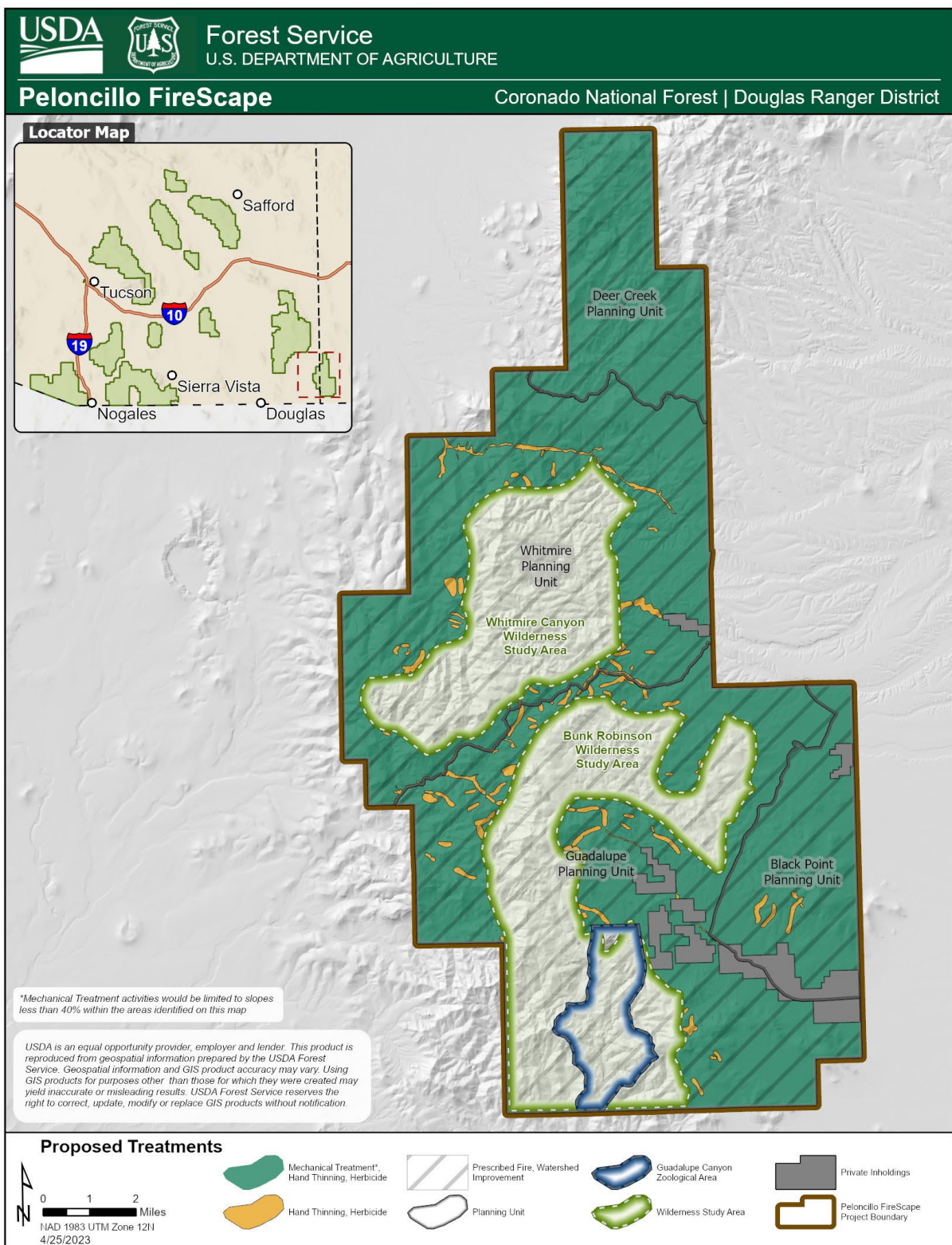


Figure 2. Proposed treatments in the project area

## **Wildland Fire Treatments**

We propose to use both planned fire ignitions (called prescribed fires or prescribed burns) and unplanned ignitions that originate from natural causes such as lightning. Due to steep slopes in the project area, fire often is the most practical and safe tool for achieving desired conditions. Although the project area is located within the Coronado National Forest, these lands are an integrated part of ranching operations that include other private and jurisdictional lands in the surrounding area. Land managers will work closely with affected landowners in both fire planning and wildfire response.

