



## **Group appeals Forest Service treatment plan**

**Matt van Buren | Posted: Monday, August 12, 2013 12:00 pm**

Carson National Forest will soon respond to an appeal of a range improvement project a New Mexico environmental group argues would lead to “toxic” results.

According to an environmental assessment prepared by the Forest Service, the proposed project would take place on 12,000 acres of sagebrush in Carson National Forest’s Canjilon Ranger District, in Río Arriba County.

“Increased bare ground has accelerated soil erosion,” the environmental assessment states. “Overall rangeland health is declining. Restoring sagebrush densities to historic conditions would increase plant productivity, health and vigor, increase ground cover, reduce soil erosion, improve wildlife habitat, increase species composition, increase forage production for livestock and wildlife, and improve watershed condition.”

The acreage “would be treated using a combination of mechanical methods and Tebuthiuron, as well as prescribed fire.” According to the assessment, a combination of fire suppression and over-grazing in the early 1900s reduced native vegetation, and encroaching sagebrush replaced plants that provides important habitat and forage for both livestock and wildlife. Some areas would be specifically tailored for mule deer habitat improvement.

“Mechanical treatments would include brushhogging, scalping and disking,” the assessment states. “Application of Tebuthiuron would be ground-based via hand spreading, tractor with a spreader, and/or ATV with a spreader. It is estimated that the Forest Service would treat approximately 500 acres per year.”

The Forest Service also issued a decision and finding of no significant impact in May, saying the activities would not significantly affect the quality of the human environment and are “unlikely to be highly controversial in a scientific sense.”

However, the environmental nonprofit group WildEarth Guardians is calling for “alternatives to toxic poisons on federal lands.”

“The (Environmental Protection Agency) recognizes that Tebuthiuron presents a significant risk to off-site, threatened or endangered species of plants due to leaching of Tebuthiuron into

groundwater,” an announcement from the group states. “As Tebuthiuron has an ‘extremely long’ half-life, those hazards compound with each use.”

WildEarth Guardians is asking that the Forest Service explore non-toxic alternatives, according to the release, including reducing the number of cattle and using fire to control sagebrush.

“Our suggestion to protect precious groundwater resources, proven to work elsewhere, was simply ignored, violating public trust and the law,” program director Bryan Bird is quoted as saying.

Carson National Forest spokeswoman Kathy DeLucas confirmed WildEarth Guardians’ appeal had been received and Forest Supervisor Buck Sánchez will review the appeal and make a decision by Aug. 15. However, as the decision is being appealed, DeLucas said there was little else she could say.