SAVE ARIZONA'S FOREST ENVIRONMENT (SAFE)

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Background

Nearly one million acres in Arizona have tragically burned in the last 120 days. These fires have killed and harmed more endangered species and their habitats than all human activity since statehood. These fires polluted our air and will soon pollute our waterways unlike any of man's activity in our state's history. The very sad part is – ever since the Rodeo-Chediski Fire (and in some instances even before) – we all knew it was going to happen, and still we were obstructed and frozen in place by a never ending process of litigation, appeals, objections, studies, consultations, designations, collaborations and planning efforts for the past 10 years.

These fires burned trees, forage, animals, homes, barns, fences and many other property structures that fell in their wake. These fires have burned or impacted approximately 100 ranch families' pasture lands and beef producing infrastructure. We estimate that 18,000 head of cattle (cows and their calves) are or will be displaced by the after effects of these fires. We currently know of over 150 miles of ranch fences that have been destroyed. Many people have provided gracious donations of money and hay that have allowed for over $80,000 worth of relief efforts from the ACGA's "Bale Out Relief Fund" and another $100,000 from sportsmen groups to people and communities impacted by these fires.

The fires and their size were: Wallow Fire – 538,049 acres; Horseshoe 2 Fire – 222,954 acres; Murphy Complex Fire – 68,078; Monument Fire – 30,526 acres; Arlene Fire – 10,610 acres; and the Bull Fire – 9,711 acres. These fires burned high mountain meadows and large swaths of endangered Mexican Spotted Owl (MSO), fish and frog habitats in the White Mountains, bird sanctuaries in the Chiricahua Mountains, Leopard Frog habitats in Cochise County and people's homes, possessions and businesses.

The United States Forest Service (USFS) estimates that from 1986 through 2000 Arizona's forests produced 367,000,000 board feet of timber per year. This totals over 5,500,000,000 board feet of growth over 15 years. The USFS's own "Forest Plan" from the 1980s called for an "Allowable Sale Quantity" (ASQ) of 267,000,000 board feet to be harvested annually, an amount at which even if the targets established for fiber removal were reached, our forests would still be increasing in fiber production and therefore fuel accumulation by 27% percent per year even if the harvest targets were reached. But we never even came close to reaching the targeted harvest. Instead, timber harvests in Arizona's forests were only 1,600,000,000 board feet of timber during these same 15 years. This means the fuel load in Arizona's forests grew by 3,900,000,000 board feet over 15 years. They have grown even more since. Man, in the form of the Forest Service, had decided not to harvest the excess. Nature has stepped in.

These wood fibers are really just particles of energy captured through sunlight, soil and water and concentrated into a wood product through a living tree. As anything that lives – it must die someday. Such large amounts of fuel production during this time period cannot be ecologically sustained for long periods of time and as nature is – it harvests them when man will not.

Table 1. Arizona Saw Timber Sold, Fiscal Years 1986 – 2000

	Arizona	Apache-Sitgreaves Forest MMBF Harvested	Coconino Forest MMBF Harvested
Estimated Annual Growth	367 (MMBF)		
ASQ[1]	267	99.0	89.0
1986	212.6	81.4	47.7
1987	235.9	88.7	74.5
1988	206.0	75.1	64.9
1989	252.3	81.6	82.3
1990	198.4	57.7	69.0
1991	159.4	94.5	33.1
1992	115.2	31.7	53.4
1993	83.5	31.8	21.3
1994	38.2	10.2	11.1
1995	30.9	15.9	8.5
1996	0.5	0.5	0.0
1997	0.6	0.0	0.0
1998	0.0	0.0	0.0
1999	43.2	25.5	2.2
2000	33.1	7.8	11.6

[1] The Allowable Sale Quantity (ASQ) is the quantity of timber that may be sold over the time period specified by the Region 3 Forest Plan. It is usually stated on an annual basis as the average annual allowable sale quantity.