### Natural Unplanned Ignitions

Forest Service Manual 5130.3 #7 states, “All or a portion of a wildfire originating from a natural ignition may be managed to achieve Forest Plan objectives when initial and long-term risk is within acceptable limits as described in the risk assessment” (USDOI 2009). The Douglas Ranger District intends to manage natural unplanned ignitions for resource benefit when appropriate. When managing a natural unplanned ignition, fire managers use the Wildland Fire Decision Support System to weigh variables such as weather, timing, fuel conditions, values and resources at risk, and available firefighting resources to determine the appropriate course of action. Though it is uncertain exactly where these unplanned ignitions will start, management of the naturally occurring fires could take place where prescribed fire is planned. The effects of managed unplanned ignitions are assumed to be the same as those for prescribed fire.

### Prescribed Fire

Prescribed fires are designed to meet objectives specified in a written, approved burn plan and all regulatory requirements prior to implementation. Prescribed fires may be ignited by hand, mechanical, or aerial-firing methods and are intended to create a mosaic of conditions dependent on fuel type within burn blocks established in the approved burn plan. Fire managers use prescribed fire to achieve varying levels of burn severity based on fuel composition and vegetation type and objectives.

#### *Broadcast Burning*

Broadcast burns would be designed to restore low- to moderate- and limited high-intensity fire across the landscape. Historically, regular intervals of naturally occurring fire played an important role in the development and ecological functioning of the grasslands, woodlands, and forests within the project area. Broadcast burning would reintroduce fire where vegetation and fuel structure are departed from desired conditions and would be implemented regularly in some treatment units to maintain desired conditions. Fire control lines are used to confine prescribed fire operations within control perimeters. Wherever feasible, control lines would be comprised of existing features and natural barriers, including rock outcrops, roads, and trails. However, in some cases, construction of fire control lines may require removal of herbaceous vegetation, pruning, and/or cutting fuels with hand tools, and clearing all cover down to mineral soil.

#### *Pile Burning*

Pile burning is used to dispose of vegetation remaining after prescribed cutting (hand thinning and mechanical treatment). Pile burning is guided by burn plans that specify the parameters of favorable conditions during which the risk of fire spread is low. Trees, shrubs, pruned limbs, and dead and down woody material (generally larger than 1 inch in diameter) are gathered and piled by hand. Piles are carefully located and constructed to minimize damage to soils and scorch to the canopies and trunks of trees.

### **Prescribed Cutting**

This treatment is designed to reduce stand density, fuel loading of canopy and ladder fuels, and restore desired stand structure and species composition. Treatment methods would include, but not be limited to, chainsaws and other hand tools, and tracked or rubber-tired machinery with mastication attachments. Woody residues from prescribed cutting activities may be hauled away from the Forest, lopped and scattered, piled and burned, masticated, consumed during broadcast burn activities, or left on site. Overall



desired conditions are identified by the Forest Plan. Stand-level desired conditions would be determined on a site-specific basis through silvicultural prescriptions. These prescriptions would include identified desired post-treatment conditions such as species composition, size class distribution, stand structure, and stocking levels.

Prescribed cutting would be utilized as needed to:

- Serve as a stand-alone fire surrogate to restore desired conditions in areas where risk of prescribed fire is unwarranted, such as WUI areas and within values at risk.
- Reduce risk of undesirable fire behavior by reducing loading and continuity of surface, ladder, and canopy fuels.
- Pre-treat areas to reduce fuels in a way that enables subsequent safe and effective application of prescribed fire and/or effective management of wildland fire.

### Hand Thinning

Hand thinning treatments would generally involve use of hand crews with chainsaws as the primary tool for tree felling. Felled trees would generally be lopped and scattered, piled and burned, consumed during broadcast burn activities, or left on site to be a component of the desired fuel loading. Hand thinning and subsequent fuels treatments would move stand structure, species composition, and stocking levels towards the desired conditions identified in the Forest Plan.

### Mechanical Treatment

Mechanical treatments would utilize specialized mechanized tracked or rubber-tired machinery. This machinery may include, but is not limited to, tractors, bulldozers, excavators, and skid-steers. Specialized attachments may be necessary for tree cutting, mastication, and grubbing. Additionally, tree felling may be conducted by hand with chainsaws as applicable. Mastication would be used to alter shrubs, coarse wood, and small trees for ecological or fuel reduction purposes by grinding material on site. In areas where mastication is ineffective (for example, where vegetation resprouts quickly), grubbing would be used as an alternative. Grubbing is the use of machinery to uproot shrubs and small trees by removing the rooting zone of the plant which would limit the resprouting ability and survival.

