

## Zaqueo Salazar

April 15, 2024

Mark Sando  
District Ranger, Coyote Ranger District  
Santa Fe National Forest (SFNF)  
HC 78 Box 1  
Coyote, NM 87012

RE: Encino Vista Landscape Restoration Project (EVLRP) - Draft Environmental Assessment (EA) - Public Comment

Dear Mr. Sando,

My name is Zaqueo Salazar. I was raised in Cañones. Since I was a child I've been very sad to see large areas of the Jemez burn in multiple large wildfires, several of which started from "control" burns. I now have property in Cañones and will be impacted by this Project.

This Project will clearly have significant impacts to the environment and an Environmental Impact Statement should be completed. If this Project were to proceed without modification, there will be much less opportunity for locals to benefit from timber resources from the mountains. The risk to the community, and I think it's a high risk, will be lots of smoke and much more damage to the Forest and watershed. I also think the other major risk will be large losses of rangeland in the mountains for those who raise cattle.

While I understand the need for the Project, I do recommend the following improvements:

- This Project needs to seriously consider drought conditions.
- The Forest staff providing analysis and subject matter expertise on this Project have very little awareness and experience with local culture, history and environmental conditions including the extreme climate. Local liaisons or Forest personnel with experience in local conditions and climate should be hired or brought in to guide these staff.
- If planned actions are expected to result in negative impacts to the Cañones Creek watershed, the planned actions should not be done. Instead, treatment by mechanized and manual timber removal by local harvesters should be used. Increased access should be given to these operators during the Project to increase efficiency. If sufficient local operators are not available, more should be sought from the local region.

- My family and I attended the public meeting in Abiquiu and Forest staff continually said there isn't enough staffing or funding when I asked why there aren't more timber sale units, why so much area is planned for prescribed burn and why roads are such a limiting factor to them for improving these plans. Once again I recommend seeking smaller operators from the local area who already have access to a lot of the project area from existing roads, as well as local contractors who can upgrade closed roads temporarily to increase access during the Project. These operators can be compensated with timber in trade to simplify procurement. This would also benefit the Forest by removing more excess fuels and deadfall, reducing fire hazard.
- Staff indicated that large project contracts were difficult to execute and complete, including a challenge with getting enough bidders to respond. I recommend looking to more, smaller projects under certain dollar thresholds for improved ease of purchasing and procurement.
- The approach to projects should not focus on the challenges and costs of proper Forest management because in comparison to potential large wildfire and the resulting huge costs, the former is minimal.
- How will the SFNF ensure adequate resources are available to complete actions for this very large Project, in a very remote area, adequately and safely? I propose doing just a few small, manageable projects at a time with minimal use of fire.
- Is there opportunity for contracted staff support for timber sales, particularly geared toward smaller operators? There are multiple resources available in the local region for this type of work.
- For this Project, there needs to be less area designated for thinning / burning treatment.
- The smaller trees at  $\leq 12$ " diameter are a common and popular size for building materials that should be accessible for harvest and use by contractors and builders. These have been a sought-after resource transported and sold outside New Mexico as well.
- I recommend that all watersheds are evaluated equally in the Assessment. It appears that the Cañones Creek watershed has not been evaluated. All the creeks in the project area drain into water used by everyone to the south of the project area in this state and Texas, so issues will be experienced far beyond this local area.
- Due to the intense, complex microclimate in the project area, I recommend that a local, traditional community liaison be hired or contracted as part of the team for all burn plans.
- A local linguist should be hired or contracted to respectfully engage with local communities in their language on behalf of the USFS and SFNF.

- The only specific mention of planting trees is for the area of the 2023 Black Feather Fire. This Project should include more planting of trees throughout the Project area, both for restoration of landscape and future resource harvesting opportunities. Planting of trees should focus on species like Douglas fir and englemann spruce. Local communities and volunteer involvement would be good partnership opportunities. There may also be opportunity for revenue from carbon sequestration markets to offset costs. There should be a focus on maintaining the natural meadows and open spaces in the Forest which allow for grazing, while also helping to reduce erosion.
- Acequias are missing from the analysis. I recommend working with the hired community liaison to meet with each acequia association's leadership and mayordomo, or at a minimum communicating with each through mail.
- The analysis indicates a benefit of Project actions to acequias will be more water available. I would like to see this modeled analysis and proof of how this would safely occur.
- A lot of thought is put into preventing changes to the mountains and Forest, so as not to harm or scare away endangered species. However, when it comes to using fire, there doesn't seem to be as much of a concern as with alternative treatments. This mentality should change.

I appreciate that you, Mr. Sando, along with the SFNF Supervisor Mr. Sanchez, Deputy Supervisor and other Forest staff went to Cañones to meet with my family and others in the community.

Congratulations on your retirement, Mr. Sando. However, at this stage of the Project, I respectfully request that the decision authority for this Draft EA and Project be reassigned to the Santa Fe National Forest (SFNF) Supervisor to ensure adequate accountability of Project decisions and outcomes.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide public comment and for your attention. I would appreciate serious consideration of and responses to my questions and concerns, and continued communication of Project developments going forward.

Respectfully Submitted,

Zaqueo Salazar