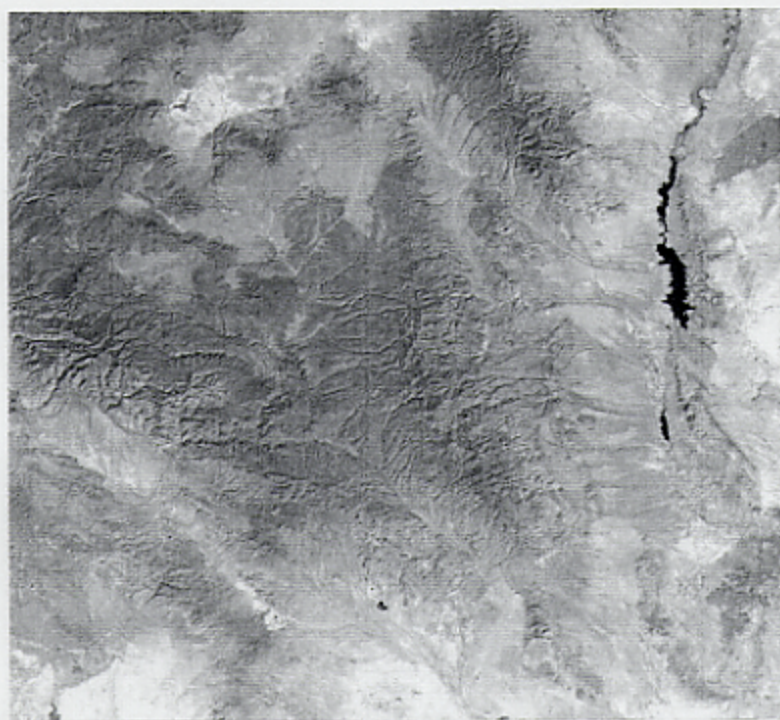


**FOREST STEWARDSHIP PLAN  
FOR THE  
20 COMMUNITIES/  
2001 WESTERN STATE FIRE MANAGERS  
LANDOWNER ASSISTANCE PROGRAM  
FOR CATRON COUNTY,  
NEW MEXICO**



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# **INTRODUCTION**

## **COUNTY LOCATION**

Catron County is the largest county in New Mexico, located in the west-central part of the state. About 180 air miles due northwest of El Paso, Texas, and 120 air miles southwest of Albuquerque. With its 2,800 population and 6,898 square miles of land area, it is one of the least populated counties in the lower 48 states. This is mostly because over 95% of the county is public land, administered by the U.S. Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management.

## **COUNTY DESCRIPTION**

Glenwood, Reserve, Quemado, and Datil are the major communities with numerous small villages/towns scattered throughout the county. Other major political subdivisions in the county include portions of the Gila, Cibola, and Apache National Forests and the Gila Cliff Dwellings National Monument. Within these National Forests are the Gila and Blue Range Wilderness Areas. Major mountain ranges include the Mogollon, San Francisco, Tularosa, Mangas, Gallos, Blue, Datil, Crosby, Sawtooth, Allegras, Horse, and Pellona Mountains. The Gila, San Francisco and Little Colorado Rivers drain the county's watersheds.

Catron County has experienced an influx of new residents due to its aesthetics and location. Scattered parcels of private land are being developed into summer vacation homes and primary residences at a significant rate. Current and future subdivisions continue to increase the complexity of the wildland/urban interface as the communities grow in close proximity of the Gila National Forest, Cibola National Forest, Bureau of Land Management administered lands and New Mexico State Trust lands. The potential for catastrophic wildland/urban interface fires will only worsen if the growing fuel loads on both public and private lands are left in their present state.

## **PROJECT OBJECTIVES:**

The objectives of the project covered under this Stewardship Plan are two-fold. The first is to assist private landowners in developing defensible space around their homes. The second, to construct fuelbreaks adjoining public lands. Private lands will be better protected from wildfires originating on federal lands, and public lands will receive protection from wildfires. It has been projected that 500 acres of the county will be treated during the project depending on landowner objectives, thickness of the site, and fuel types encountered.

Stated objectives are:

1. Reduction of damages in the wildland/urban interface from fire.
2. Creating defensible space (30ft) around structures.
3. Thinning defensible zone (30-100ft) on the properties.
4. Develop fuel breaks along jurisdictional/private/state land boundaries.
5. Reduce tree densities along road right-of-ways to reduce vehicle/wildlife collisions. Additionally to use as fuelbreaks and pre-suppression lines.