The economic value of the fiber resources lost in these fires is astounding. The USFS estimates that 2.5 billion board feet of wood was lost in the Wallow Fire alone. At $1 per board foot of economic value this equates to $2.5 billion of lost economic activity from the wood loss alone.

If we use our memory and add the loss of wood resources in the Rodeo-Chediski Fire to the Wallow Fire – the rural resource-based communities of Flagstaff, Payson, Heber, Show Low, Snowflake, Taylor, Pinetop-Lakeside, McNary, Eagar, Williams and Springerville have lost approximately $4 billion in economic activity and jobs from the loss of these renewable natural resources in their forests. Imagine how much value these renewable natural resources would have provided to these resource-based communities if they could have harvested them over 20 years – rather than watch them go up in smoke during two fires in a 10-year time frame. If this was not criminal – it certainly was malfeasance.

Our wonderful forests produce other fuels and fibers in the form of plant (rather than wood) forages. These forages have provided food for wildlife, cattle and sheep for over 100 years of Arizona's history. The economic value of the loss in livestock production from the reduction in forage harvests in our forests is an additional loss for these communities and our state. The ACGA performed a study based on livestock numbers from the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) National Agricultural Statistic Service (NASS) Reports for Arizona from 1993 thru 2010. This study demonstrates that a total of approximately $126 million dollars was lost annually from the reduction of approximately 55,000 head of livestock foraging in Arizona's forests. This allows us to reflect on how these plant fuels have been allowed to build up from the lack of harvest and how they have been diminished right along with the reduction in wood harvests. A copy of this study is provided on the next two pages:

It is clear that the process of planning, studying, consultation, litigation, appeals, objections and collaborations are failing us and our forests. All of these processes have only led to another 500,000 acre fire, the killing of endangered species, the release of massive amounts of pollution and the devastation of several decades of forest growth.

The worst part is – it is not over. Our forests are growing today and these lawsuits and appeals have driven off our wood harvesting economy. The infrastructure of small and large diameter wood mills is gone. There are only a couple of small ones left. The range and animal science expertise that used to oversee the day-to-day management of livestock production to harvest the forage that grows daily in our forests has shrunk because many of those ranch families found less dangerous and uncertain areas to produce food in. We are at a breaking point where either we continue to talk about the forest, study the forest and collaborate about the harvest of small diameter trees – or we act. We act by inviting back investment and expertise in the form of wood mills and ranch families. We act by inviting back those "forest engineers" who worked in the woods and understand how to harvest trees and make valuable products for mankind.

Estimate of Reduction in Livestock Production in Arizona Due to United States Forest Service (USFS) Policies On National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) Reviews; Endangered Species Act (ESA) Consultation/Mitigation; Changes in Seasons of Use; and Changes in Utilization Standards

Background

This document attempts to quantify the total reduction in livestock production in Arizona due to changes over the past 25 years in USFS policies regarding permitted livestock use. The estimates are compiled from the comparison of the United States Department of Agriculture's National Agricultural Statistics Service Report for Arizona for the years 1993 and 2010. The numbers are taken directly from each county with major acreages of National Forest Lands and a percentage of the reduction in livestock numbers for each county attributed to the number of acres of Forest and assumptions from prior permitted use numbers. These numbers reflect the estimated loss of permitted livestock use numbers on these forests coupled with season of use/utilization reductions.

It is provided as information regarding discussions about the loss of revenues to Arizona counties from the massive

reduction in PILT payments from the USFS. These reductions have become magnified since the early 1990's when saw timber sales and permitted livestock use on these forests began to be reduced drastically.

Livestock Numbers

The table below reflects the numbers of cattle in each of 8 counties which contain USFS lands as part of the range for livestock production. It compares the 1993 cattle population with the 2010 population number. Provided within the table is an estimated percentage number of livestock population reduction due to USFS policies and procedures.

