Letter to the Editor regarding Jacob-Ryan Vegetation Management Project dated March 14, 2012

From North Kaibab District Ranger Timothy Short to the editors of the Flagstaff Arizona Daily Sun, Kanab Southern Utah News, St. George Spectrum, and Williams Grand Canyon News

Dear Editor,

I would like to share some information about a project on the North Kaibab Ranger District that I feel is important to the future health of this forest.

The Jacob-Ryan Vegetation Management Project is a plan to mechanically thin, prescribe burn, and restore around 25,000 acres of ponderosa pine forest surrounding Jacob Lake.

Currently, the forest in the Jacob Lake area is too dense and is at risk of stand replacing wildfire. It is not a question of *if*, but *when* fire breaks out on this landscape. My staff and I have devoted much time to designing this project, and we feel implementation is essential not only to prevent a catastrophic wildfire, but also to restore forest health and enhance wildlife habitat.

Some critics have made misleading statements to the public about this project. They have mischaracterized it as primarily cutting old growth and large diameter trees, and adversely affecting goshawk and other wildlife habitat. They also continue to appeal and threaten litigation, which could tie up yet another necessary forest treatment in lengthy and costly legal procedures.

After the largest wildfire season in Arizona's history, and at a time when Arizona state and local governments are demanding action to treat our forests, it is essential that we as land managers respond with our best efforts to care for these resources.

Much of the controversy from our critics is due to their desire for a 16-inch, and possibly even a 12-inch, diameter cap on trees to be thinned. The emphasis of this project is overwhelmingly on removing small-diameter trees and restoring the natural role of fire. In fact, our analysis shows that only a little more than one percent of the trees we might thin during this ten-year project would be greater than 16 inches in diameter.

There are instances where having the flexibility to remove a tree larger than 16 inches in diameter is necessary to create gaps to reduce the likelihood of running crown fire. Alleviating densely-crowded conditions also gives other trees the space, water, and light they need to grow into the large trees of tomorrow.

Another mischaracterization by critics of this project is that it could adversely impact the northern goshawk population, a species for which the Kaibab Plateau is well-known. This project is based on the observations of Dr. Richard Reynolds of the Rocky Mountain Research Station. For more than two decades, Dr. Reynolds has been studying northern goshawk on the North Kaibab District to better understand their needs and behavior. This project follows his recommendations for a forest structure that would provide the greatest benefit to northern goshawk and their prey species.

I encourage anyone who is interested in this restoration effort to learn more about it by visiting the Kaibab National Forest web site at http://www.fs.usda.gov/kaibab, where we have posted photos of the project area, links to the studies that we cite, planning documents, and other information.

Thank you.

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North Kaibab Ranger District
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