

(I love the part about how this (Arizona) "forest's mission is to supply timber to Utah mills." I wonder how the AZ legislature feels about that?)

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Logging plan for fire site protested

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01/31/2007

Environmental groups and Kaibab National Forest managers are in disagreement over whether tens of thousands of acres severely scorched in a monitored burn that turned into wildfire north of the Grand Canyon last summer should now be logged.

The Kaibab National Forest is proposing to put the equivalent of 17,000 log truck loads of timber 14 inches in diameter and larger up for sale in the area burned in the Warm Fire south of Jacob Lake as part of a salvage operation.

"We're very carefully looking at where salvage logging is and what causes the least impact to the environment," North Kaibab Ranger District spokesman Scott Clemans said.

Part of the forest's mission is to supply timber to Utah mills, he said.

The forest is proposing to cut only trees that were burned once the lightning-caused fire became a wildfire and to cut no green trees.

"We don't believe that that kind of logging is appropriate," said Erik Ryberg, of the Center for Biological Diversity. "... Salvage logging is devastating to the landscape."

His group, the Grand Canyon Trust and the Sierra Club say it could hinder the landscape's recovery, harm watersheds and introduce invasive species. They asked forest managers to consider logging just along the road heading to the North Rim instead.

"Our review of the science on this issue leads us to believe strongly that intensive salvage logging won't provide ecological benefit to the area, and is in fact likely to do real harm," said Ethan Aumack of the Grand Canyon Trust.

About 26,000 acres out of the 58,568 acres that burned in June was a severe burn, leaving a swath of severely burned land lining more than four miles of the main road leading to the North Rim of the Grand Canyon.

The Kaibab National Forest has issued a report saying much of the burn area upstream of the Marble Canyon Watershed would see greater likelihood of erosion and beetle kill, loss of Mexican spotted owl and Northern goshawk habitat, but also a rebirth of quaking aspens -- with or without the logging.

One the biggest changes might come in the shape of public response.

This fire has undercut public trust in the government to manage slow-burning fires for the purpose of forest restoration, said Charlie Neumann, a river runner, former National Park Service firefighter and owner of Willow Canyon Outdoor Company in Kanab.

"Now there's a new paradigm where they let these things go," he said of the wildland use fires that are allowed to burn if ignited by lightning in the right place. "But this one, they let it go for 2 Ö weeks ... and it was really productive ... They let it go into late June and the wind blew up that day and pretty soon -- zap -- 40,000 acres went up like that."

Neumann supports prescribed and other monitored burns for restoring forest health. But his neighbors might not, at least not anymore, he said.

"It polarized people the other way," he said. "People are pissed. People don't trust the government here."

Forest managers have yet to release a document listing lessons learned from this fire.

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Public meeting

Analyze the Kaibab National Forest's plans for restoring the area burned in the Warm Fire and add new ideas from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. Feb. 8 at Flagstaff High School. The official comment period for this issue has ended, however.