County	1993 Cattle Population	2010 Cattle Population	Total Reduction in Cattle Population	Contributing % due to Forest Policies	Number Head Reduced due to USFS Policies
Apache	52,000	35,000	17,000	50%	8,500
Coconino	51,000	45,000	6,000	75%	4,500
Gila	30,000	10,000	20,000	95%	19,000
Graham	35,000	15,000	20,000	50%	10,000
Greenlee	11,000	8,000	3,000	50%	1,500
Navajo	39,000	30,000	9,000	50%	4,500
Yavapai	64,000	45,000	19,000	30%	5,700
Santa Cruz	18,000	15,000	3,000	60%	1,800
Total	300,000	203,000	97,000		55,500

Economic Loss

The annual loss of beef production from the 55,500 head of cattle totals 30,525,000 pounds of beef (average of 550 pounds per head). The direct total value of this lost beef production would be $36,630,000 ($1.20 per pound).

In April of 2009 the University of Arizona completed a study titled, *"Impacts from Agricultural Production on the Arizona Economy, Jorgen R. Mortensen,"* which quantified an economic multiplier of 3.46 for livestock production in Arizona. Using this study the loss of beef production means a loss of $126,739,800 (3.46 x 36,630,000) to Arizona's economy. Overall, the study pegged Arizona's total livestock production value at $4.45 billion dollars. Livestock were the largest segment of Arizona's agricultural economy.

Key Points

- While the total 55,500 head of lost livestock production may not have grazed year round on the forest, many of these numbers were lost because the forest was utilized as either summer or winter range. When a critical component of a season's use is lost the overall ranching unit has to reduce drastically or eliminate itself.

- USFS lands are critical ranges for most northern Arizona ranches. Their ability to provide plentiful plant forage during the summer months allows ranch families to maintain larger production numbers throughout the year.

- Recent USFS policies to only allow 35% or 40% of available forage to be consumed by livestock has led to a large buildup of plant fibers and fuels in our forests. After several years of only 35% use the plant litter begins to build up and desiccate making itself ripe for fire fuels.

- When our rural resource-based communities are allowed access to these wood, plant and mineral resources – they thrive.

- The additional benefit of fuel-reduction projects from livestock grazing does not cost the USFS any dollars. This at a time when they are calling for $2,000 per acre to "clean and thin" our forests.

- Utilization of 55 to 60 percent, depending on season and historical use, is more in line with the proper management of fuels in an already fuel-heavy forest.

Over the last 30 years the policy decisions and statutory requirements that govern our forests have changed dramatically. The implementation of the Endangered Species Act (ESA), which calls for single-species management, has been placed over the United States Forest Service (USFS) like a super-zoning law. To complicate matters, this super-zoning law is implemented by another agency of the federal government—the United States Fish & Wildlife Service (USFW), which is not statutorily empowered to manage USFS lands, but now finds itself empowered through ESA. In addition to the hammer of ESA, individual employees of the USFS can be charged with personal liability if they make a decision that may harm a species. Ironically, this same liability does not apply if the USFS employee makes a decision that harms people. Thus USFS employees will always err on the side of the species to the extent that they will not make any decision that may be challenged by the USFW. This scenario allows the USFW to insert itself into forest planning processes with no accountability for the results of such a process. For example, they can say the USFS cannot perform a certain action such as thinning, controlled burns, permitting grazing or conducting a timber sale because it may harm a species, yet they bear no responsibility for the results of this management gridlock, such as catastrophic wildfire.

In addition to this disconnect between authority and accountability we now have several well-funded advocacy activist organizations who have found that the ESA and National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) provide an avenue to "paper wrench" the USFS into a "process predicament" with their litigiousness. These groups have discovered that these two federal laws provide an avenue for them to grind the management of these lands to a halt and at the same time provide federal funds, through the awarding of attorney's fees, to pay these advocacy groups for the litigation. Hence timber sales, thinning projects and grazing allotment planning processes that take years to complete, are continually stymied. These litigious tools are so prevalent that the USFS did a review and published a study called, *Process Predicament, How Statutory, Regulatory, and Administrative Factors Affect National Forest Management, June 2002*, An Arizona example from the study follows:

It's About Good Government

The Coconino National Forest in Arizona is home to the northern goshawk. In 1996, the forest proposed thinning trees near a goshawk nest, partly to protect the bird from fire hazards. The project was stopped because environmentalists protested. That year, catastrophic fire destroyed the forest, including the tree with the goshawk nest. "There was not a green tree left," said a Forest Service biologist. "What the scientists said could happen, did happen, right in front of my eyes."

