

**ARIZONA GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT
HABITAT PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM
HABITAT ENHANCEMENT AND WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT PROPOSAL**

PROJECT INFORMATION

Project Title: Ida Grassland Maintenance Project

Project No. 09-203

Region/GMU: Region II, GMU 7W

HPC: Williams-Flagstaff

Project Type: mechanical thinning

Project Description: Thin small-diameter conifers (junipers and pines) from historic grassland habitat on the Williams District of the Kaibab National Forest (NF). Agra-axes and chainsaw hand-crews would be used to thin conifers from area identified by AGFD and the Kaibab NF as a "high priority grassland restoration area." Archeology surveys and NEPA for this project were completed in 2008. A total area of 12,640 acres was cleared through NEPA. Approximately 2,500 acres were treated between April and September of 2009. In this proposal, we are seeking funding to treat an additional 1,800 acres in 2010.

Wildlife Species to Benefit: Pronghorn antelope and elk will benefit because historic grassland habitat will be maintained. Other nongame grassland species also will benefit (e.g., Gunnison's prairie dog, badger, northern harrier, barn owl, vesper sparrow). Mule deer also will benefit in the longer term because thinning conifers will maintain high herbaceous forage production. If these areas are not thinned, increasing conifer density will result in decreased forage production over time across much of the area.

Possible Funding Partners:

Implementation Schedule:

Beginning: Spring 2010

Completed: Spring 2011

NEPA Compliance: (if applicable)

Completed: Yes No

Projected Completion Date: NEPA completion date - September 2008; Implementation completion date - Spring 2011

PROJECT FUNDING

SBG Funds Requested: \$45,000

Cost Share Funds: \$63,750 AGFD Wildlife Conservation Funds: \$33,550 spent between 4/09 and 6/09; \$30,200 carried over and to be spent by 6/30/10.
\$80,000 in Forest Service implementation costs in 2009 (salary and fleet).
\$90,000 in Forest Service implementation costs in 2010.
\$20,500 in AGFD implementation costs (salary and fleet for AGFD agra-axe and operator – Floyd White).
\$15,000 U.S. Forest Service NEPA costs (already expended);
\$24,000 U.S. Forest Service archeology survey and clearance costs (already expended)

Total Project Costs: \$314,750 or \$275,750 excluding NEPA and arch survey costs.

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION	
Applicant: Kaibab National Forest, Williams Ranger District, Jeff Waters - Kaibab National Forest South Zone Wildlife Biologist Telephone: (928) 635-5627	Address: Williams Ranger District 742 S Clover Road Williams, AZ 86046
AGFD Contact and Phone No. Carl Lutch: 928-606-3093; John Goodwin: 928-214-1270 (If applicant is not AGFD personnel)	
Coordinated with: Carl Lutch, John Goodwin, AGFD	Date: August 28, 2009
Applicant's signature: <i>/s/ Jeffrey R. Waters</i>	Date: August 28, 2009

WAS PROJECT PRESENTED TO THE LOCAL HPC? YES ___ ___ NO X

HAS PROJECT BEEN SUBMITTED IN PREVIOUS YEARS? Yes

NEED STATEMENT/PROBLEM ANALYSIS: Grasslands on the Williams Ranger District of Kaibab National Forest provide habitat for various wildlife species such as pronghorn antelope, Gunnison's prairie dog, badger, northern harrier, barn owl, vesper sparrow. Many of the grassland areas on the Williams District have declined during the past century due to increased density of conifers (primarily junipers and pines). Encroachment of junipers and pines into historic grasslands is at least partially due to reduced wildfire frequency caused by livestock grazing and fire suppression.

The proposed project area is located within an area identified as a "priority grassland restoration area" by AGFD and the Kaibab National Forest (see South Zone Grassland Restoration Assessment, 11/15/07, on the Kaibab NF's website: <http://www.fs.fed.us/r3/kai/projects/plans.shtml>). Pronghorn antelope are regularly observed within the project area, as are large herds of elk and mule deer. Pronghorn prefer open grassland habitats with long sighting distances. Increased conifer density reduces sighting distances and thus degrades pronghorn habitat quality. In addition, once conifer density reaches a certain level, forage and browse production declines, which degrades habitat quality for pronghorn, elk, and mule deer.

