Decision Memo
Lockett Meadow Vegetation Management Project
USDA Forest Service
Coconino National Forest, Flagstaff Ranger District
Coconino County, Arizona

Background
The Lockett Meadow Vegetation Management Project has been identified to protect rare aspen and meadow habitat, to provide for public health and safety, and to protect site resources and facilities within this recreation complex. Specifically, this project would include treatment of up to approximately 50 acres to address the interrelated needs to reduce meadow and aspen encroachment by conifers, remove identified hazard/danger trees within the designated camping areas, and reduce created and natural fuels. Fuels reduction will also assist in reducing the spread of a catastrophic wildfire.

The project area consists of mountain grassland (meadow) and aspen dominated stands that are experiencing encroachment from conifers. The project area contains multiple recreational sites and Forest Service roads that are at risk of damage from falling trees. Removing these trees would provide for public health and safety within a high use recreational area and protect recreational site improvements in the area.

Decision
I have decided to implement the activities as described in the August 12th, 2016 scoping letter for meadow encroachment, aspen stand improvement, hazard/danger tree removal, and fuels reduction. These activities are as follows:

Meadow Encroachment – Remove encroaching conifer from the meadow using hand thinning. Due to the large size of some trees to be removed, we anticipate using a small loader for removal. Depending on the location of material to be removed, trees will be either whole tree skidded or carried to nearby roads or temporary landings. Activity created slash (tops, limbs, and small diameter materials) would be hand piled and planned for burning. No slash piles will be constructed in the main meadow area.

Aspen Stand Improvement – Remove ponderosa pine and mixed conifer species from the understory of aspen stands within the project area. Some individual trees would be retained to provide for structural diversity within the aspen stands. No trees larger than 12 inches diameter at breast height (DBH) would be removed from aspen stands, nor would trees be removed if removal would cause undue damage to existing aspen stand. Activity created slash would be hand piled and planned for burning.
Hazard/Danger Tree Removal – Standing dead or unstable trees would be removed by hand felling and activity created slash would be piled. Only trees that pose a threat to recreational sites, facilities, and system roads would be cut.

Fuels Reduction - To reduce fuels, we propose to use prescribed fire across the project area. Prescribed fire boundaries would match those of the project area. Slash and downed woody material in excess of desired conditions would be hand piled and planned for burning. Larger diameter material will generally be kept out of slash piles and made available for fuelwood collection.

This action is categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental impact statement (EIS) or an environmental assessment (EA). The applicable category of actions is identified in agency procedures as 36 CFR 220.6(e)(6)- Timber stand and/or wildlife habitat improvement activities that do not include the use of herbicides or do not require more than 1 mile of low standard road construction. This category of action(s) is applicable because the activities proposed would directly benefit the health of the timber in this area while improving meadow conditions, which is a benefit to wildlife, and the project area does not require any road construction. Lockett Meadow represents a rare high-elevation meadow habitat. The actions included in this decision will make the aspen and meadow habitat more resilient to wildfire and encroachment from conifers. This will benefit a number of wildlife species including the red-naped sapsucker, mule deer, and various species of bats, the grasshopper sparrow, Swainson’s hawk, and other species.

I find that there are no extraordinary circumstances that would warrant further analysis and documentation in an EA or EIS. I took into account resource conditions identified in agency procedures that should be considered in determining whether extraordinary circumstances might exist:

- **Federally listed threatened or endangered species or designated critical habitat, species proposed for Federal listing or proposed critical habitat, or Forest Service sensitive species** – No threatened, endangered, or proposed plants, fish, amphibians, reptiles, birds, mammals, or invertebrates occur within the proposed project area. Two Forest Service sensitive species, Allen’s Lappet-browed bat and Pale Townsend’s Big-eared bat have potential occupied habitat within the project area. Wildlife specialists determined that this project would have no effect to these bats or their habitat. Refer to the Biological Assessment available in the project record for further details.

- **Flood plains, wetlands, or municipal watersheds** – There are no springs or riparian areas within the project area. The National Wetlands Inventory (NWI) identifies three artificial wetlands within the project area where water is impounded for extended periods through berming, diking, or other earth-moving activities. These features are not managed as wetlands by the Coconino National Forest and are not expected to be disturbed by thinning activities.

