NEWS

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CONSERVATIONISTS AND DIXIE NATIONAL FOREST SUCCEED IN RESOLVING THE FIRST-EVER OBJECTION TO A 'HEALTHY FORESTS RESTORATION ACT' PROJECT FILED IN THE INTERMOUNTAIN WEST.

Conservationists from Utah Environmental Congress and Forest Guardians successfully negotiated a resolution with the Dixie National Forest in southern Utah to the Objection they recently filed of a substantial timber sale under the rules of the 2003 Healthy Forest Restoration Act (HFRA). The "Duck Creek Fuels Treatment Analysis" is now to be the first fuels reduction and logging project in the Intermountain Region of the Forest Service implemented under the President's controversial 2003 Forest legislation that was passed in the wake of the Southern California wildfires of that year. Lead Objector UEC agreed to withdraw the HFRA Objection in exchange for a 9 inch diameter-at-breast-height (DBH) cap on logging trees in more remote areas that are not close to the 'at risk' Duck Creek summer home community that this project is to protect. Duck Creek is located in a heavily forested area on top of the Pink Cliffs about 10 miles southeast of Cedar Breaks National Monument along state highway 14.

> "It was a very positive experience working together, and we've come up with an agreement that meets all of our objectives and provides protection to the community." said Cedar City District Ranger Dayle Flanigan who added, "This is a great step forward for the Forest Service and the UEC for working on projects together."

The agreement, which commits the Forest Service to not log big trees in the backcountry in exchange for conservationists withdrawing their Objection, clears the way for on-the-ground implementation of this first HFRA project in the Intermountain Region to begin this year, with fuels reduction treatments concentrated near the borders of this community that is at risk from wildfires.

> "Ranger Flanigan's willingness to work out an honest resolution that protects big trees in the backcountry and focus logging near houses - where it really counts - has laid the foundation for a new relationship with Utah conservationists based on trust and honesty instead of antagonism and polarization." said Kevin Mueller, executive director of the Utah Environmental Congress, "This is more than a 'win-win' deal, its an affirmative example that when public participation in Forest projects is taken seriously, the result is better, quicker decisions that protect our big trees and our communities … not 'analysis paralysis.'"

This resolution, which dramatically reduces the volume of timber to be logged by this project, is in line with direction in the HFRA to protect old growth and large trees as much as possible and to collaborate with the public so the resulting projects are not controversial and are actually effective in protecting communities and preparing them for wildfire. In addition to laying the foundation for a new relationship based on trust and expediting treatments to protect this community from future wildfires, the agreement avoids what would likely have been a voracious court battle up to the 10th Circuit Court of Appeals in Denver.

Southern edge of the Duck Creek HFRA project area, Dixie National Forest

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