6. Maintain any future wildland fire as a "ground fire" where suppression efforts can be more effective.
7. Increase forest health and vigor throughout the county.

## **WILDLAND/URBAN INTERFACE COMMUNITIES FOREST TYPES**

This plan is designed to cover the most critical areas in Catron County, as defined by the Inter-agency Command Team and in the draft Catron County Action Plan. These critical areas are:

- **Aragon and the Tularosa Valley-** Pinyon/Juniper predominant woodland on south slopes, sparse Ponderosa pine on north slopes. Grasses and Forbs are the predominant vegetation in valley bottoms.
- **Datil Area-** Pinyon/Juniper predominant woodland with scattered Ponderosa pine stringers.
- **Escudilla/Bonita Subdivision-** Pinyon/Juniper is the predominant vegetation type, intermixed with open grasslands.
- **Horse Mountain Subdivision-** Pinyon/Juniper predominant woodland with sparse Ponderosa pine.
- **Jewett Gap-** Ponderosa Pine predominates overstory, with mixed conifers on wetter sites, and Pinyon/Juniper on dryer sites.
- **Luna Valley-** Predominant vegetation type is Ponderosa Pine with Pinyon/Juniper on dryer sites. Understory vegetation is primarily grasses and forbs.
- **Mogollon-** Ponderosa predominant forest overstory on east, west and south facing slopes, Mixed Conifer overstory on north facing slopes.
- **North of Omega-** Predominant vegetation type is Pinyon/Juniper on hillsides with open grasslands in drainage bottoms.
- **Pie Town-** The predominant vegetation is Pinyon/Juniper with scattered wet sites of dense Ponderosa Pine.
- **Rancho Grande Area-** Ponderosa predominant overstory forests with Pinyon/Juniper woodland understory.
- **Wild Horse Subdivision-** Predominately Pinyon/Juniper with scattered Ponderosa Pine stringers.
- **Willow Creek/Indian Creek/Elk Springs-** Ponderosa dominant overstory on south facing slopes and ridge tops, mixed conifer on north facing slopes, with ponderosa pine/mixed conifer intermixed with riparian vegetation in valley bottoms



## RESOURCE DESCRIPTION

### SPECIES COMPOSITION

As can be expected in a region where the elevation ranges from 5,000 feet above sea level at the San Francisco Hot Springs near Glenwood to, 10,892 feet above sea level at the crest of Whitewater Baldy in the Mogollon Mountains, vegetation regimes, habitat types and species composition is extremely variable. High altitude Spruce/Fir forest occupies the highest elevations, Mixed Conifer/Ponderosa Pine forest at the mid-levels with extensive grasslands and pinyon/juniper types dominating the lower elevations. Riparian vegetation is found according to the amount of overland flow present.

### OVERSTORY SPECIES

Dominant overstory species consist of **Pinyon pine** (*Pinus edulis*), **Alligator juniper** (*Juniperus deppeana*), **One-seed juniper** (*Juniperus monosperma*), **Ponderosa pine** (*Pinus ponderosa*), **Gambel oak** (*Quercus gambelli*), **Rocky Mountain juniper** (*Juniperus scopulorum*), **Douglas fir** (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*), **White Fir** (*Abies concolor*), and **Aspen** (*Populus tremuloides*



Ponderosa Pine/Arizona Fescue Habitat Type Willow Creek Mesa 8,500 ft.





Pinyon/Juniper Woodlands intermixed with open meadows.

These two vegetation types are the most common for Urban/Interface type development in Catron County.

#### UNDERSTORY VEGETATION

The primary understory community is comprised of shrubs, forbs, herbaceous plants, grasses, and cacti. Many of the following species are found in the Urban/Interface areas identified in this plan.

