

AZSFWC  
P. O. Box 12590  
Glendale, AZ 85318-2590

**Grant Recipient:**

Arizona State Chapter of the National Wild Turkey Federation (NWTF)

**Award Amount: \$40,000** (Awarded 2017)

**Project Title:** Pinaleno Ecosystem Restoration Project (PERP Stewardship)

Year 6/7, 2019/ 2020

The June 2017 Frye Fire (nearly 50,000 acres) impacted the PERP Stewardship Project resulting in limited work being completed in Fall 2017. No work was conducted in Fall of 2018 as conditions post-Frye Fire were being evaluated. A new logging contractor (Smith Forestry Services) was identified in Fall of 2017 and he was orientated to the project site in December 2017. He started logging operations in late summer 2019 and was very productive; all USFS and NWTF staff was happy with his work on the difficult conditions was operating under (steep hills and difficult logistics). This grant was awarded during the Frye Fire, so operations and this report were delayed with permission of the AZSFWC.

In Spring 2019, following re-evaluations of the project by the USFS and also USFWS relative to threatened and endangered species (Mexican spotted owl (MSO) and Mt Graham red squirrel) operations were allowed to resume if spotted owl surveys were conducted across the project sites to be treated. Activities required for operations included spotted owl surveys, typical logging operations, and, for the first time, thinning of small diameter woody material. The small diameter material was cut and then stacked for future burning per USFS specifications. It was determined by the USFS and NWTF the remaining funding in the Agreement, including the \$40,000 grant from AZSFWC, would be adequate to complete the planned and required work (MSO surveys, logging, thinning).

Smith Forestry Services was placed under contract to conduct the logging work. An MSO qualified survey contractor (Moors Wildlife Management Services) was identified and placed under contract to conduct the required surveys. MSO surveys were conducted June through August 2019 and it was determined all planned logging and thinning work would be allowed to proceed without any restrictions. Summitt Forests was contracted to conduct the thinning operations across approximately 330 acres. Logging operations began in September 2019 and thinning operations began in October 2019.

The funding provided by this grant from AZSFWC, \$40,000, enabled the NWTF to provide non-Federal match for an additional \$160,000. The AZSFWC grant was very important for the completion of this project, especially after the Frye Fire impacted nearly 50,000 acres of the

Pinaleno Mountains and the Mt Graham area. An additional \$2,000 was awarded to the project in 2019 by the AZ NWTF Stat Chapter.

### **Acres Completed**

Logging operations during the Fall of 2019 completed 101 acres before snowfall shut down operations, leaving 33 acres to be completed in 2020. Thinning operations during the Fall of 2019 completed 154 acres before the crew had to pull off the project. There are an estimated 180 acres of thinning work remaining and will be completed in Fall of 2020. Work conducted in the Fall of 2019 was primarily in the areas near or around Cunningham Campground, Treasure Park, and Snow Flat.

All remaining work for PERP Stewardship project, post-Frye Fire, is scheduled to be completed in the Fall of 2020 and the project will be completely finished. The Frye Fire changed the conditions of the overall 5,300 acre project site, and the approximately 3,500 acres scheduled for timber treatments. As a result of these changed conditions current funds remaining were adequate for remaining work. The Coronado NF is satisfied with the scope of work and the project will be considered completed at the end of 2020. Currently there are no plans for the next phase of work in the Pinaleno Mountains, but the USFS is investigating what the next steps should be. Changed conditions of the landscape and forest stand, sever impacts to the Mt Graham red squirrel population, impacts to the local MSO population, impacts and affects to other threatened or sensitive species on the mountain, and infrastructure protection issues will all be taken into account.

A preliminary inspection of the project was made in June 2020 to review all work completed in summer and fall of 2019, and to see current progress in May and June 2020. A newly established pair of MSO had formed and moved into an area adjacent to an area where thinning/logging had occurred and was planned to be completed. With full cooperation of the US Fish and Wildlife Service, the USFS identified and marked areas which needed to be avoided by contractors. This resulted in approximately 2.5 acres of one unit being removed from the project in order to not disturb this pair of MSO during the identified breeding season. While some may see this as a negative, I think of it as a positive. A federally listed threatened species moved into, or near, an area we had operated in demonstrating to me our work was beneficial to this species. The MSO has repeatedly demonstrated a curiosity for human activity and a certain level of tolerance for our actions. This pair is no exception.

### **Overview of PERP Stewardship**

The Pinaleno Ecosystem Restoration Project (known as PERP Stewardship) is a large-scale project in the Pinaleno Mountains (Mount Graham) in Graham County, AZ. This project was initiated to reduce dense timber stands (high fuel loads) in order to better manage and protect

habitat of the endangered Mount Graham red squirrel. The existing high fuel loads/dense timber stands threaten the health of the forest and also present conditions which too often lead to catastrophic wildfires. Fire not only converts current forest stands, but also threatens human infrastructure, including recreational infrastructure such as access roads and trails, campgrounds, and prime hunting areas in GMU 31. Additionally, high fire danger threatens the multi-billion dollar observatory found on the summit of this range. PERP Stewardship allows for the prescribed thinning of forest stands in order to reduce fuel loads yet keep healthy stands of mixed-conifers. The NWTF is the primary contractor for the USFS on this project and employs multiple loggers to complete the work. Trees removed from the forest are either processed on site (chipping or masticated) or de-limbed and logs hauled to a sort yard near Safford.

