

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

Game Branch / HPC Project Number:

14-109

**PROJECT INFORMATION**

**Project Title:** GMU 1 Mineral Grassland Restoration

**Region and Game Management Unit:** Region I Game Management Unit 1

**Local Habitat Partnership Committee (LHPC):**

- Springerville HPC

**Was the project presented to the LHPC?**

YES[X] NO[]

**Has this project been submitted in previous years?** YES[] NO[X]

**If Yes, was it funded?** YES[] NO[] → **Funded HPC Project #(s):**

**Project Type:** Grassland Restoration by mechanically treating encroaching Piñon Pine and Junipers.

**Brief Project Summary:** Mechanically treat approximately 1,182 acres of Piñon Pine and Juniper encroachment through IDIQ contracts (782 acres) and Forest Service force account (400 acres.)

The Mineral Grassland Restoration project is approximately 1,182 acres. The project lies immediately south and southeast of the community of Vernon with AZ State lands and various private lands bordering project boundaries. Vegetation transitions from thinned ponderosa pine timber to piñon/juniper woodlands then to open grasslands south to north respectively. The variability of vegetation across this landscape coupled with the presence of numerous water sources such as springs, water tanks, and three creeks, make this project a priority project for wildlife habitat restoration. Elk, deer, antelope, turkey, and numerous other species utilize this habitat year round for its cover, food, and water sources.

Approximately 821 acres contains a low density (<50 trees/acre) treated in the late 90s. Due to lack of repetitive treatment, Piñon Pine and Junipers have continued to encroach throughout the grasslands. The other remaining 361 acres contains a high density (>100 trees/acre) that have never been treated in historical grasslands. Grass and browse have been highly suppressed in these areas due to lack of moisture, sunlight, and overgrazing.

Over the past 5 years several vegetative treatments and prescribed burns have been completed around the proposed project boundary. Under the White Mountain Stewardship approximately 2,000 acres of ponderosa pine/piñon/juniper has been thinned adjacent to the project area to the south. The treatments have reduced tree densities to a more natural conditions and significantly improved community wildfire protection, water flow, and potential wildlife forage production. In order to maximize the potential to watershed and wildlife habitat improvement grassland restoration is required.

Areas targeted for mechanical treatment lie both in and adjacent to areas funded for treatment through the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation including primarily the Garris Knoll prescribed burn. Springerville fire management employees have to date cut a little over 120 acres to date of the 400 proposed for force account treatment. RMEF funds total \$80,000 and current investment by FS personnel for 120 acres @\$100 per acre includes \$12,000. In general, the remaining mechanical treatment areas are proposed for treatment post cutting which in the past has resulted in eliminating up to 40% of re-sprouts due to heat from the slash created by the initial cutting. The burn portion of the project is scheduled for the fall of 2015, which means all cutting must be complete within the unit prior to burning. Springerville Ranger District plans to complete approximately 200 more acres prior to burn implementation for an additional \$20,000 investment.

(PLEASE NOTE: If the project cannot be funded at the \$156,197 level, partial funding will also be greatly appreciated and the District can work with the funding received.)		
<b>Big Game Wildlife Species to Benefit:</b> Elk 45%, Deer 25%, Turkey 15%, Antelope 15%		
<b>Implementation Schedule</b> (Month/Day/Year):  <u>Project Start Date:</u> Summer/Fall 2014   <u>Project End Date:</u> Summer/Fall 2016	<b>Environmental Compliance:</b> NEPA Completed: Yes[ <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ] No[ ] N/A[ ] Projected Completion Date: <u>August 12, 2002</u>  State Historic Preservation Office - Archaeological Clearance: Yes[ <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ] No[ ] N/A[ ] Projected Completion Date: <u>Multiple surveys</u>  Arizona Game and Fish Department EA Checklist: N/A[ ] To be Completed by: _____ Projected Completion Date: _____	
<b>PROJECT FUNDING</b>		
<b>Special Big Game License Tag Funds Requested:</b>	\$ 156,197	
<b>Cost Share or Matching Funds:</b>	\$ 137,460 * see itemized use of funds	
<b>Total Project Costs:</b>	<b>\$ 293,657</b>	
<b>PARTICIPANT INFORMATION</b>		
<b>Applicant</b> (please print): Rob Lever	<b>Address:</b> PO Box 760 Springerville, AZ 85938	<b>E-mail:</b> rlever@fs.fed.us
<b>Telephone:</b> [REDACTED]		<b>Date:</b> 2/20/2014
<b>AGFD Contact and Phone No.</b> (If applicant is not AGFD personnel): Mike Godwin [REDACTED]		
<b>Project has been coordinated with:</b> USFS, AGFD, USFWS		

### NEED STATEMENT – PROBLEM ANALYSIS:

In GMU 1 it has been determined that winter range habitat is one of the significant limiting factors impacting big game wildlife. The lack of fire, thinning, and over grazing, over many decades has resulted in increased canopy cover and loss of wildlife forage. Over the last 18 years the Springerville HPC has been focused at improving winter range habitat condition at the landscape level. In the past 9 years over 28,000 acres of winter range habitat has been mechanically thinned within the winter range landscape habitat and broadcast burned approximately 6,950 acres to restore/improve wildlife habitat, see table 1 below. Thinning and prescribed burning continues to be needed to maintain these treated areas in an open condition and stimulate forage production for wildlife.