- ◆ The four shrub species found are **Mountain mahogany** (*Cercocarpus* spp.), **Broom snakeweed** (*Gutierrezia sarothrae*), **Rabbitbrush** (*Chrysothamnus* spp.), and **Squaw currant** (*Ribes inebrians*).
- ◆ Forbs include true asters (*Aster* spp.), **Sticky Aster** (*Machaeranthera bigelovii*), **Fleabane** (*Erigeron* spp.) **Buckwheat** (*Polygonum* spp.), and **Pussytoes** (*Antennaria* spp.)
- ◆ Herbaceous plants include **Indian paintbrush** (*Castilleja* spp.), **Harebell** (*Campanula* spp.), **Scarlet buglar** (*Penstemon* spp.), **Locoweed** (*Astragalus* spp.), **Geranium** (*Geranium* spp.), **Nodding onion** (*Allium cernuum*), **Pale trumpets** (*Ipomopsis longiflora*), and **Verbena** (*Verbena* spp.)
- ◆ Grasses found are **Sixweeks threeawn** (*Aristida adscensionis*), **Blue grama** (*Bouteloua gracilis*), **Squirrel tail** (*Sitanion hystrix*), **Muhly grass** (*Muhlenbergia* spp.), and **Pine dropseed** (*Blepharoneuron tricholepis*).
- ◆ Cacti species include **Banana yucca** (*Yucca baccata*), **Prickly pear** (*Opuntia* spp.)

#### INSECTS AND DISEASES



Insects and disease are as much a part of the forest and woodlands as floods, wildfire, drought and severe weather. In fact, it is because of these events, that pathogens become problems that must be addressed.

When conditions occur that will cause wide scale losses of trees, an **Integrated Pest Management Plan** needs to be formulated. The highlights of this plan include:

#### PREVENTION

1. Utilization of cut wood above 4 inches diameter outside bark (DOB), thereby eliminating potential breeding grounds for pathogens.
2. Timing management programs when insect populations are low and when slash can dry out (Mid to late summer).
3. Avoiding programs that create slash for more than one year.
4. Disposing of green slash by burning, chipping/spreading, debarking, or burying.

#### SUPPRESSION

1. Covering infested slash (4 in. DOB and larger) with clear plastic in direct sunlight.
2. Remove infested slash away from uninfested trees.
3. Infested firewood should not be removed from site until treated, so as not to spread insects.

Insects associated with the vegetation types to be encountered consist of:

Pinyon needle scale (Matsucoccus acalyptus)  
Pine needle scale (Chionaspis pinifoliae)  
Pinyon spindle gall midge (Pinyonia edulicola)  
Pinyon needle miner (Coleotechnites edulicola)  
Ponderosa pine needle miner (Coleotechnites ponderosae)  
Tiger moth (Halisidota spp.)  
Douglas-fir tussock moth (Orgyia pseudotsugata)  
Western spruce budworm (Coristoneura occidentalis)  
Conifer sawflies (Neodiprion spp.)  
Conifer aphids (Cinara spp.)  
Coley spruce gall adelgid (Adeges cooleyi)

Spider mites (Oligonychus spp.)  
Pine tip moths (Rhyaciona spp.)  
Pinyon pitch nodule moth (Petrova arizonensis)  
Spittlebugs (Aphrophora spp.)  
Bark moths (Dioryctria spp.)  
Pitch moths (Vespa mima spp.)  
Twig beetles (Pityophorus spp.)  
Bark beetles (Ips spp.)  
Roundheaded woodborers (Family Cerambycidae)  
Flatheaded woodborers (Family Buprestidae)  
Western cedar borer (Trachykele blondeli)  
Juniper twig pruner (Styloxus bicolor)

The only major problem with forest pests in the county is the Ips beetle infestation north of Highway 60 due to the droughts of 1999-2000. The droughts subsequently allowed large populations of beetles to become established in weakened Pinyon /Junipers in large quantities. A



cold wet winter will be needed to stop this infestation, and even then, there will be continued damage on individual trees. Scattered outbreaks of bark beetles and western spruce budworm can be found throughout the county but usually not in sufficient numbers to be of serious concern.

**Diseases** associated with the vegetation types to be encountered consist of:

Dwarf mistletoe (Arceuthobium spp.)  
True mistletoe (Phoradendron spp.)  
White pine blister rust (Cronartium ribicola)  
Stem rusts of junipers (Gymnosporangium spp.)  
Broom rust (Chrysomyxa arctostaphyli)  
Branch & shoot dieback on spruce (Cytospora kunzei Sacc.)

Dwarf mistletoe is currently the only disease present in areas around Jewett Gap, Pic Town and Horse Mountain. Dwarf mistletoe has been seen in small quantities on the Ponderosa pine, on dryer sites. See *You Can Save Your Trees from Dwarf Mistletoe* in appendix for proper pruning procedures of diseased trees.

