

USDA Forest Service, Southwest Region

Tonto National Forest

Payson Ranger District

Fuels Program Brief



August 4, 2014

Topic: Fuels Program, Payson Ranger District, Tonto National Forest

Background: The “rim country” communities on the Tonto National Forest are typical of the region’s challenges regarding restoration of fire-adapted ecosystems where there are communities at risk from catastrophic wildfire located within the forest environment. Large fires (Rodeo-Chedeski, Willow, Cave Creek Complex, and more recent Wallow, Las Conchas, Horseshoe 2, and Monument) have posed a threat to these communities in recent years, heightening the concern for action.

Thinning and Piling, Burning: Between 2001 and 2014, the Payson RD has contracted mechanical treatments including; thinning/piling, machine mastication and maintenance thinning that total 42,895 acres costing \$16.4 million. The Payson RD has Broadcast Burned 57,955 acres.

Contributions: In 2006, the Pine-Strawberry Fire District raised \$78,000 in public donations to maintain the fuel breaks that were constructed in 2003 on Forest System Lands and was authorized under a participating agreement. Also in 2006, the Gila County Board of Supervisors authorized \$200,000 to be spent constructing fuel breaks on National Forest System lands adjacent to Pine/Strawberry, Payson, Star Valley and East Verde Park. Additional funds for this project were provided by the town of Payson which authorized \$50,000, the Tonto Apache Tribe provided \$18,000; the Rim Club provided \$40,000; Terra-Payson 40 LLC provided \$8,000; and the East Verde Park homeowners’ association and fire district provided \$100,000: 481 acres were thinned and piled with this funding. This work was authorized by the Forest Service using three participating agreements. The town of Payson applied for a resource advisory committee grant for an additional \$50,000 to construct fuel breaks on Forest System Lands, which was awarded and completed in February 2008. The project was 80 acres. The communities of Christopher Creek and Hunter Creek raised \$88,000.00 in 2008 to construct fuel breaks around their sub divisions on National Forest System Lands. Also in 2008 the Pine/Strawberry Fire Wise group raised \$35,000.00 to purchase native grass seed to be planted in the fuel breaks around their communities. In 2011 the community of Christopher Creek/Hunter Creek raised \$51,262.00 that they used to maintain the existing fuel breaks around their communities, which treated 361 acres. Gila County also contributed \$3,692.00 to help Christopher Creek/Hunter Creek complete the remaining 26 acres of that project. Also in 2011 Pine Strawberry Fuels Reduction Inc., raised \$29,156.00 to construct a fuel break around the community of Arrow Head Estates, which created a 77 acre fuel break. To date \$751,110.00 has been contributed from outside sources to perform fuels reduction work on National Forest System Lands on the Payson Ranger District. The community involvement and support in the rim country from outside sources, has proven very critical in the success of this large landscape scale fuels program.

WUI Planning: Since 2001, the Payson District has been strategically planning on a landscape scale to address the restoration of fire-adapted ecosystems as well as treat high hazard areas immediately adjacent to communities at risk. Five planning areas have approved NEPA and represent a substantial program of work. They are: (1) the 48,688-acre Verde Analysis Area, with 12,111 acres for thinning and 28,438 acres for prescribed burning; (2) the 68,242-acre Payson Analysis Area, with 10,307 acres for thinning and 35,037 acres for prescribed burning; (3) the 72,447-acre Pine/Strawberry Analysis Area, which contains 17,105 acres for thinning and 40,927 acres for prescribed burning; and (4) the 30,237-acre Christopher/Hunter Analysis Area, with 11,808 acres for thinning and 20,304 acres for prescribed burning. The fifth and final Analysis area that was recently signed on 9/13/2012 will provide the entire Payson RD with completed landscape scale hazardous fuels analysis. The project name is Myrtle, which has a planning area of 37,515 acres, with 17,846 acres for thinning and 28,275 acres for prescribed burning. This Analysis area has ten subdivisions within its boundaries that have recently received treatment.

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