If process keeps projects from restoring the land, the land ultimately suffers. At stake are wildlife habitat and all of the other values that the Forest Service is charged with protecting and delivering on the national forests and grasslands. By streamlining the procedures, the agency can reduce costs and increase its ability to do more on the ground for healthy, resilient ecosystems.

Many values might or might not flow out of that, such as recreation, wildlife habitat, and timber. But the particular values are incidental to the core purpose – good government. It's about reducing waste and mismanagement. It's about efficient, effective service delivery.

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*Tom Knudson, "Playing With Fire: Spin on Science Puts National Treasure at Risk," Sacramento Bee, 25 April 2001.

Finally, the USFS federal planning theme, coupled with the political whim of Congress and the Executive Branch, has ignored rural communities and citizens in Arizona for far too long. The impacts of their decisions could not be felt in Washington D.C. or in some instances even in the urban areas such as Phoenix. We now not only feel – but have seen first-hand – the results of this "process predicament." It is time we move forward in giving Arizona a voice in the management of these lands unencumbered by the gridlock of ESA, NEPA and a distant electorate.

The Problem

The following example and summary is taken from *Process Predicament, How Statutory, Regulatory, and Administrative Factors Affect National Forest Management, June 2002.*

> In December 1995, a severe winter storm left nearly 35,000 acres of wind thrown trees on the Six Rivers National Forest in California. The storm's effects created catastrophic wild land fire conditions, with the fuel loading reaching an estimated 300 to 400 tons per acre – ten times the manageable level of 30 to 40 tons per acre.
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> The forest's management team proposed a salvage and restoration project to remove excess fuels and conduct a series of prescribed burns to mitigate the threat to the watershed. From 1996 through the summer of 1999, the forest wrestled its way through analytical and procedural requirements, managing to treat only 1,600 acres.
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> By September 1999, nature would no longer wait. The Megram and Fawn Fires consumed the untreated area, plus another 90,000 acres. Afterward, the forest was required to perform a new analysis of the watershed, because the post fire conditions were now very different. A new round of processes began, repeating the steps taken from 1996 to 1999.
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> Seven years after the original lowdown, the Megram project was appealed, litigated, and ultimately enjoined by a federal district court. The plan to address the effects of the firestorm – a direct result of the windstorm -- remains in limbo.

Process and Predicament goes on to state, "The Megram case example, encapsulated above, illustrates the process predicament faced by Forest Service decision- makers at all levels. As many Forest Service employees see it, they are caught in a bind, where the very procedures they need to follow to get them to their goal are keeping them from getting there."

To summarize *Process and Predicament*, the Forest Service is so busy following its procedural requirements in performing studies, planning and documenting that it cannot fulfill its mission – "to sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the nation's forests and grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations." In its own words, "Too frequently, the paralysis results in catastrophe."

Proposed Solutions

Given the unquestionable "process predicament" that has encumbered the forest management process to a point that it can no longer conduct or prescribe management treatments in a timely manner, the following solutions need to be implemented:

Save Arizona's Forest Environment Goal: Reduce fuel loads and take other appropriate actions so that risk of catastrophic wild fire is reduced in Arizona's National Forests by providing for long-term, self-funding mechanisms and infrastructure to eliminate the dangerous accumulation of overgrown trees and forests.

Action Items Supporting SAFE Goal:

- Suspend NEPA and other pre-decisional requirements for fuel/fiber reduction activities on Arizona forests (forage and timber management) for 5 years.