## **NOXIOUS WEEDS**

The *Integrated Weed Management Plan* needs to be consulted before thinning operations begin to prevent the introduction or spread of the following invasive species:

### Class "C" Weeds:

These Non-native species are widespread in the County and State. Long-term programs are necessary to manage these species.

Field bindweed (Convolvulus arvensis L.)  
Russian olive (Elaeagnus angustifolia L.)  
St. Johnswort (Hypericum perforatum L.)  
Salt cedar (Tamarix pentandra)

### Class "A" Weeds

There are three Non-native species with a limited distribution in the Catron County. **High priority** needs to be taken to prevent new infestations and eliminating existing infestations.

African Rue (Peganum harmala)  
Camelthorn (Alhagi pseudalhagi)  
Leafy spurge (Euphorbia esula)  
Additional assistance can be received from the county extension agent or the Natural Resource Conservation Service



## SOIL TYPES

See *SOIL SURVEY OF CATRON COUNTY, NEW MEXICO; NORTHERN PART* also *SOIL ASSOCIATIONS AND LAND CLASSIFICATION FOR IRRIGATION CATRON COUNTY* by NEW MEXICO STATE UNIVERSITY in appendix.

Soil types will be identified in each area where work will be done, in order to determine the site suitability, limitations, and determine the best course of action to mitigate potential erosion.

## FISH & WILDLIFE CONCERNS/THREATENED AND ENDANGERED SPECIES

Threatened and Endangered Species are a concern for all areas in Catron County. The Mexican Spotted owl has essentially shut down a timber/forest harvesting program that provided a tax base to the County. Over 100 jobs were lost, along with the loss of the secondary services and economy provided by this industry. The County Commission has made every effort available to insure that the county's voice is heard when it comes to implementation of the National Environmental Policy Act.

The county is currently used by many game and non-game species. Some of the more common game species include:

Mule Deer (*Odocoileus hemionus*)  
Pronghorn Antelope (*Antilocapra americana*)  
Mountain Lion (*Felis concolor*)  
Wild Turkey (*Meleagris gallopavo*)  
Ringtail (*Bassariscus astutus*)  
Javelina (*Tayassu tajacu*)  
Raccoon (*Procyon lotor*)  
Red Squirrel (*Tamiasciurus hudsonicus*)  
Snow Goose (*Chen caerulescens*)  
Gambel's Quail (*Callipepla gambelii*)  
Mourning Dove (*Zenaidura macroura*)

Elk (*Cervus elaphus*)  
Black Bear (*Ursus americanus*)  
Bobcat (*Lynx rufus*)  
Fox (*Vulpes* spp.)  
Badger (*Taxidea taxus*)  
Beaver (*Castor canadensis*)  
Long-tailed Weasel (*Mustela frenata*)  
Albert's Squirrel (*Sciurus aberti*)  
Canada Goose (*Branta canadensis*)  
Blue Grouse (*Dendragapus obscurus*)  
Band-Tailed Pigeon (*Columba fasciata*)

Some of the common non-game species include:

Dwarf shrew (*Sorex nanus*)  
Least shrew (*Cryptotis parva*)  
Rock squirrel (*Spermophilus variegatus*)  
Spotted ground squirrel (*S. spilosoma*)  
Pocket Gopher (*Thomomys bottae*)  
Plains pocket mouse (*Perognathus flavescens*)  
Ord's kangaroo Rat (*Dipodomys ordii*)  
Harvest mouse (*Reithodontomys megalotis*)  
Plains harvest mouse (*R. montanus*)

Deer mouse (*Peromyscus maniculatus*)

N. Rock mouse (*P. nausetus*)  
Porcupines (*Erethizon dorsatum*)  
Spotted skunk (*Spilogale gracilis*)  
Striped skunk (*Mephitis* spp.)  
W. small-footed bat (*Myotis ciliolabrum*)  
Black-tailed Jackrabbit (*Lepus californicus*)  
Coyotes (*Canis latrans*)  
Scrub Jay (*Aphelocoma coerulescens*)  
Common Raven (*Corvus corax*)  
Red-shafted Flicker (*Colaptes auratus*)  
Badger (*Taxidea taxus*)



Black-tailed rattlesnake (*Crotalus molossus*)

Short-horned lizard (*Phrynosoma douglasii*)

