

**THE BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
OF SANTA FE COUNTY**

RESOLUTION NO. 2022 – 050

Introduced by:

Commissioner Anna Hansen and Commissioner Anna T. Hamilton

A RESOLUTION URGING THE UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE FOREST SERVICE (USFS) TO PREPARE AN ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE NATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY ACT ON THE SANTA FE MOUNTAINS LANDSCAPE RESILIENCY PROJECT; TO REQUEST NEW RISK, COSTS, AND BENEFITS ASSESSMENT OF USFS FOREST FUELS TREATMENTS ON THE SANTA FE NATIONAL FOREST INCLUDING THEIR RISK TO NEW MEXICO HEALTH, WATER SUPPLIES AND ECONOMIES; TO PUBLICLY ASSESS USE OF ALTERNATIVE TREATMENTS UNDER ACCELERATING CLIMATE CHANGE; AND TO REQUEST THAT THE USFS CEASE INTENTIONAL BURNS IN SANTA FE COUNTY UNTIL THESE PUBLIC REVIEWS

WHEREAS, the Santa Fe National Forest (SFNF), United States Department of Agriculture Forest Service (USFS), issued a draft Decision Notice (DN) and Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) based on analysis in an Environmental Assessment (EA) for the Santa Fe Mountains Landscape Resiliency Project (SFMLRP) to conduct extensive ground disturbing activities in forests east of Santa Fe in March 2022; and

WHEREAS, The DN and FONSI for the Project selected Alternative 2 which calls for cutting and intentional burning of vegetation on 38,680 acres across a 50,566-acre project area over the next 10 to 15 years (all areas would be treated multiple times); and

WHEREAS, this area and the entire SFNF provide recreation and outdoor enjoyment to more than 100,000 Santa Fe County residents and thousands of visitors each year and is home to the Santa Fe Ski Basin, Hyde Memorial State Park, portions of the Pecos Wilderness and Tesuque and Nambe Pueblos, extensive inventoried roadless areas and high value habitat for breeding birds and other wildlife; and

WHEREAS, the Santa Fe County Board of County Commissioners (Board) passed Resolution No. 2019-53, on April 4, 2019, encouraging the USFS to conduct a comprehensive and objective analysis for the SFMLRP; provide effective notice to the public including presentations in downtown Santa Fe, NM; and incorporate a broad range of forest and fire ecology research before taking any action; and

WHEREAS, the Board passed Resolution No. 2010-110 on June 29, 2010, in support of Wilderness designation for Inventoried Roadless Areas adjacent to the Pecos Wilderness that will be impacted by the SFMLRP and other SFNF projects; and

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WHEREAS, National Environment Policy Act (NEPA), often described as the United States Magna Carta for the environment, helps public officials make decisions based on comprehensively understanding environmental consequences before actions are taken and mandating, to the fullest extent possible, citizen involvement in such decisions; and

WHEREAS, NEPA requires analysis of the direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts of the SFMLRP on a variety of resources, including the risks of intentional burning on national forest lands bordering private property and impacts to air quality and public health, threatened and endangered species, inventoried roadless areas, water quality, soils, vegetation and wildlife; and

WHEREAS, on May 10, 2022, the Chief of the USFS (Chief) called for a review of the Hermit's Peak Fire (Chief's Review) which was a consequence of the escaped Las Dispensas intentional burn on the Pecos/Las Vegas Ranger District of the Santa Fe National Forest; and

WHEREAS, the Hermit's Peak/Calf Canyon Fire has destroyed at least 400 homes, forced up to 18,000 people to evacuate their properties, cost more than \$248 million in firefighting expenses and burned more than 341,000 acres; and

WHEREAS, the Chief's Review found that megadrought and climate disruption are presenting unforeseen challenges to the planning and executing of intentional burns; and

WHEREAS, USFS will undertake thousands of acres of intentional burns per year similarly endangering Santa Fe County this fall, adjacent to densely populated areas, without substantive changes to their (flawed) methods, use of personnel, or strategy for climate change; and

