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News Release

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Kaibab National Forest and Alamo Band of Navajo Nation expand forest health and tribal employment partnership into 2020

Williams, Ariz., Aug. 12, 2016—For Immediate Release. After several successful years of partnering together to conduct forest restoration work and provide employment opportunities to tribal members, the Kaibab National Forest and Alamo Band of the Navajo Nation have expanded their relationship by committing to tackling mutually beneficial projects through the year 2020.

The Kaibab National Forest signed a supplemental agreement with Alamo Navajo School Board Inc., the primary employer for the Native American reservation headquartered in Socorro County, New Mexico, to work together to reduce the risk of high-severity wildland fire and improve ecosystem health around the communities of Williams and Tusayan through forest restoration efforts such as removing trees from overly dense stands and treating the remaining slash.

“We are very excited to see this partnership continue to grow and develop because it is accomplishing great restoration work on the forest while providing an economic benefit to the Alamo Navajo community and on-the-job training to Alamo community members,” said Heather Provencio, supervisor of the Kaibab National Forest. “It really is a win-win for everyone, and we are pleased to build upon the successes of recent years.”

Over the next four years, Alamo Navajo crew members will mark and cut at least 800 acres of ponderosa pine, juniper and pinyon on priority forest restoration projects for the purposes of fuels reduction, forest health and wildlife habitat improvement under the supplemental agreement. They will also be responsible for treating the activity slash – the felled trees that result from the thinning work – by piling, scattering or producing firewood for use by tribal communities.

“These crew members love to come out to the forest and do this work,” said Steve Guerro, ANSBI president. “They want to keep coming out and doing more. This program provides work training and a great educational experience for our young people.”

According to Bill Ferranti, natural resource specialist for the Alamo Natural Resources Department, Alamo is one of three noncontiguous Navajo communities and is therefore largely isolated from the larger Navajo Nation. “Alamo has a current 73 percent unemployment rate in the 18- to 34-year-old age group, and 55 percent of its members have never been in the workforce,” Ferranti said.

“We established ANSBI as a 638 (Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act) program because we were asking ourselves, ‘How are we going to grow and develop our own people and make our community self-sufficient?’ We have a high rate of unemployment back home,” said Earl Apachito, ANSBI board member.

As part of the overarching ANSBI program, an Alamo community natural resources management workforce was established and trained in order to provide Alamo members with marketable skills and employment opportunities while simultaneously fulfilling a need to restore forested lands across the Southwest.

“This project provides training and shows the crew members that they can do anything,” Apachito said. “These guys are hard workers, and this partnership with the Kaibab National Forest shows our capabilities.”

It was in 2012 that the Kaibab National Forest first teamed with ANSBI, which administers close to 50 different programs for the 2,000-member Alamo community including health services, education, technology, roads and forest restoration through grants and contracts with federal, state and tribal agencies. At that time, ANSBI hired, trained and managed a crew of Alamo members to complete a fuels reduction and habitat improvement project on the forest’s Tusayan Ranger District. The project involved the marking and cutting of 208 acres of ponderosa pine forest over several weeks for the purposes of ecosystem restoration, fuels reduction, and wildlife habitat improvement. Kaibab National Forest managers specifically sought out the Alamo crew because of their previous success in restoring forested lands on the Cibola National Forest in New Mexico.

The Kaibab National Forest secured funding for that original project on the Tusayan Ranger District through the Coconino County Resource Advisory Committee, a local community group that provides recommendations on funding for projects that benefit resources on federal lands. Over the years, additional work was able to be completed because the partnership competed well for grant and other funding due to the multiple benefits it provided including forest health improvement, employment opportunities, workforce training, and fuelwood for nearby Native American communities.

To date through the partnership, 930 acres have been thinned, 38 acres have been piled, and 280 cords of fuelwood have been provided to local communities of the Navajo Nation. That work can now continue through 2020 thanks to the Kaibab National Forest and ANSBI executing the supplemental agreement to extend the partnership.

“This partnership is so important for so many reasons,” said Mike Lyndon, tribal liaison for the Kaibab National Forest. “Not only does important forest restoration work get done and Alamo members have opportunities for training and employment, but also we are able to provide firewood to tribal communities free of charge for their home heating, cooking and other needs.”

There is typically a high demand for firewood within rural communities, including many tribal communities bordering the forest. Elderly tribal members and those with health conditions often have difficulty gathering sufficient firewood in a season. Within rural Navajo communities, many people rely on fuelwood as their primary heat source, so it is a valuable byproduct of important fuels reduction work.

Instead of hauling off or burning the remnants of their forest restoration efforts, the Alamo Navajo crew members use a firewood processor purchased by ANSBI in 2014 to cut precisely-sized firewood pieces as they go, creating a stockpile that is intended to help meet the needs of nearby tribal communities.

“We continue to look for ways to add value to this partnership for all of those involved,” Lyndon said. “It’s not only the work being accomplished but also the relationships being forged that we see as important. I hope this effort sparks new ideas and approaches to managing public lands together with our tribal partners.”

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Alamo Navajo and Kaibab National Forest representatives sit on a pile of firewood generated from forest restoration partnership efforts.
Photo by Dyan Bone. Credit Kaibab National Forest.



Forest restoration work completed as part of the partnership between the Alamo Band of Navajo Nation and the Kaibab National Forest.
Photo by Dyan Bone. Credit Kaibab National Forest.

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