



*Monday, July 8, 2019*

## **CLEARING AND BURNING PROJECTS APPEALED**

**Conservation groups appeal Hyde Park and Pacheco Canyon decision to 10th Circuit**

**Contact: Sam Hitt, 505-577-2944, [sam@wildwatershed.org](mailto:sam@wildwatershed.org)**

SANTA FE—Conservation groups are appealing a federal judge’s decision allowing the Forest Service to clear and burn most trees on nearly 7 square miles of national forests above Santa Fe.

In the appeal filed Monday to the the 10th Circuit Appeals Court in Denver, Wild Watershed and the Multiple Chemical Sensitivities Task Force, together with two individual plaintiffs, charge that federal District Court Judge James Parker erred in his June 3 ruling approving the Hyde Park and Pacheco Canyon projects. The groups want the projects halted until the agency prepares a comprehensive environmental study as part of a much larger program to “change forest conditions” on over 150 square miles of national forest adjacent to Santa Fe and nearby communities.

“These projects are the first of what could become the most extensive ever slash and burn forestry near Santa Fe” said Sam Hitt, founder of Wild Watershed and President of the Santa Fe Forest Coalition, “vast stretches of roadless forest eligible for Wilderness could be turned into moonscapes while Trump is in the White House.”

The groups allege that the Santa Fe National Forest failed to analyze the cumulative and indirect impacts of clearing and burning in the forests near Hyde Memorial State Park and surrounding Pacheco Canyon to the north. Unfortunately, Judge Parker agreed with U.S. attorneys who alleged that Congress had exempted the Forest Service from it duty to analyze these impacts when it attached an amendment aimed at speeding up logging to the must-pass Farm Bill in 2014.

This claim flies in the face of repeated Forest Service public assurances that it would comply with all environmental laws when it approved projects using the expedited authority of the Farm Bill amendment, including the National Environmental Policy Act that requires a comprehensive analysis and public disclosure of all impacts.

In addition, the Farm Bill amendment requires that projects maximize the retention of old growth and large trees and use the best available science to maintain and restore ecological integrity. Both projects recommend clearing 65 percent of the trees over 9 inches in diameter in mixed

conifer forests and up to 90 percent of trees in ponderosa pine forests—followed by prescribed burns that could result in the mortality of 30 percent of the remaining larger trees—actions inconsistent with old growth protection and restoration of ecological integrity.

More disturbing is the apparent management bias of the Forest Service in favor of maintaining younger forests by clearing and burning every 10 to 15 years. This never allows the necessary “decadence” of mature and old growth forests to develop that provides critical habitat for many species and helps stabilize the climate.

###

