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**NOV 7 2018**

Ms. Cathy Garcia and Mr. Scott White  
santafedsa@gmail.com

Dear Ms. Garcia and Mr. White:

Thank you for your letter of August 26, 2018, to Senators Martin Heinrich and Tom Udall regarding the Hyde Park Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI) Project. Senator Heinrich has asked the U.S. Department of Agriculture to respond to you. I apologize for the delayed response. The WUI project is currently the subject of pending litigation, we cannot directly address all of the concerns outlined in your letter; however, we can speak broadly to the purpose of this important work and its benefits. The Santa Fe National Forest (SFNF) is home to a diverse array of wildlife, world-class recreation opportunities, and centuries-old traditional uses that provide a place of respite and connection to the natural world. We share your concern for this important resource and are committed to ensuring that the public will enjoy the benefits of healthy forests for generations to come.

The Greater Santa Fe Fireshed Coalition was formed in early 2016 to support restoration efforts across a 107,000-acre landscape in the southern Sangre de Cristo Mountains. Members of the Coalition include New Mexico State Forestry, the Pueblo of Tesuque, the City of Santa Fe, the Nature Conservancy, the SFNF, Forest Stewards Guild, and other government and non-governmental organizations. The Coalition's mission is to use a proactive, collaborative approach to improving the health and long-term resilience of forested watersheds and communities by addressing wildfire. The Hyde Park WUI Project was developed in coordination with the Coalition with this mission in mind.

Extensive tree-ring research conducted in the forests of Northern New Mexico shows that low to moderate intensity wildfires burned through the Sangre de Cristo Mountains in lower elevation ponderosa pine and mixed conifer forests about every 7 to 15 years. In these ecosystems, fire is a keystone process that removes needles, twigs and leaves, and creates space for a lush understory that provides for a diversity of wildlife habitat and improves forest health. The exclusion of fire in the late 1800s created abnormally dense and unhealthy forest conditions that became ripe for unnatural, catastrophic fires and insect and disease outbreaks.

The Hyde Park WUI Project was proposed to prevent damage from uncharacteristic wildfire to key resources and infrastructure and to improve poor vegetative conditions and reduce fuel loads. The project borders the Santa Fe Municipal Watershed, which provides 40% of Santa Fe's water, and Hyde Memorial State Park. State Highway 475, which accesses Ski Santa Fe, also goes through the project area. The proposed management activities will help to restore forest composition and ecological function in this area, as well as reduce high fuel loads so that when fire occurs, it remains low-intensity.



The SFNF is also in the early stages of developing a proposal for additional work across National Forest System lands in the Fireshed. Pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act, the Forest will analyze the environmental impacts of the proposed project at the appropriate level of environmental review. If it is determined that significant impacts will result from the proposed work, an Environmental Impact Statement will be prepared.

In regard to potential expansion of the Pecos Wilderness, the SFNF is currently revising their Forest Plan, and as part of that process, has identified potential areas of recommended wilderness. The draft plan, and alternatives with varying amounts of potential recommended wilderness, is scheduled for release and public comment in early 2019.

The SFNF will continue to use all communication tools at its disposal including press releases, websites, and social media to share information about Fireshed projects and promote public engagement and participation. We welcome a spirited and respectful dialogue with all who value public lands and share commitment to their stewardship.

Thank you for sharing your ideas and concerns about the Hyde Park WUI Project and the Greater Santa Fe Fireshed. If you have further questions or concerns, please contact Hannah Bergemann, Fireshed Coordinator, at [hannahbergemann@fs.fed.us](mailto:hannahbergemann@fs.fed.us) or (505) 438-5448.

Sincerely,

  
CHRISTOPHER B. FRENCH

Acting Deputy Chief, National Forest System  
cc: Ms. Jordan Burns