



## **Red River**

# **Forest Service to revisit Upper Bitter Creek thinning near Red River**

**By Eric Heinz**  
Staff writer

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Carson National Forest officials plan to revive a thinning project put on hold last year after the U.S. Forest Service determined that appeals against the plan were valid.

Planned for the Questa Ranger District of Carson National Forest near Red River, the Upper Bitter Creek Project involved the thinning of trees for personal wood use and taking out dead trees to reduce potential wildfire fuel as well as the creation of 11.6 miles of new roads within more than 5,000 acres. The plan was shot down after various environmental groups and other parties appealed with concerns regarding the proposal.

Diana M. Trujillo, acting supervisor of Carson National Forest at the time, signed letters acknowledging the appeals Sept. 24, 2012.

The reasons listed in the appeal letters from Trujillo included:

- The Upper Bitter Creek Environmental Assessment and project record fail to demonstrate how the project complied with the Carson Forest Plan requirements for old growth analysis.
- The Upper Bitter Creek Environmental Assessment and project record project record fail to demonstrate how the project complied with the Carson Forest Plan requirements for road density within Management Areas 1, 2, and 6.

- The Upper Bitter Creek Environmental Assessment and project record fail to demonstrate how the project complied with Carson Forest Plan requirements for snags within spruce-fir forest.

Kathy DeLucas, spokesperson for the Carson National Forest, said the forest service intends to look over the plans in the environmental assessment, as required by the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA), so it can move forward with the project.

“Right now we’re in the process of reviewing and processing additional data, and we plan to go out with another environmental document,” DeLucas said during a phone interview Monday (Aug. 5). “Once that decision has been made, we’ll go into the NEPA process where people can comment. So we’re just looking at where we fell short and trying to beef up that area.”

DeLucas said the initial plans did not address some of the environmental impacts that could have been caused by implementing the proposed roads.

According to a letter on the website for WildEarth Guardians, an environmental watchdog group from Santa Fe, the group was concerned about the forest service’s oversight in regard to impact to wildlife and rivers.

“The (forest service’s) decision approved logging and thinning on 2,542 acres or nearly four square miles of high elevation spruce-fir forest on the Questa Ranger District,” the letter states. “It authorized a variety of logging activities requiring 11.6 miles of road construction and opening of 12 miles of closed roads. The appellants as well as respected scientists identified severe scientific flaws in the logging projects’ justification and intolerable impacts on old growth forest, roads that pollute already suffering trout streams and critical wildlife habitat impacts, loss of standing dead trees or snags.”

Since the old environmental assessment was scrapped, DeLucas said the forest service has been looking over the areas it missed the first time to determine the more environmentally sustainable route.

“We can create a document that’s more comprehensive to address the shortcomings that may not have been in the first document,” DeLucas said. “(The thinning) is important for fire mitigation and fire danger, and that’s why we think it’s important to move forward with it.”

The Carson National Forest will release appeal dates as soon as the new environmental assessment is complete. To view some of the appeals and track the project’s progress, visit [www.fs.usda.gov/projects/carson/landmanagement/projects](http://www.fs.usda.gov/projects/carson/landmanagement/projects)