Table 1: Acres treated within Winter Range Landscape Habitat on the Springerville Ranger District

- |  |               |
|--|---------------|
| • White Mountain Stewardship (\$USFS)                    | ~24,950 acres |
| • Acres thinned (\$Wildlife contributions)               | ~2,760 acres  |
| • Prescribed broadcast burned (\$USFS)                   | ~3,306 acres  |
| • Prescribed broadcast burned (\$Wildlife contributions) | ~3,644 acres  |

### **PROJECT OBJECTIVES:**

- Improve watershed by restoring open grasslands and maintaining treated areas.
- Restore critical winter range habitat and browse species important for wildlife.
- Improve forage quality and quantity in critical winter range.
- Restore, enhance, and maintain meadows and grassland areas.
- Recycle nutrients into the soil.

### **PROJECT DESCRIPTION AND STRATEGIES:**

The Mineral Grassland Restoration project is approximately 1,182 acres. The project lies immediately south and southeast of the community of Vernon with AZ State lands and various private lands bordering project boundaries. Vegetation transitions from thinned ponderosa pine timber to piñon/juniper woodlands then to open grasslands south to north respectively. The variability of vegetation across this landscape coupled with the presence of numerous water sources such as springs, water tanks, and multiple creeks, make this project a priority project for wildlife habitat restoration. Elk, deer, turkey, and numerous other species utilize this habitat year round for its cover, food, and water sources.

The strategy in this project effort to improve watershed and wildlife habitat is to mechanically thin previously treated grasslands and completely suppressed grasslands. A combination of strategies and resources to mechanically thin these areas are proposed. Approximately 400 acres of low density PJ units will be treated using personnel from the Forest Service and a skid steer with a Fecon masticating head. The remaining 421 acres of low density PJ units will be placed in an IDIQ contract to be masticated. The 361 acres of high density PJ units will also be placed in an IDIQ contract. Strategic areas within the high density PJ units may be lopped and scattered in order to protect re-sprouting grasslands from overgrazing.

This project proposal is requesting funding at the amount of \$156,197 to complete thinning of up to 1,182 acres, or more, of important watershed and wildlife transition/winter range habitat within the treated units and grassland restoration areas. The Springerville District considers this an on-going project and will be seeking additional funds in the years to come for thinning and prescribe burning focusing in the winter range landscape area.

### **PROJECT LOCATION:**

The Mineral Grassland Restoration project is immediately south and southeast of Vernon, Arizona. Central legal location is T9N R25E S2. Average elevation 7300'. FS Roads 2, 61 404, & 404F. Identifying location names; Buckelew Springs, Garriss Knoll, Casimero Spring, Oak Spring, Pulciphier Creek, Vernon Creek, Mineral Creek, Gust Ranch, Carlock Ranch.

### **LAND OWNERSHIP AT THE PROJECT SITE(S):**

(if the project area is private property, please state specifically and provide the landowner's name)

- Public land. USFS Apache-Sitgreaves NF, Springerville Ranger District

### **HABITAT DESCRIPTION:**

Transition pine/piñon/juniper and grassland habitat within critical winter range habitat on GMU 1.



**ITEMIZED USE OF FUNDS:**

Special Big Game License Tag Funds

Mechanically thin 1,182 acres @ \$132/acre includes:

Salaries for 2 permanent seasonal fire employees	\$10,000
Fuel and repairs for skid steer w/Fecon head	\$5,000
IDIQ contract funding	\$141,197
Total	\$156,197

Cost Share or Matching Funds (for volunteer labor rates please refer to the worksheet below)

Vehicle use and fuel	\$2,000
Archeological Clearance for 1,182 acres @ 30/acre	\$35,460
RMEF grant for RX burning	\$80,000
120 completed acres @\$100 per acre	\$ 12,000
Additional 200 acres to be completed force account @ \$100 per acre	\$20,000
Total	\$137,460

**LIST COOPERATORS AND DESCRIBE POTENTIAL PARTICIPATION:**

Mechanical thinning limits the resources used for this project to trained FS personnel and IDIQ contracts.

**WOULD IMPLEMENTATION OF THIS PROJECT ASSIST IN PROVIDING, MAINTAINING,  
OR FACILITATING RECREATIONAL ACCESS?**

YES[] NO[] N/A[X]

**PROJECT MONITORING PLAN:**

Photo and established range monitoring points will be utilized where appropriate.

**PROJECT MAINTENANCE:**

The project area will need periodic maintenance such as prescribe burning or mastication.

**PROJECT COMPLETION REPORT TO BE FILED BY:**

Rusty Bigelow, Springerville Ranger District Fuels Specialist.

**WATER DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS (please use the worksheet below):**

**TREE CLEARING/REMOVAL PROJECTS (please use the worksheet below):**

## **TREE CLEARING/REMOVAL WORKSHEET**

**PROJECT TITLE:** GMU 1 Mineral Grassland Restoration

- 1) **What is the estimated acreage of the project?** 1,182
- 2) **How are the trees going to be cleared?** (agra axe, chain saw, grubbing, push, chaining):  
Mastication, Tree Shear, Lop and Scatter
- 3) **What is the estimated number of trees per acre?** 821 acres of <50 trees/acre. 361 acres of >100 trees/acre
- 4) **Describe trees to be cleared (species, estimated diameter, single stem, multi-stem):** Piñon Pine and multi stemmed <16" drc Alligator Juniper and Utah Juniper.
- 5) **Describe terrain (slope, soil type, rocks)** Primarily flat grasslands with rock outcroppings and various drainages.
- 6) **Please list any special land management status for the project site (e.g. Wilderness, National Park, National Monument). If private land, list landowner.** None
- 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 removal equipment? YES ☒ NO ☐

Please describe any restrictions to public access:

