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Forestry Division



April 19, 2024

Forest Supervisor Shaun Sanchez
USDA Forest Service – Santa Fe National Forest
11 Forest Lane
Santa Fe, NM 87508

RE: Encino Vista Landscape Restoration Project – Environmental Assessment

Dear Forest Supervisor Sanchez,

The New Mexico Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department-Forestry Division is submitting this letter of support to the United States Department of Agriculture, Santa Fe National Forest Service’s Encino Vista Landscape Restoration Project in the Jemez Mountains.

The Division’s mission is to promote healthy, sustainable forests and watersheds while balancing the need for wildfire prevention and suppression. New Mexico is one of the most ecologically diverse states in the nation, encompassing five of the eleven United States Department of Agriculture climate zones. New Mexicans value our forests and the benefits they provide to current and future citizens. New Mexico’s forests supply 50% to 75% of all water for municipalities and agriculture. They also provide important wildlife habitat, recreational opportunities, timber, and cultural values to communities across the state.

The Encino Vista Landscape Restoration Project is of particular importance because of the adjacency of the project area to the Abiquiu Lake. This water storage reservoir is critical to New Mexico’s water security. The Albuquerque Bernalillo County Water Utility Authority stores water in the reservoir and all of the imported San Juan Chama Project water flows through the Abiquiu Lake. The San Juan Chama Project water provides drinking water for Albuquerque and Santa Fe and supplies agricultural irrigation water for the Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District. An uncontrolled wildfire in the project area could cause post-fire erosion and debris flow that would degrade water quality and impede the flow of this critical water resource. For this reason the state Forestry Division entered into a project agreement with the Santa Fe National Forest to pay for the archaeological surveys that are necessary before implementation can begin.

We understand the public concern about the use of prescribed fire and the potential for an escaped prescribed burn. Climate change and aridification is affecting fuel conditions, soil moisture and fire behavior in ways that are not always recognized by fire

managers and scientists. Fall burning has several advantages over spring, including shorter days and burn periods, as well as temperatures trending colder and not warmer. A preference for fall burning could be addressed in the final environmental documentation along with specific conditions that would be needed for spring burning to proceed.

We appreciate your attention to stewardship of watersheds that are critical to New Mexico's long term water security. We look forward to continuing collaboration in support of responsibly managing New Mexico's forests.

Sincerely,



Laura McCarthy
State Forester