



United States Department of Agriculture

Forest Service

Kaibab National Forest
800 S. 6th St.
Williams, AZ 86046
(928) 635-8200
www.fs.usda.gov/kaibab

News Release

Media Contact: Jacqueline Banks
jacqueline.banks@usda.gov
(928) 635-8314

Kaibab National Forest to begin marking trees in early March in Government Prairie Project north of Parks

WILLIAMS, Ariz., Feb. 28, 2020 — The Kaibab National Forest will begin marking trees in early March within the 1,400-acre Government Prairie Project north of the community of Parks in order to prepare the area for a future timber sale as part of ongoing forest restoration efforts.

The project area is located about 5.5 miles north of the intersection of Forest Road 141, also known as Spring Valley Road, and Historic Route 66 between Government Mountain and Government Hill. Much of the broader Government Prairie area includes large grassland and savanna ecosystems that have become less healthy over time due to significant encroachment by trees and other vegetation not historically found there.

Crews recently began painting the boundaries of the Government Prairie Project area. Next week, they will start marking trees within those boundaries with a leave-tree mark, meaning that the trees that are intended to remain post-treatment will be marked with paint. Forest Service marking crews make every effort to limit the visibility of tree marking paint where possible, such as along roadways and adjacent to private property, so as to not impede the views of residents and visitors.

There are varying treatments within the 1,400-acre project footprint, which are based on historic conditions in different units. In historic grasslands and savannas, the vast majority of encroaching conifers will be removed in order to encourage species diversity, reduce dwarf mistletoe infection, promote understory grasses and forbs, restore connectivity between grassland habitats for wildlife species, and move the entire area closer to historic and healthy ecological conditions.

Grasslands play an important ecological role, especially for various wildlife species such as pronghorn antelope, and are known for their high biodiversity. Healthy grasslands are better able to carry out natural processes such as nutrient cycling and provide increased water availability and habitat quality.



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Other treatment units within the broader project boundary are dominated by stands of ponderosa pine trees. These stands have become overly dense due to fire exclusion and other factors. In these units, treatments will focus on removing trees in order to more closely resemble historic stand structures, which include more openings between groups of trees and fewer areas of interlocking crowns. Goals of these treatments include reducing threats to lives, private property and forest resources posed by unnaturally severe wildfire; improving the overall health of the remaining stand by increasing tree age and species diversity; and enhancing wildlife habitat through improved grass and understory vegetation growth.

Once the project has been marked, which will likely be completed by this summer, it will be offered as a timber sale. Implementation of the Government Prairie Project is anticipated to begin in early 2021, depending on the contractor selected to complete the work as well as weather conditions at the time.

The Government Prairie Project is one of several grassland restoration projects that have been implemented or are planned across the southern two districts of the Kaibab National Forest. Forest managers monitoring the effects of these projects have already documented increased use by a variety of wildlife species.

The efforts to improve conditions in the Government Prairie area are part of the broader Four Forest Restoration Initiative, which seeks to accelerate forest restoration treatments across 2.4 million acres of ponderosa pine forest on the Mogollon Rim of northern Arizona. The project area was part of almost a million acres that were analyzed under the [4FRI 1st Environmental Impact Statement](#), which approved forest restoration work across more than 580,000 acres of the Kaibab and Coconino National Forests.

To learn more about 4FRI, visit www.fs.usda.gov/4fri.

Kaibab National Forest information is also available through the following sources:

- Kaibab National Forest Website: www.fs.usda.gov/kaibab
- Twitter: www.twitter.com/KaibabNF
- Facebook: www.facebook.com/KaibabNF
- Flickr: <http://bit.ly/KaibabNFPhotos>

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