- **Congressionally designated areas such as wilderness, wilderness study areas, or national recreation areas** – There are no designated wilderness, wilderness study areas, or national recreation areas within the project area. The Kachina Peaks Wilderness which is also an inventoried roadless area (IRA) is about a mile from the project boundary. This decision may result in noise or affect views from some areas of the Kachina Peaks Wilderness, but not to a level that would result in acute or long-term effects to Wilderness.
character and thus is not expected to result in significant effects to the Kachina Peaks Wilderness.

- **Inventoried roadless areas or potential wilderness areas** – There are no inventoried roadless areas (IRAs) or potential wilderness areas within the project boundary. The Kachina Peaks IRA is located about one mile northwest of the project area.

- **Research natural areas** – There will be no effect to research natural areas as none are present in the project area.

- **American Indians and Alaska Native religious or cultural sites** – The project area falls within the San Francisco Peaks Traditional Cultural Property (TCP) boundary and the TCP cannot be avoided. However, per tribal consultation, project related activities will not detract from the elements that make the TCP eligible for the National Register and are thus not considered an adverse effect. Thus if all clearance recommendations are followed, the Lockett Meadow Vegetation Management Project will result in No Adverse Effect to historic properties.

- **Archaeological sites, or historic properties or areas** – The project area contains one site and nine isolated occurrences. If recommendations are followed, including site protection measures as outlined in the Region 3 Programmatic Agreement, Appendix J, Section II, there should be No Adverse Effect to cultural resources by the proposed project.

**Public Involvement**

This action was originally listed as a proposal on the Coconino National Forest Schedule of Proposed Actions on January 1, 2016 and updated periodically during the analysis. One response was received from the Arizona Department of Environmental Air Quality Division (ADEQ) in support of the project following resource protection measures to reduce the disturbance of particulate matter.

The following tribes were contacted via the Forest's Schedule of Proposed Actions (SOPA) on January 5, 2016: the Pueblo of Acoma, the Hualapai Tribe, the White Mountain Apache Tribe, the Fort McDowell Yavapai Nation, the Navajo Nation, the Yavapai-Apache Nation, the Havasupai Tribe, the Hopi Tribe, the Tonto Apache Tribe, the Pueblo of Zuni, the Yavapai Prescott Indian Tribe, the San Carlos Apache Tribe, and the San Juan Southern Paiute Tribe. To date, there haven't been any concerns regarding the proposed activities.

The Hopi Tribe claims cultural affiliation to prehistoric cultural groups on the Coconino National Forest. On January 29, 2016 the Forest Service submitted a draft copy of the preliminary survey results including the area of potential effect for review and comment in order to determine if the project might affect cultural resources significant to them. The Hopi Tribe responded in a letter dated February 3, 2016 expressing their appreciation for an opportunity to provide input regarding this project and agree with our determination of effect. Consultation is ongoing and will continue for the duration of the project.

**Findings Required by Other Laws and Regulations**

This decision is consistent with the Coconino National Forest Land Management Plan. The project was designed in conformance with land management plan direction related to the management areas identified in Table 1.
Table 1. Management areas occurring within the Lockett Meadow project area including acres. Based on 2007 update.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>MA</th>
<th>Acres</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ponderosa Pine and Mixed Conifer, Greater than 40 Percent Slopes</td>
<td>MA 4</td>
<td>1.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mountain Grassland</td>
<td>MA 9</td>
<td>32.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inner Basin</td>
<td>MA 16</td>
<td>8.81</td>
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<tr>
<td>Schultz</td>
<td>MA 36</td>
<td>6.06</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Administrative Review (Appeal) Opportunities

On January 17, 2014, President Obama signed into law the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2014; followed by the 2014 Farm Bill on Feb 7, 2014. The Farm Bill repealed the Appeals Reform Act (ARA):

- Section 431 of that Appropriations Act directs that the legislation establishing the 36 CFR Part 215 (post-decisional appeals) and 36 CFR Part 218 (pre-decisional objections) processes do not apply to categorically excluded projects under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).


Therefore, this decision is not subject to appeal, pursuant to 36 CFR 218, as amended.

Implementation Date

Implementation of the proposed action may occur immediately upon signing of this document.

Contact

For additional information concerning this decision, contact: Jessica Richardson, District NEPA Coordinator, Flagstaff Ranger District, 5075 N. Highway 89, Flagstaff, AZ. 86004, 928-527-8219, or email: jessicarichardson@fs.fed.us.

Mike Elson  
Flagstaff District Ranger  

12-7-16
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