



USDA Forest Service Santa Fe National Forest Briefing Paper Santa Fe Watershed Protection: Looking Outside the Boundary

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For more than 15 years, the Santa Fe National Forest (SFNF) has worked with a strong group of partners to protect the City of Santa Fe's water supply by treating the landscape within the Santa Fe Municipal Watershed. The partners recognize that the Watershed is at risk from untreated areas outside its boundary; however, the partners have not had the resources to look at the potential effects of a fire that enters the Watershed from outside its boundaries. In addition to the significant threat to at least 40 percent of the city's water supply, the risk of wildfire within the larger area around the Watershed raises other concerns:

- A fire pushing from the south through Apache Canyon or from the east out of the Dalton and Macho drainages has the potential to enter the Watershed and undo some of the gains made by the treatments.
- West of the Watershed, the wooded slopes include in-holdings owned by the Tesuque Pueblo. These pueblo lands, as well as the adjacent SFNF lands, play an important role in tribal culture that cannot be replaced if lost to fire. The Tesuque Pueblo has received funding from the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) to protect its lands and has expressed an interest in collaborating with the SFNF toward that end.
- The downstream post-fire effects of a large fire in the drainages would be devastating to the Pueblos and the village of Tesuque. Many of the small villages east of Santa Fe would be adversely affected by post-fire flooding.

In 2014, the SFNF and several partners supported a Forest Guild proposal to the Rio Grande Water Fund calling for a landscape-level assessment to lay the groundwork for treatment on lands adjacent to the Watershed, including the areas to the west in the Tesuque drainages and to the east/south in the Glorieta/Apache Canyon drainages. A key component in the Forest Guild proposal is a strong collaborative base that includes communities that have not been previously engaged, including the Nambe and Tesuque Pueblos, Tesuque Village, La Cueva and Glorieta. The proposal would also fund data collection to assess current conditions for vegetation, wildlife (including species listed under the Endangered Species Act, such as the Mexican spotted owl), and cultural resources that fall under the protections of the National Historic Preservation Act. The proposal paves the way to begin National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) analysis with a clear understanding of the work to be performed, unprecedented community support, and the least impact on other resources. To date, the Forest Guild has not secured funding to launch the project.

The SFNF supports larger-scale restoration work to protect the Watershed and surrounding lands. However, additional information needs to be gathered before decisions on how and where to proceed can be made, including:

- Quantitative stand condition information for the areas south and west of the Watershed to help predict the largest threat.
- A detailed assessment of vegetation types and conditions, cultural resources, threatened and endangered species, and access (these areas – much of which is in inventoried roadless areas (IRAs) – have few roads and steep slopes).
- Internal dialogue on the SFNF's capacity to undertake or participate in another large planning process since many key personnel are assigned to other high-priority efforts, including the Southwest Jemez Mountains Restoration Project, conservation of the New Mexico meadow jumping mouse and its habitat, and Forest Plan Revision.

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