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Kaibab Forest plans to reassess forest thinning plan

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PHOENIX_Kaibab National Forest officials intend to prepare a new appraisal of a plan to thin 30,000 acres of the forest, an appraisal they hope will make the project easier to defend against attacks by environmental groups.

The Kaibab Forest's decision to go ahead with the Jacob Ryan project was overturned by the regional forest service last month because the environmental assessment used to review the plan didn't adequately address soil erosion concerns and how thinning would affect the view from the highway.

Kaibab National Forest spokesman Scott Clemans said both analyses were being redone.

Clemens also said the Kaibab Forest plans to put together an environmental impact statement for the project, which requires the forest service to present the positive and negative impacts of the plan.

The impact statement would be easier to defend against challenges than the previous environmental assessment, an appraisal that asks the forest service to show a project will have no environmental impact, Clemans said.

The plan to thin forests in the Jacob Lake area is necessary to reduce fire risk, protect the habitat of the northern goshawk and improve public safety near Highways 89A and 67, Clemans said.

The forest service doesn't know how many trees would be cut down under the plan, but most trees would be between 4 and 12 inches in diameter and would create less than 1 million feet of saw timber, he said.

Center for Biological Diversity spokesman Erik Ryberg, who wrote the appeal that prompted the regional forest service to overturn the decision, said environmentalists were concerned that the forest service refused to protect all large trees.

Leaving smaller trees without protecting all older growth would contribute to fire concerns and didn't protect the northern goshawk, Ryberg said.

The forest service also has other means of clearing trees that endanger the public, he said.

Ryberg said he would pull his appeal if the forest service agreed to only cut down trees that were 16 inches in diameter or less.

On the net:

Kaibab National Forest: <http://www.fs.fed.us/r3/kai/>

Center for Biological Diversity: <http://www.sw-center.org/swcbd/>