The New Mexico Department of Game and Fish, in their publication entitled *New Mexican Wildlife of Concern*; list **Threatened, Endangered and Sensitive species in Catron County**. These species are federally listed, state listed, or both. The species on this list that are most inclined to inhabit the county include:

**Fish-** Gila Trout (*Oncorhynchus gilae*)  
Roundtail Chub (*Gila robusta*)  
Gila Chub (*Gila intermedia*)  
Spikedance (*Meda fulgida*)  
Loach Minnow (*Rhinichthys cobitis*)  
Gila Top Minnow (*Pociliopsis occidentalis*)

**Amphibian-** Lowland Leopard frog (*Rana yavapaiensis*)

**Reptiles-** Gila Monster (*Heloderma suspectum*)  
Narrowhead Garter Snake (*Thamnophis rufipunctatus rufipunctatus*)

#### **Birds**

Brown Pelican (*Pelecanus occidentalis carolinensis*)  
Bald Eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*)  
Common Black-Hawk (*Buteogallus anthracinus anthracinus*)  
American Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus anatum*)  
Interior Least Tern (*Sterna antillarum athalassos*)  
Mexican Spotted owl (*Strix occidentalis lucida*)  
Gila Woodpecker (*Melanerpes uropygialis uropygialis*)  
Southern Willow Flycatcher (*Empidonax traillii extimus*)  
Bell's Vireo (*Vireo bellii*)  
Grey Vireo (*Vireo vicinior*)  
Varied Bunting (*Passerina versicolor*)  
Baird's Sparrow (*Ammodramus bairdii*)

**Mammals-** Spotted Bat (*Myotis Euderma maculatum*)  
Mexican gray Wolf (*Canis lupus baileyi*)  
Arizona montane vole (*Microtus montanus arizonensis*)

**Invertebrates-** Gila Pyrg Snail (*Pyrgulopsis gilae*)  
New Mexico Hot spring Pyrg Snail (*Pyrgulopsis thermalis*)

The New Mexico Forestry Division, in their publication entitled *Inventory of Rare and Endangered Plants of New Mexico* (August, 1995), list three endangered plant species in Catron County. The species are:

Gooding's onion (*Allium godingii*)  
Golden lady slipper (*Cypripedium pubescens*)  
Hess's fleabane (*Erigeron hessii*)



At this time, no threatened or endangered species have been identified on the land base where Wildland/Urban Interface Mitigation activities will take place. If in the future such a species is found, care should be taken to protect both the species and its habitat.

## **WATERSHED AND WETLAND RESOURCES**

There is considerable variation in climate between localities within Catron County; average annual precipitation is 9 to 30 inches per year, with a 2 inch increase for every 1000 foot rise in elevation. Except for the undrained basins on the north, the San Augustin Plains, and a small area in the extreme eastern part of the county that is within the Rio Grande drainage system, all the remaining areas are west of the Continental Divide, and drain into the Colorado River drainage system. The two principal drainages in Catron County, the Gila and San Francisco rivers, are perennial throughout most of their course.



The Luna valley is in the headwaters of the San Francisco river, along with Aragon-Apache Creek area (the Tularosa River is a major tributary of the San Francisco River. Willow Creek and Indian Creek are considered the headwaters of the Middle Fork of the Gila River. Both the San Francisco River and Little Colorado Watershed drain the area around Jewett Gap.

For further information, please reference appendix.

## **AESTHETIC RESOURCES**



Catron County is characterized by rough and broken terrain, including steep mountainous areas, plateaus, and mesas intermingled with steep canyons, nearly level plains, and narrow valley bottoms. This resource has attracted Native Americans, ranchers, settlers, miners and present day second/seasonal homebuyers to Catron County. This rough broken landscape has also contributed to the slow growth of the county, where only 3000 plus people call home.

Valleys' offers view of typical pinyon/juniper woodlands interspersed with large open meadows. Surrounding all of this is numerous mountain peaks covered in ponderosa pine and mixed conifers. Ranges, panoramic views, and relative isolation all contribute to the aesthetic value of the area.

The aesthetic value of the county could potentially be drastically reduced due insect and disease infestations, catastrophic-stand replacement wildfire and uncontrolled growth and development.



The Mogollon Mountains as seen from U.S. 180 at the Frisco Divide.

