



Zuni Mountains of New Mexico are a New Forest Restoration Priority

Collaborative forest restoration in the Zuni Mountains will receive \$7.6 million in federal funding over the next ten years

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Santa Fe, NM— New Mexico will get \$7.6 million in federal money for a ten year forest restoration project in the west-central part of the state, Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilkas announced Thursday. The Zuni Mountain Landscape area is 210,000 acres, most of which is encompassed by the Mt. Taylor Ranger District of the Cibola National Forest. The project is focused on improving forest and watershed health, reducing risk of severe wildfires, and protecting wildlife—including the endangered Zuni bluehead sucker. Project funding was awarded through the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program and involves a broad array of collaborators including the Forest Guild, National Wild Turkey Federation, the New Mexico Forest and Watershed Restoration Institute, Zuni Pueblo, Acoma Pueblo, Ramah Navajo Chapter, Mt. Taylor Manufacturing, Cibola and McKinley Counties, the New Mexico Environment Department, and others.



The project will restore 56,000 acres of forest and support 92 jobs in two rural counties and leverage an additional \$6.7 million in non-CFLRP funds. Compared to the cost of wildfire suppression, which topped \$41 million for the Las Conchas Fire in New Mexico in 2011, restoration treatments proposed under the Zuni Mountain project are cost effective alternative.

New Mexico's watersheds on national forests have supported intensive human use for centuries. The Zuni Mountains in particular saw nearly 100% tree removal during the railroad logging period from the 1890s to the 1920s. Today, our forests are being transformed by climate warming, catastrophic forest fire, soil erosion, and housing developments in the wildland-urban interface. These changes have threatened the "ecosystem services" they provide and have had cascading impacts on New Mexican communities. While these conditions are not entirely unique to the Zuni Mountains, the need for watershed restoration is particularly acute in the Zuni Mountains of west-central New Mexico.

"Forest restoration is an important investment in our state's public lands and is a critical tool to protect and improve our water supply and reduce the risks from wildfires," Forest Guild executive Director Michael DeBonis said. "This funding will help improve the health of the Zuni Mountains area, while also creating jobs for New Mexicans."

Authorization for funding comes from the 2009 law that focuses on landscape-scale forest restoration projects that cover 50,000 acres or more of National Forest and other lands. Competitive funding is awarded through the program to restoration projects that are developed collaboratively in local communities. In 2010, the first year of the program, the 10 projects selected through a national competition reduced forest fuels and wildfire risk on nearly 155,000 acres, created an estimated 1,550 jobs, generated approximately \$59.5 million in labor income, and produced more than 535,000 tons of woody biomass for bio-energy production.

Over ten years project will reduce threats to the watersheds of the Zuni Mountains, creating the prospect for a more sustainable future of our natural and cultural resources on forested public lands in northern New Mexico.

More information about the Zuni Mountain Landscape project can be accessed here: www.forestguild.org/CibolaCFLRP.html or contact **Eytan Krasilovsky**, Community Forestry Coordinator 505-983-8992, ext.16 eytan@forestguild.org.

More information about the benefits of the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program can be accessed here: www.fs.fed.us/restoration/CFLR/documents/CFLRPAnnualReportNov2011.pdf

www.forestguild.org

The **Forest Guild** is a national organization of more than 800 foresters, natural resource professionals, and supporters who practice and promote ecologically, economically, and socially responsible forestry as a means of sustaining the integrity of forest ecosystems and the human communities dependent upon them.