Scott P Lerich  
NWTF  
La Luz, NM

Figure 1. Watershed map of the Pinaleno Mountains, Graham County, AZ

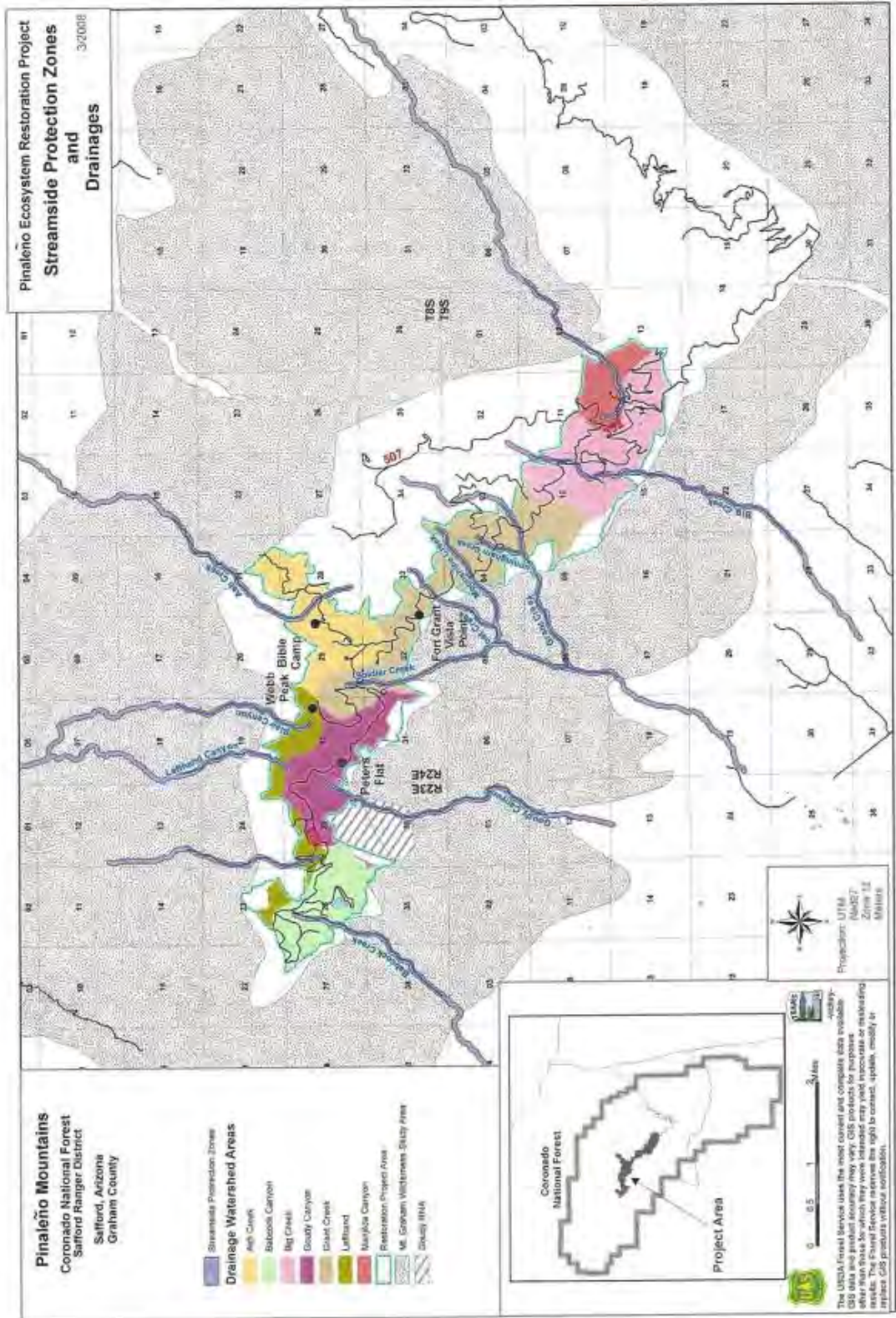


Figure 44. Drainages eligible for Wild and Scenic River status

Figure 2. Skidding logs up the Snow Flat road, PERP Stewardship Project, 30 June 2020.



Figure 3. Skidding logs up the Snow Flat road, PERP Stewardship Project, 30 June 2020



Figure 4. Log deck above Snow Flat, PERP Stewardship Project, 30 June 2020



Figure 5. Large log deck near Snow Flat, PERP Stewardship Project, 30 June 2020





Figure 6. Logging operations on steep ground near Snow Flat, PERP Stewardship Project, 30 June 2020



Figure 7. Large log deck in Unit 323, PERP Stewardship Project, 30 June 2020



Figure 8. Unit 323, between Treasure Park and Snow Flat, PERP Stewardship Project, 30 June 2020