### **Application of Herbicide**

Application of herbicides is proposed to reduce resprouting of trees and shrubs to prevent regrowth after prescribed fire, prescribed cutting, mastication, or grubbing treatments and/or as a primary treatment to address broad-scale invasion of woody species that are difficult to control with fire or mechanical means. It should be noted that herbicide would not be applied indiscriminately nor uniformly across these areas due to the spot treatment methods being proposed. Use of herbicide is dependent on site-specific needs and objectives. The size and scope of herbicide treatments would be determined in the required Pesticide Use Proposal prior to implementation.

The method would also be used to restore vegetation structure and composition in sites where the proportion of tree and shrub cover exceeds desired conditions. Target species include, but are not limited to, mesquite, whitethorn acacia, catclaw acacia, catclaw mimosa, manzanita, oak species and juniper species. These species are either inherently invasive in native grasslands or are considered aggressive resprouters following fire or other types of vegetation treatment.

Herbicide treatment methods would include ground-based application such as cut-stump following hand thinning or mastication, hack-and-squirt foliar application, or basal bark injection, using a backpack sprayer. Herbicide treatments may be a primary or secondary treatment option to promote desired vegetation structure. Applications would be scheduled and designed to minimize potential effects on animals, water quality, soil fertility, and non-target plants, while remaining consistent with the objectives of the treatment.

## **Watershed Improvement**

Watershed improvement treatments would be designed to help watersheds trend towards desired conditions. Up to 150 acres a year could be treated with erosion control techniques, planting, or seeding. The improvement techniques employed would be in accordance with the following core principles:

- stabilize active erosion to prevent further degradation;
- improve hydrological function through increased infiltration; and
- promote vegetation reestablishment where needed to stabilize soils and streambanks, and to restore soil functions.

To meet these core principles, restoration techniques would be designed to meet the following objectives:

- stabilize gullies and other erosion issues in upland areas and along roadsides or other disturbed areas;
- stabilize stream channels;
- improve wildlife habitat.

## Erosion Control Techniques

Erosion control activities in upland areas where erosion occurs would be considered where needed to meet the above core principles and project objectives. Common erosion control techniques that may be used to stabilize stream channel erosion and incisement include rock check dams, rock gabions, woody debris, beaver dam analogs, or similar structures within minor, ephemeral drainages. Stabilization techniques would include the use of hand tools (including shovels, rakes, and pry bars), and, in some cases, heavy equipment (including tractors, backhoes, and bulldozers), depending on site needs, access, and resource concerns. These actions would help promote the stabilization and recovery of the uplands to reduce sediment contributions to more major intermittent and perennial streams downslope.

Erosion control needs would be determined on a site-specific basis. Emphasis would be placed on locations where erosion threatens the integrity of other resources or where a resource would benefit from soil stabilization (e.g., to protect a cultural site, natural resource feature such as a wetland, or infrastructure from an advancing headcut or gully; where increased risk of debris flows threatens downslope resources; where stabilization could improve planting success). As appropriate, wattle installation, wood mulch, and/or seeding and planting with native species may also be used to improve slope stability.

## Planting and Seeding

Broadcast seeding of native plant species would be applied where necessary to increase the rate of upland stabilization. The 2014 Forestwide Planting for Traditional Uses and Pollinators on the Coronado National Forest Project Decision Memo (USDA 2014) includes analysis of the planting of wildflower, forbs, grasses, and shrubs across the Coronado National Forest, including the Douglas Ranger District. This previous analysis would be incorporated by reference as part of the environmental effects disclosed in the Peloncillo FireScape Environmental Assessment. The new analysis would build upon the 2014 decision by examining the impacts of planting and seeding forbs, grasses, shrubs, and trees in the project area under current conditions.

Seed would be gently raked into the soil (<0.5 in) to improve soil contact and protection from predation. Seed mixes would be composed of locally adapted native plant materials from appropriate seed zones with diverse functional traits to achieve establishment of cover, long-term soil stabilization, soil fertility, and wildlife habitat benefits. Seed mixes would be specific to a given ERU and would be selected with consideration of on-site conditions such as topographic position (along drainages or upland), soil type, aspect, and slope. Selection of broadcast seeding locations would focus on areas where soil disturbance or damage is such that natural regeneration would not be expected to occur within timeframes otherwise expected for the ERU or where erosion issues are expected to occur or are observed to occur as a result of monitoring. In the case of expected or observed erosion issues, broadcast seeding would be used in

combination with other stabilization treatments appropriate for the site. Areas treated with broadcast seeding would be monitored for treatment success and follow up needs on a case-by-case basis depending on project expectations and needs, resources of concern to be protected at least in part from the seeding, and/or if there are any particular concerns within the treatment area (such as locations that may be particularly susceptible to erosion problems).

