



**U.S. Forest Service**  
**Kaibab National Forest**  
800 S. 6<sup>th</sup> St.  
Williams, AZ 86046  
Voice: (928) 635-8200  
Email: [mailroom\\_r3\\_kaibab@fs.fed.us](mailto:mailroom_r3_kaibab@fs.fed.us)  
Web: [www.fs.usda.gov/kaibab](http://www.fs.usda.gov/kaibab)

# News Release

**Media Contact: Jacqueline Banks**  
**(928) 635-8314**  
[jcbanks@fs.fed.us](mailto:jcbanks@fs.fed.us)



## **Kaibab National Forest seeks public input on grassland restoration project**

**Williams, Ariz., March 23, 2015—For Immediate Release.** The Kaibab National Forest is seeking comments on a proposed grassland restoration project on the forest's Williams and Tusayan ranger districts that would restore the structure and function of grasslands and woodland areas by reducing tree densities, reestablishing natural fire regimes, and promoting grassland-associated wildlife species.

The detailed proposal and associated documents, including maps, are available on the Kaibab National Forest website at <http://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=44132>. Interested individuals are encouraged to submit comments during the 30-day scoping period, which will run from March 24 to April 22.

Comments may be written, hand-delivered, oral, or electronically-delivered. Hand-delivered comments can be submitted to the Williams Ranger District office from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday, excluding holidays, at 742 S. Clover Rd., Williams, AZ 86046, or to the Tusayan Ranger District office from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday, excluding holidays, at 176 Lincoln Log Loop, Grand Canyon, AZ 86023.

Comments may also be submitted via electronic mail to [comments-southwestern-kaibab-williams@fs.fed.us](mailto:comments-southwestern-kaibab-williams@fs.fed.us). Please include "South Zone Grassland Restoration Project" in the subject line of the email.

The Southwestern landscape, including the Williams and Tusayan districts of the Kaibab, has been greatly altered over the past century by the encroachment of woody plants, particularly juniper, pinyon, and ponderosa pine, into areas that were formerly grasslands and open pinyon-juniper woodlands.

Many factors have played a role in this transition, including historical livestock grazing, fire suppression, changes in wildlife populations, and climate change. These factors have eliminated the vegetation necessary to carry low intensity surface fires across the landscape, thereby altering the natural fire regimes and allowing uncharacteristic forest succession to take place. Encroachment can alter water and nutrient cycling, impact soil integrity, and negatively impact wildlife habitat.

Forest managers are seeking to reduce this encroachment and move toward desired conditions by thinning conifer trees, conducting prescribed burns and implementing associated actions on a broad scale across the two southern districts of the Kaibab National Forest.

"Grasslands serve an important ecological role and provide habitat for wildlife including birds and mammals," said Roger Joos, wildlife biologist and project lead. "Functional grasslands are much less abundant than they were historically, which reduces the amount of available habitat for grassland-

associated species. Understanding the value of these grasslands and the threats they are facing, we recognize the need to work toward restoring them to healthier conditions.”

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