PROJECT OBJECTIVES: The primary objective of this project is to maintain and restore grassland habitat on the Williams Ranger District of the Kaibab National Forest by preventing historic grasslands from becoming dominated by pinyon-juniper woodland.

PROJECT STRATEGIES: Small-diameter (<12 inches dbh) junipers and pines would be thinned using agra-axes. In a few areas where conifer density is greater, a chainsaw hand crew would be used to supplement thinning by agra-axe. In most areas, cut trees would be left in place on the ground. Cut juniper and pine trees resulting from agra-axe treatments provide favorable microsites for the growth of desirable herbaceous plants because the dead trees provide shade which helps to retain soil moisture and the dead trees help protect plants growing beneath them from livestock grazing. Cut trees located

near roads would be available to be collected with a personal fuelwood permit according to Kaibab National Forest travel and fuelwood collection regulations and policy. Excess slash would be hand-piled and burned in certain areas to avoid high concentrations of slash. In other areas, juniper skeletons would be crushed using the agra-axe machines.

PROJECT LOCATION: A 12,640-acre area on the north part of the Williams District of the Kaibab National Forest about 13 miles southeast of Valle off of Highway 180 (see attached map).

LAND OWNERSHIP AT PROJECT SITE (Please state specifically if PRIVATE PROPERTY and provide landowner's name): U.S. Forest Service, Kaibab National Forest

IF PRIVATE PROPERTY, IS THERE A STEWARDSHIP AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE LANDOWNER AND THE DEPARTMENT?

HABITAT DESCRIPTION: Grassland and pinyon-juniper woodland/savanna. Elevation ranges from 6,500 to 7,000 feet.

ITEMIZED USE OF FUNDS: We are seeking \$45,000 in funding for this project. At an average cost of approximately \$25/acre, we should be able to treat approximately 1,800 acres with these funds. Approximately \$20,000 would go to salaries and \$25,000 to fleet costs.

LIST COOPERATORS AND DESCRIBE POTENTIAL PARTICIPATION: Kaibab National Forest and AGFD.

PROJECT MONITORING PLAN: Project implementation would be regularly monitored by the Kaibab National Forest South Zone wildlife biologist, Jeff Waters, and AGFD GMU 7 Wildlife Manager, Carl Lutch.

PROJECT MAINTENANCE: Follow-up treatments are authorized under the project NEPA so that the area can be maintained as grassland habitat. Follow-up treatments would be funded through alternative funding sources.

PROJECT COMPLETION REPORT TO BE FILED BY: A project completion report would be submitted by the Kaibab National Forest South Zone wildlife biologist at the end of the two-year funding period, or separate annual completion reports would be submitted if requested.

WATER DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS (see attached worksheet): No