## **CULTURAL RESOURCES**

Catron County is located in a region that was extensively utilized by the Mogollon and Mimbres people of the past. The evidence of this can be witnessed first hand at the Gila Cliff Dwellings National Monument in South Central Catron County, as well as cliffs and caves along all major tributaries of the Gila and San Francisco River. Major archeological sites can be seen around Reserve, Luna, Aragon and Quemado. It is not uncommon to find stone pits, temporary summer camps, and hunting sites on south facing slopes through out the county. The Tularosa Valley was an early reservation for the San Carlos Apaches. Before the Apaches were "tamed", their famous Chiefs (Geronimo, Victorio, etc) would lead their people into the Gila Highlands during the



summer months to hunt and to escape the heat of the southern New Mexico desert. European settlement started in the late 1860's when the Luna Family (in which the central New Mexico town of Los Lunas was named after) started bringing large amounts of sheep into the areas for summer pasture. Cattle ranching started in the 1870's when ranchers, primarily from Texas, braved the Indians and difficult winters to start ranches and homesteads in the upper reaches of the Gila and San Francisco Rivers. Many of the miners that discovered the ore deposits in the Mogollon area came to the area as soldiers, and once discharged, came back to develop and prosper in the mining camps. Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid actually lived and worked on the WS Ranch north of Glenwood (during the time they were on this ranch, cattle rustling dropped dramatically).

Various movies have been filmed in the county, the most memorable being Henry Fonda's "My Name is Nobody". During the filming of this western, one lady from Reserve actually told Mr. Fonda that "she had left a real life cowboy to come to Mogollon to see him act like one". The building in downtown Mogollon that is marked "General Store" is actually a building that was built for this movie.

The mining industry essentially died in 1942 when all the miners went off to World War II and the silver veins played out. It was not until the mid 1960's that towns like Mogollon started to grow with the advent of the second/seasonal home industry. Old miners cabins and shacks were repaired and rebuilt for second homes for people from as far away as El Paso, Albuquerque, Tucson, Phoenix and even Southern California.

The next building boom started in the early 1980's when marginal ranches in the Datil area were bought by developers and subdivided. This has brought a completely new group of people to Catron County; Retirees, people who want to "get away" or those who want to slow their life styles down.

All these immigrants have brought a new and unique character to Catron County, along with personalities, differences of opinion and various environmental ethics.

Every effort will be made to insure that the customs and culture of Catron County, both historical and current are protected during this project. Ground disturbance will be kept to a minimum during thinning and slash treatment operations. If evidence of a significant potential cultural site is revealed during ground operations, activities in the immediate area will be suspended, an adequate management buffer zone around the area will be established, and the New Mexico State Historic Preservation Office will be notified.



# PROJECT RECOMMENDATIONS

## THINNING AND PRUNING:

Each forest type will be treated accordingly, see *Wildland Urban Interface Prescriptions* by Ron Moody, with an emphasis on forest health and fire protection. Specific prescriptions will be included in the "TWENTY COMMUNITIES COST SHARE PROGRAM THINNING PRACTICE PLAN" that will be written for each property. Proper thinning of the pinyon-juniper woodland/ponderosa pine forest should concentrate on the removal of diseased, dead or dying trees first. An unusually low needle count, numerous mistletoe infestations, or excessive number of brown needles can identify diseased or dying trees. Individually diseased branches encountered when thinning should be removed, using proper pruning procedures *see appendix*.

Branches need to be removed on trees within the defensible space of homes. [Healthy trees should be pruned to a minimum of 15 feet in ponderosa and 6 feet in pinyon/juniper. Mountain mahogany should be thinned at the same time diseased and low branches are removed. If at all possible, all junipers up to 8" DRC (diameter root crown) should be removed. An overall spacing between tree crowns of 10 feet, depending on slope, would eventually provide a nice layer of grasses and forbs.]

## SLASH DISPOSAL

All of this pruning will provide a lot of firewood and slash. Firewood should include branches down to 4" in diameter. Care should be taken not to create piles of slash where stems exceed a diameter greater than two inches. Such piles can become breeding sites for wood boring beetles. "Slash," a.k.a., the rest of the pruned material, should be piled in areas prone to erosion or left in piles to be burned at a later date. Large scale burning should be conducted under the supervision of an individual with wildland firefighting experience. Piles of slash should not exceed 3 feet in height. See the accompanying pamphlet *Guidelines for Fuel wood Management for Private Landowners in New Mexico* for a further explanation of fuel wood management.