WHEREAS, neither the Chief's Review, nor other communications, analysis, or strategies by the USFS on the SFNF, specifically re-evaluates the viability of SFNF projects and plan of forest treatments given extreme drought and accelerating climate change; and

WHEREAS, the growth of grasses and other fine fuels following fuel reduction activities, together with debris generated by fireline construction, contributes to increased fire risk; and

WHEREAS, unacceptable risks are taken by personnel conducting planned burns because they are pressured to "accomplish the mission"; and

WHEREAS, an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is appropriate because the EA for the SFMLRP did not disclose or analyze the significant impacts to resources of an escaped intentional burn resulting from global heating and increased fine fuels produced by management and bureaucratic pressure to meet targets; and

WHEREAS, the risks and impacts of escaped intentional burns were not identified in the EA for the SFMLRP or other SFNF projects, although the issue was raised in public comments.

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NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Board of County Commissioners of Santa Fe County hereby:

1. Encourages the USFS to prepare a comprehensive EIS for the SFMLRP that would in every respect engage the public, respond to a full and fair discussion of significant environmental impacts, examine alternatives, including preserving forests in their natural condition, and document unavoidable adverse effects prior to commencing any action.
2. Urges the USFS to investigate tactical and strategic alternatives to large-scale fuel reductions, both to restore the forest and to address wildfire risk, including costs and benefits of all current treatments and alternatives. Specifically, we request that additional experts in regenerative agroforestry, indigenous and historical approaches be consulted, with public access to presentations, and that additional science and community approaches be sought through public meetings.
3. Requests that the USFS use an EIS or additional tools, agencies, or monies to investigate, analyze and disclose to the public, the risks of an escaped intentional burn, specifically under pervasive conditions of drought and climate-change, in comparison to the risk of alternative approaches and plans.
4. Requests that the USFS re-evaluate the recent scientific literature on combined fire/heating/climate change impacts on high-altitude forests in their risk calculations for intentional burning, including critical parameters that now best predict forest mortality and regeneration failure, such as vapor pressure deficit, soil dryness, and maximum soil temperature, and implement new required metrics on both forest condition and in assessing conditions for intentional burning.
5. Requests the USFS use an EIS and additional tools to assess the impacts of USFS forest fuels' treatments on the ecosystems comprising the SFNF, including future catastrophic loss of tree regeneration and ecosystem integrity, and the risk of those treatments to New Mexico citizens, water supplies, and economies.
6. Requests the USFS cease all prescribed burns on the SFMLRP area until the greater understanding and concomitant risk reduction provided by these reviews is in place.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Board of County Commissioners of Santa Fe County requests that the County Manager forward this Resolution to the United States Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack and Under Secretary of Agriculture for Rural Development Xochitl Torres Small, U.S. Secretary of the Interior, the Bureau of Land Management Director, the U.S. Forest Service National Director, New Mexico's Senators and Representatives in Congress, the New Mexico Governor, and State Senators and Representatives in the New Mexico Legislature representing Santa Fe County and Counties in the Sangre de Cristo Mountain Range (The Santa Fe National Forest).

PASSED, APPROVED, AND ADOPTED ON THIS 12TH DAY OF JULY, 2022.

**THE BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
OF SANTA FE COUNTY**

By: 
Anna T. Hamilton, Chair

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ATTESTATION:

Katharine E. Clark

Katharine E. Clark
Santa Fe County Clerk

Date: 7/19/22



Approved as to form:

Cristella Coley for

Jeff Young
Santa Fe County Attorney

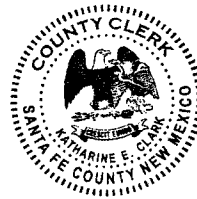
COUNTY OF SANTA FE)
STATE OF NEW MEXICO) ss

BCC RESOLUTIONS
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I Hereby Certify That This Instrument Was Filed for
Record On The 19TH Day Of July, 2022 at 02:22:27 PM
And Was Duly Recorded as Instrument # **1993277**
Of The Records Of Santa Fe County

Witness My Hand And Seal Of Office
Katharine E. Clark

Deputy *Destiny Romero* County Clerk, Santa Fe, NM



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