



NEWS RELEASE

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Forest Guild Releases Analysis of Wildfire Risk Reduction on Federal Lands *Federal Record Keeping Weak; Community Participation Crucial to Success*

Santa Fe, NM – According to a new report from the **Forest Guild**, the federal government needs to improve the record keeping and increase public participation in planning fuel reduction treatments used to lower the risk of forest fires. The Forest Guild, a national organization of natural resource professionals, studied projects implemented as part of the **Healthy Forests Initiative (HFI)** and the **Healthy Forests Restoration Act (HFRA)** to assess their ecological and social impact. To address the need for increased community participation, the Forest Guild also created a workbook to assist communities in monitoring fuel reduction treatments.

For decades federal policy was to suppress all fires, even in forests adapted to light ground fires. This caused too many small trees, dead branches, and other natural material to build up in forests. The build up of these fuels on millions of acres of federal land has increased the risk of much more dangerous fires than naturally occurred. Major federal programs, including HFI and HFRA, have focused on reducing fire risk by cutting trees and removing fuels.

The large scale of fuel reduction has prompted public interest in monitoring federal efforts. However, according to the new report, until the federal government improves their reporting and monitoring, it is impossible to fully evaluate the ecological and social impacts of fuel reduction.

Much of HFI focused on streamlining the regulatory system and reducing the avenues for the public to challenge federal land management decisions. However, HFI has not decreased the amount of environmental documentation that agencies file, according to the Forest Guild's analysis of HFI and HFRA projects. Moreover, the number of projects litigated has changed little because of HFI and HFRA. "Based on available data, early and substantial public participation is a much more effective tool for facilitating fuel reduction projects than are administrative attempts to curtail litigation," said Forest Guild Research Director **Dr. Zander Evans**. In the Guild's analysis, fuel reduction projects that were built around community fire plans and public consensus were more likely to be successfully implemented than those that were not.

The study also shows that at the national level, HFI and HFRA made no drastic change to the legal landscape in which federal land managers make decisions. However, HFI has enabled federal agencies to implement small projects that focus on non-controversial treatments more rapidly. Finally, the report also highlighted prescribed fire as an under utilized tool in the federal fuel reduction program even though it significantly helps reduce fire risk in many forests.

With support from Wilburforce Foundation, Dr. Evans and Forest Guild member George McKinley, a family forest land and mill owner, investigated more than 100 federal fuel reduction projects in southwestern Oregon. Their in-depth regional study was paired with a national overview of the legal and administrative environment for hazardous fuel reduction treatments. Both the analysis, *An Evaluation of Fuel Reduction Projects and the Healthy Forests Initiative* and workbook titled, *Workbook for Community Monitoring of Federal Fuel Reduction Projects* are available from the Forest Guild website:

http://forestguild.org/fuel_reduction_evaluation.html

Background Information

Founded in 1995, the **Forest Guild** is a national association of more than 600 professional foresters and associated resource professionals whose mission is to promote ecologically, economically and socially responsible forestry as a means of sustaining the integrity of forest ecosystems and the human communities dependent upon them. The Guild provides training, policy analysis and research to foster a broader community participation in the challenges of forest conservation and management. The Forest Guild is headquartered in Santa Fe, New Mexico with regional offices in California, Wisconsin and Massachusetts.

Dr. Zander Evans is research director for the Forest Guild. He holds a Masters of Forestry and a PhD from the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies. His research includes the impact of invasive exotic insects on northeastern forests, the effects of forest restoration on forest carbon stocks, and the impact of federal fuel reduction on social and ecological systems.

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