## DEFENSIBLE ZONES

Reduction of fire threat can best be realized through a selective thinning of undesirable trees on sloped areas and creating defensible space around existing buildings. Specifically, defensible space is defined as at least 30 feet of open space between a building and the forest leaving only the widely spaced, pruned larger trees standing. *Creating Wildfire - Defensible Zones* a pamphlet from the New Mexico State University Cooperative Extension Service contains proper examples of defensible space and defensible zone for private landowners.





Urban/Interface in Catron County. Note 2 structures in back ground.

## LANDOWNER WILDFIRE MITIGATION PROCEDURES

### Application/Implementation Procedures - Catron County

Step 1. Property should be in the focus area of:

Luna	Escudilla Bonita
Jewett Gap	North of Omega
Pie Town	Wildhorse
Datil Area	Horse Mt. Subdivisions
Tularosa Valley	Rancho Grande
Mogollon	Willow Creek/Indian Creek/ Elk Springs

Step 2. Cost-share assistance will be given in the form of 70% reimbursement and 30% landowner responsibility. The Landowner will request a *Wildfire Mitigation Cost-share Assistance Application* from the Catron County Commission Office in Reserve (533-6423). The landowner should then complete as much of the application as possible and return it to the County Commission Office. **Please include a site map if possible**



Step 3. When the application is completed, a representative from the Catron County Commission Office, NM Forestry Division, US Forest Service or local volunteer fire department will make a site visit to determine needs and will complete a Practice Plan that identifies activities that need to take place to mitigate the hazard to the structure or property.

Approved activities will consist of:

- Structure Protection/Survivable Space/Zone  
(That area within 30 feet/100 feet of the structure)
- Thinning  
(From 100 feet out to 2 acres around the home)
- Fuel break development  
(Fuelbreaks constructed along property boundaries or roads.)

Step 4. If during the site visit, it is determined that minimal work is needed to mitigate the threat, and that the landowner can complete the work in a short amount of time, then the process for that property will be complete. It is recommended that the landowner notify the representative when the work is done so another site visit can be scheduled to inspect the completed work.

Step 5. If the visit determines major action is needed to mitigate threat to the property, then the representative will complete the **Practice Plan**. The landowner can then apply for cost-share assistance from the County Commission Office, in conjunction with the New Mexico Forestry Division.

Step 6. Cost-share assistance will be given in the form of 70% reimbursement and 30% landowner responsibility. The Landowner will either request a *Wildfire Mitigation Cost-Share Assistance Application* from the Assessment Team, or from the Catron County Commission Office (533-6423). The Assessment Team can assist the landowner in completing this application or the landowner can complete the application himself/herself.

Step 7. Once the Practice plan is complete, and has been signed by the landowner, Catron County Commission Office and Socorro District Forester, the landowner will receive a **Notice to Proceed**. The landowner can then begin work.

Step 8. The Landowner can complete the work himself or hire a contractor to do the work. (Cost Share Rates will be calculated in the Practice Plan).

In-kind cost that can be calculated into the 30 % Landowner match include:

- ✓ Hours worked by landowner/volunteers (calculated at \$15.39 per hour).



- ✓ Chainsaw time.
- ✓ Transportation Time (Moving slash to disposal site).
- ✓ Purchase and Installation of Spark Arrester(s) on chimney.
- ✓ Road Rehabilitation/ Erosion Control

Step 9. Once all work has been identified and the practice plan has been complete, then the landowner will request an inspection be made of the property. If the work passes inspection, the landowner can 1) pay the contractor for services rendered according to their agreement or 2) if the landowner arranged the work to be done by him, he then needs to document all costs associated with the project on an itemized expense schedule. In both cases, landowners will provide the Catron County Commission Office or program manager with copies of all expenditures. Cost cannot exceed established rates indicated on the *Practice Plan* and landowner should show in-kind contributions of no less than 30% of the total project cost.

Step 10. Once an audit has been completed, the Catron County Commission Office will request re-imbursement, once a month, from the NM Forestry Division. Once the Catron County Commission Office receives re-imbursement, the landowner will then be reimbursed 70% of all documented cost associated with the practice.

