Environmentalists appeal forest thinning ruling

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FLAGSTAFF, Ariz. Two environmental groups have appealed a Forest Service decision to allow thinning of 30,000 acres of ponderosa pine forest, saying that too many large and older trees would be lost.

The Forest Service won't specify how many trees it will allow to be cut southeast of Fredonia, so the thinning could turn into heavy logging, according to the Southwest Forest Alliance and the Sierra Club. The Center for Biological Diversity has also appealed.

The Forest Service's plan calls for logging of trees up to 24 inches in diameter; most will be between 12 and 18 inches. Thinning is designed to create healthier forests and less fire risk.

Kaibab National Forest Supervisor Mike Williams says his decision will reduce the likelihood of intense wildfires, improve habitat for the northern goshawk and reduce unhealthy trees along state routes 89A and 67.

The regional forester will now decide whether to uphold the Kaibab's decision or reverse it.