

SUMMIT COUNTY CITIZEN VOICE

Conservation groups challenge USFS logging plan that could take down old-growth trees on Arizona's Kaibab Plateau

February 24, 2012 by Bob Berwyn

Conservation groups have blocked similar logging plans twice before

SUMMIT COUNTY — For all the talk of restoration and ecosystem protection, the U.S. Forest Service sometimes still seems intent on logging old-growth timber. Sparking the latest showdown, the agency in January approved a 25,000-acre timber sale in the Kaibab National Forest, near the North Rim of the Grand Canyon in Arizona.

Conservation groups challenging the project say it could harm rare, threatened species like northern goshawks. A source population of goshawks lives on the Kaibab Plateau. According to a Forest Service report, goshawks are “vulnerable to extirpation or extinction in Arizona.”

The Center for Biological Diversity and the Sierra Club have appealed the timber sale for the third time in a decade. The Forest Service has tried five different variations of the timber sale. Two were blocked by appeals and litigation, while the Forest Service withdrew the other two previous proposals.

“This forest needs a limited amount of small-tree thinning to safely reintroduce natural fires, but for a decade the Forest Service has rejected common sense and opted instead to cut down old trees,” said Jay Lininger, an ecologist with the Center for Biological Diversity. “The Jacob Ryan timber sale makes a mockery of forest restoration and exposes the need for leadership and reform within the Forest Service.”

The appeal challenges logging of old-growth trees and argues that logging will not retain sufficient forest canopy to support the rare northern goshawk.



Ancient ponderosa pines marked for logging in the Kaibab National Forest. PHOTO COURTESY CENTER FOR BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY

“It is just outrageous that the Forest Service is proposing for the fifth time to log these old growth and large trees, when we have so little remaining,” said Sandy Bahr, chapter director for the Sierra Club’s Grand Canyon (Arizona) Chapter. “The old growth and large trees make up less than 3 percent of our forests and are a critical component of healthy forests and essential for wildlife species such as the northern goshawk. In a real restoration project, they would be the centerpiece, not slated for logging.”

In its last failed attempt to implement the timber sale, the Forest Service in 2009 admitted violating its own management plan in response to a Center appeal. Center staff documented old-growth trees marked for cutting, despite bogus claims by the Forest Service that it would protect old growth.