

17. **FORESTS:** Old-growth logging plan near Grand Canyon put on hold (05/27/2009)

Eric Bontrager, E&E reporter

The U.S. Forest Service is reversing its decision to log old-growth forests near the Grand Canyon following an appeal by environmental groups that say the logging could threaten sensitive habitat in the region.

Managers at Arizona's Kaibab National Forest announced in a [letter](#) that they are putting the planned 26,000-acre Jacob Ryan timber sale on the Kaibab Plateau on hold after the Center for Biological Diversity and the Sierra Club raised concerns that the logging plan was in conflict with the existing forest plan.

Both groups filed an appeal in March against the timber sale, intended to thin the forest to reduce the threat of wildfires in the area, arguing that the plan did not consider alternatives to protect larger and older ponderosa pine forests from logging.

The suspended plan had included mitigation measures to prevent logging of trees larger than 18 inches in diameter and those older than 130 years, regardless of size. But CBD took coring samples that it says show that some of the trees marked for cutting were up to 200 years old.

Those old-growth trees are vital habitat for the northern goshawk, which is protected under the Kaibab Forest Plan, the groups contend.

"The decision and analysis do not demonstrate compliance with direction in the Kaibab Forest Plan, agency policy, direction and supporting information regarding cumulative effects, and 1996 northern goshawk requirements," said the forest supervisor, Michael Williams, in the letter the groups received over the holiday weekend.

The forest managers said the project, authorized in February, will be put on hold while they conduct additional work on the logging plan's potential impacts on the goshawk's habitat and ways to mitigate those risks.

The Kaibab Plateau is home to the largest breeding population of goshawks in the lower 48 states, but large portions of the raptor's habitat were destroyed by past logging efforts. In 1996, the Forest Service adopted protective measures under the Kaibab Forest Plan in an effort to avoid the goshawk's listing under the Endangered Species Act.

Both groups said they are supportive of amending the logging plan to encourage thinning of younger trees smaller than 12 inches in diameter to restore a natural fire regime in the forest that still allows for the protection of the goshawk's habitat.

"It is time for a project that focuses on restoration, protection of wildlife, and preserving the limited old growth that remains," Stacey Hamburg, Grand Canyon campaign coordinator for the Sierra Club's Grand Canyon Chapter, said in a statement. "By reversing its decision, the Forest Service now has an opportunity to do that."

[Click here](#) to read the letter from the Kaibab National Forest managers.

