

# NEWS

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## FOREST RULE CHANGE IN 11<sup>TH</sup> HOUR RULES CONSERVATION GROUPS:

### *Citizens accuse Dixie National Forest of a violation of trust and failure to collaborate*

Salt Lake city, UT– Utah Environmental Congress and Forest Guardians filed an “objection” under the rules of the Healthy Forest Restoration Act (HFRA) to the first ever logging project in Utah implemented under the President’s controversial 2003 forest legislation, and possibly the first HFRA Environmental Impact Statement to be challenged in the nation. The conservation groups cried foul, citing a switch to the new rules at the last minute to take advantage of the law’s streamlined citizen participation while avoiding the law’s more burdensome requirements for collaboration.

“The failure to actually follow the HFRA with the very first HFRA project in the state is an alarming harbinger of things to come. We’re dealing with a huge old fashioned logging project big enough to fill log trucks bumper-to-bumper from Temple Square all the way down State to 106th south!” said Kevin Mueller, executive director of Utah Environmental Congress. “Agency claims that it must log old growth forest miles away from the wildland urban interface to protect distant summer homes are simply not honest.”

The Dixie National Forest first announced the Duck Creek project in July 2001, fully two years before the HFRA was signed into law or even a flicker in the eyes of the Forest Service. The 2004 the Draft Environmental Impact Statement was not circulated for comment under the HFRA as required then, in March 2005 the Dixie abruptly announced that the Duck Creek sale would be “completed” under the rules of the HFRA, which severely limits citizen participation and judicial review.

“Changing the rules of the game in the fourth quarter is just one more example of the Bush Administration trampling democracy,” said Bryan Bird, Forest Program Coordinator at Forest Guardians. “Announcing this as a Healthy Forests project after public participation obviously violates federal law but also perpetuates the impression that this is a rogue government agency.”

The Duck Creek Fuels Treatment, would cut trees and conduct prescribed burning on 11,774 acres of the Dixie National Forest lands around Duck Creek Village southeast of Cedar Breaks National Monument. The purpose of the project is to ostensibly reduce fuels and “reduce the risk of a large-scale high intensity wildfire,” but the project also targets logging large trees in violation of the HFRA and the government’s own science indicating large tree cutting is counterproductive for fuels reduction. The preferred alternative would cut 1,663 acres of old growth and cost the taxpayer over \$10 million.

“Logging old growth was not envisioned by Congress when it voted on the HFRA and collaboration was a requirement.” said Bird. “These requirements are meant to ensure that fuel reduction projects are non-controversial and communities can be protected in a timely manner. Duck Creek clears neither of those hurdles, and this last minute change just allows the government to sidestep citizen input. Is it any wonder we don’t trust them with our trees?”

The objecting groups support limited thinning of small trees in close proximity to the subdivision where it would protect houses but contest unneeded large-tree logging miles away. They cite the strong direction of the HFRA to protect large trees and initiate collaboration under HFRA early in the planning process-not at the end.

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