**Timeframe between landowner submittal of receipts and landowner re-imbursement should be no more than 30 business days, but initial re-imbursements may take longer.**

## CONCLUSIONS

The intention of this project is to assist private landowners with creating defensible space, defensible zones, fuel breaks and properly thinned forest, with the ultimate goals of protecting peoples lives, homes and investments from catastrophic wildfire. The by-product will be healthy, well-stocked, high quality woodland/forest relatively free of diseased, defective, and excess tree density. The thinning projects will also improve the wildlife forage on the property, bolster the occurrence of grass species, and reduce the wildfire hazard. A low thin, or thinning from below method will be employed as needed.

**A decision of “not likely to adversely affect endangered species” has been reached.** The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service biological assessment has identified no critical habitat in the Wildland/Urban Interface Fuel Treatment areas to be impacted. The planned low thinning of the land base will reduce the vulnerability of potential habitat to catastrophic wildfire.



**A decision of “not likely to affect watershed resources” has been reached.** Efforts will be made to minimize the amount of area exposed to bare mineral soil during tree and slash removal. Appropriate best management practices, such as water bar construction and grass seeding with weed free competitive grass seed will be employed where necessary to stabilize the soil.

The thinning operation will be a small contribution to the improvement of overall watershed health and yield. Thinning will create openings in the forest canopy, which promotes and increases the growth of grasses and forbs. Grasses and forbs are much better at temporarily trapping runoff from short duration, high-intensity storms and allowing the moisture to percolate into the watershed. Trees lock up available moisture much longer and are less capable of trapping moisture from rapid runoff. An excessive number of trees on the landscape can actually promote erosion by shading out the grasses and forbs capable of trapping rapid runoff from intense summer storms.

**A decision of “not likely to affect aesthetic resources” has been reached.** Activities will be within current subdivisions or proposed subdivision where aesthetics in most cases will be improved, not damaged. Landowners that have enrolled in the project expressed their most vocal concerns for maintaining or improving the aesthetics of the property.

**A decision of “not likely to affect on cultural resources” has been reached.** Actual ground disturbance will be held to a minimum, with most activities happening at the duff or surface level. It is assumed that landowners who do discover some type of cultural resource will want to protect it, as it will increase the value of the property and provide them with a link to New Mexico’s rich history.



## APPROVAL PAGE

**All Landowners** agree to maintain the practice for a minimum of ten (10) years.

Planner  
Nick Smokovich  
Timber Management Officer

Date

Approved by:

Doug Boykin  
Socorro District Forester

Date



## APPENDIX

- ◆ Catron County Draft Wildfire Hazard Mitigation and Implementation Plan 20 Communities Initiative 8/1/01 prepared by: Doug Boykin- New Mexico Forestry Division, Linda Cooke- Catron County, Loretta Ray- Gila National Forest
- ◆ Common Grasses of Grant and Catron Counties New Mexico The Upper Gila Watershed Alliance prepared by: Stephen O. MacDonald
- ◆ Conifer Pests in New Mexico New Mexico State University – Cooperative Extension Service prepared by: Robert Cain NMSUCE and Douglas Parker Forest Service, Southwestern Region
- ◆ Creating Wildfire – Defensible Zones New Mexico State University Cooperative Extension Service and New Mexico State Forestry Division
- ◆ Guidelines for Fuelwood Management for Private Landowners in New Mexico New Mexico Department of Natural Resources January, 1985 prepared by: Terri Zubchenok, Forestry Division
- ◆ Socorro County's Strategic Plan for Managing Noxious Weeds Socorro County Noxious Weed Committee, Socorro Soil & Water Conservation District, Bureau of Land Management Socorro Field Office
- ◆ Soil Associations and Land Classification for Irrigation Catron County Agricultural Experiment Station in cooperation with Water Resourced Research Institute and Soil Conservation Service
- ◆ US Fish and Wildlife Service's biological and conference opinion based on review of the US Forest Service's proposed Wildland/Urban Interface Fuel Treatments in New Mexico and Arizona
- ◆ How to Prune Trees United States Forest Service publication prepared by: Peter J. Bedker *Plant Pathologist*, Joseph G. O'Brien *Plant Pathologist*, and Manfred E. Mielke *Forest Health Specialist*.
- ◆ Water Resources of Catron County, New Mexico prepared by: S.M. Wells
- ◆ Wildland Urban Interface Prescriptions Southwestern Region July 21, 2000 prepared by: Ron Moody