- Immediately require consultation on risk of catastrophic wild fire in critical habitat determinations with US Fish and Wildlife Service to attain intended goal of conserving species, not allowing their habitat to be destroyed by fire.

- Begin restoration of burned forest immediately working in consultation and conjunction with local authority and community to restore ranching infrastructure, wildlife habitat and recreational areas destroyed by fires.

- Authorize and effectuate immediate harvest of salvage timber burned in the National Forest and utilize intensive livestock management to recover burned areas.

- Streamline US Forest Service decision process for reduction of fuel and fiber reduction activities including the harvest of timber and forage.

- Allow logging operations of both saw timber and pre-commercial timber on a scale and for a term which will permit private sector infrastructure investment in areas surrounding Arizona's forests.

- Require the US Forest Service to harvest an amount of timber each year approximating annual growth and increase in forage harvest with livestock of up to 60% utilization of annual growth.

- Review Wild Fire Fighting techniques which are now biased towards "re-introducing" fire into landscapes where intense fire suppression has been utilized for one hundred years. This should include forest closure to all non-authorized forest actions. Meteorological conditions need to be considered along with overgrowth of forest in restricted areas.

- Institute budget reforms where Congress and the Administration dedicate 25% of its resources which are normally appropriated for fighting wildfire in Arizona, to direct these monies to the "Save Arizona's Forest Environment (SAFE)" account which will be housed in the Arizona State Land Department. Rural communities, homeowners, businesses and healthy forests entrepreneurs would be able to present plans applying for grants that provide for the protection of their locales by implementing their "SAFE" plans. This proposal will assist in creating safe forests, jobs and economic activity in these threatened areas.

- Designate an office within the Department of Agriculture that would work with rural communities and individuals to assist them in addressing any grievances or issues related to forest planning or to resolve other Arizona State agency issues surrounding forest management.

- Convene a "Save Arizona's Forest Environment (SAFE)" Summit at which we will issue a request to all interested individuals and advocate or activist groups to sign a pledge to refrain from utilizing the Courts or Administrative processes for a period of five years while we consider and implement adaptive management measures to enhance the health of Arizona's forest lands and the protection of forested communities.

Summary

To achieve forest health, protection of adjacent communities from catastrophic fire, other forest management goals and to maintain Arizona's Forest lands in an ecologically sustainable condition, the ACGA proposes to use proven silvicultural practices, prescribed fire and proper forage management to achieve these goals.

The National Forests are capable of providing the many values and benefits that people expect from our forests, but they need proper management in order to provide these values. ACGA supports prescribed fire, commercial timber harvest, noncommercial treatments and enhanced forage harvests on Arizona's Forest lands allocated for such uses through appropriate land and resource management planning processes. Further, we believe the commercial utilization payments can be a big part of bringing back private investment to help finance the total treatment needs of the forests.

For far too long we have allowed outside interests and bureaucratic paralysis to dictate the management of our forests in Arizona. Our federal government needs to reduce the current bureaucratic planning process and litigious playing field that our forests have been subject to for most of the last 30 years.

We have spent the last nine years since the Rodeo-Chediski Fire collaborating, talking, appeasing and planning our next step of action. All of this has led to a proposal known as the Four Forests Restoration Initiative (4FRI). The 4FRI is a noble effort, but in and of itself it is not of sufficient size or scope to return our forests to health or to invite enough private investment of wood harvesting infrastructure into these rural resource based communities. The 4FRI has taken 9 years (since the Rodeo-Chediski Fire) to "collaborate" on a solution for a single type of fiber mill in the form of an Oriented Strand Board (OSB) plant to be the infrastructure to process the necessary amount of annual growth from our forests. When our forests are growing at 367 million board feet per year, a single OSB plant is not sufficient to deal with the scope of fuels building in our forests.

It will be through the empowerment of private investment, individuals and communities that we set the guidepost for future forest planning. We need to direct and see through the initiative to return people to work in the woods, protect habitats and communities and return to the days of 5,000 to 10,000 acre fires in our forests – not 500,000 acre catastrophes.