TREE SHEARING (AGRA-AXE, PUSH) PROJECTS (see attached worksheet): Yes

TREE SHEARING WORKSHEET

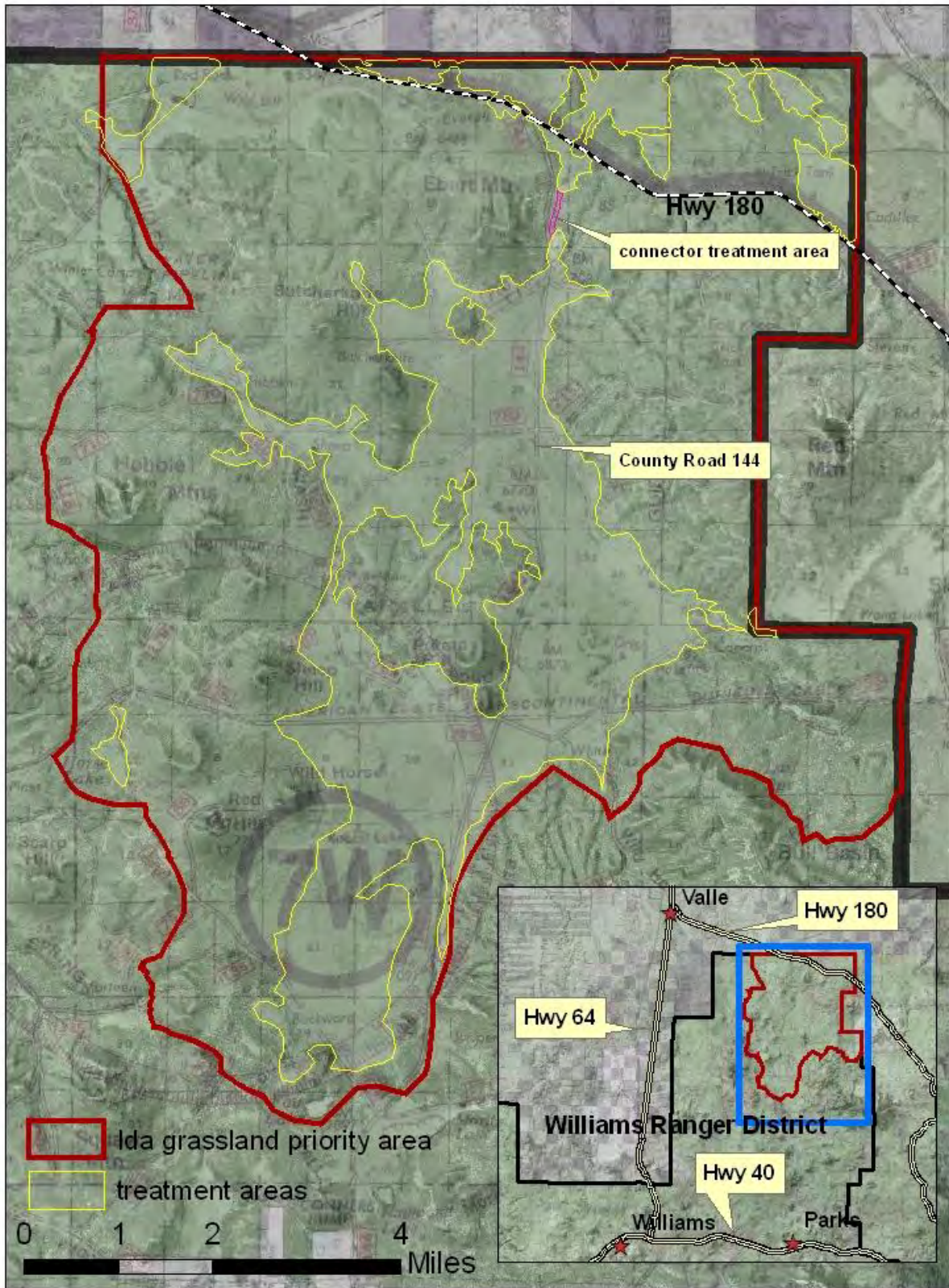
PROJECT NAME: Ida Grassland Maintenance Project

- 1) **What is the estimated acreage of the project?** 2,000 acres
- 2) **How are the trees going to be cleared? (agra axe, chain saw, push):** agra-axe and chainsaw hand crew
- 3) **What is the estimated number of trees per acre?** 50-100 trees/acre throughout most of areas proposed for treatment.
- 4) **Describe trees to be cleared (species, estimated diameter, single stem, multi-stem):** Mostly one-seed juniper, with scattered Utah juniper and pinyon pine. One-seed junipers are multi-stemmed. Trees up to 12 inches diameter at breast height would be cut.
- 5) **Describe terrain (slope, soil type, rocks, etc.):** Gentle slopes. Primarily grassland mollisols. Rocky areas would be avoided.
- 6) **Please list any special land management status for the project site (i.e. Wilderness, National Park, National Monument, etc). If private land, list landowner.** Kaibab National Forest lands with no special designation. Project area overlaps Smoot Lake Allotment (cattle), Dog Knobs Allotment (cattle), Moritz Lake Allotment (cattle), and Squaw Mountain Allotment (sheep).
- 7) **Please provide the following information about access to the proposed site:**
Type of access (mark one): 2x4 vehicles 4x4 only foot only**
**If foot access only: Distance in miles: Approx. hiking time:

Does access to this site require crossing private or tribal lands? YES NO

Is the site relatively accessible for tree shearing equipment? YES NO

Please describe any restrictions to public access: None



Ida Grassland Maintenance Project Area



Example of project area



Agra axe clipping one-seed juniper tree