Riparian planting may be conducted along intermittent and perennial streams where disturbances inhibit natural vegetation recovery. Riparian species that may be planted could include, but are not limited to, propagated native pollinator forbs, shrubs, and grasses, willows, alder, Arizona sycamore, Arizona madrone, and cottonwood. Invasive plants established along stream channels may need to be removed where needed to facilitate the success of plantings.

Hand planting would be conducted to improve habitat quality for wildlife species dependent on plant species composition and structure. Planting of native habitat type species would be applied to sites with high mortality of desired species due to wildfire or other severe disturbances. Planting would occur when natural regeneration is not expected to proceed within timeframes adequate for resource protection. Species that may be planted could include, but are not limited to, propagated native pollinator forbs, shrubs, and grasses, Apache pine, Chihuahuapine, pinyon pine, and Arizona cypress. Vegetation would be planted with hand tools and, where extant grasses and forbs would compete with plant stock, sites would be prepared by removing groundcover within two feet of individual plants. Hand planting sites would be monitored for treatment success and follow up needs based on resource objectives, expected outcomes, and any projected issues for the treatment area such as water availability or erosion issues.

### **Decision to be Made**

As the Douglas District Ranger, I am the Responsible Official for this project. The decision to be made is whether to approve the Proposed Action, another alternative, or develop an alternative design that meets the purpose and need and moves the area towards the desired condition, or to not implement a project at this time. I may also determine that the proposal or alternatives would result in significant effects requiring analysis through an environmental impact statement.

### **How to Comment**

I am now inviting your comments on the proposed Peloncillo FireScape project. This scoping period is intended to provide interested and affected parties with an opportunity to make their concerns known prior to a decision being made by the District Ranger. I would like to invite your comments regarding issues, opportunities, concerns, and suggestions for the proposed project.

Please make your comments as specific as possible. If you provide recommendations for changes to the Proposed Action, please include the reasons for your recommendations. This information will help identify the need for alternatives. Comments should be within the scope of the Proposed Action, have a direct relationship to the Proposed Action, and must include supporting reasons for the Responsible Official to consider (36 CFR 218.2).

Specific written comments (§218.2) on the proposed project will be accepted for **30 calendar days** following publication of a legal notice in the *Herald/Review* (Cochise County, AZ) and *Hidalgo Herald* (Hidalgo County, NM). If the comment period ends on a Saturday, Sunday or Federal holiday, comments will be accepted until the end of the next Federal working day. The publication date in the newspaper of record is the exclusive means for calculating the comment period. Those wishing to comment should not rely upon dates or timeframe information provided by any other source.

Specific written comments must be submitted electronically or via physical mail. Electronic comments including attachments should be submitted using the Public Comment Form at

<https://cara.fs2c.usda.gov/Public/CommentInput?project=58434>. Electronically filed comments may be submitted in word (.doc), portable document format (.pdf), rich text format (.rtf), text (.txt), and hypertext markup language (.html).

Physical mail should be sent to:

Douglas Ruppel  
c/o Mindi Lehew  
Coronado National Forest  
300 West Congress Street  
Tucson, AZ 85701

Only individuals or entities (as defined by 36 CFR 218.2) who submit timely and specific written comments (as defined by 36 CFR 218.2) about this proposed project or activity during this or another public comment period established by the Responsible Official will be eligible to file an objection. Other requirements to be eligible to submit an objection are defined by CFR 218.25(a)(3) and include name, postal address, title of the project, signature or other verification of identity upon request, and the identity of the individual or entity who authored the comments. Individual members of an entity must submit their own individual comments in order to have eligibility to object as an individual. A timely submission will be determined as outlined in 36 CFR 218.25(a)(4). It is the responsibility of the sender to ensure timely receipt of any comments submitted. Names and contact information submitted with comments will become part of the public record and may be released under the Freedom of Information Act.

#### **Contact Information**

If you have any questions concerning this process, please contact Mindi Lehew, Environmental Coordinator, at [mindi.lehew@usda.gov](mailto:mindi.lehew@usda.gov). Additional information, including maps, can be found on the project website at <https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=58434>.

If you would like to stay informed of this project as it progresses, please self-subscribe to the project mailing list using the "Subscribe to Email Updates" link on the project website.

I appreciate your interest and continuing cooperation with our forest management programs.

Sincerely,



DOUG RUPPEL  
District Ranger