

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

Game Branch / HPC Project Number: 14-302

PROJECT INFORMATION

Project Title: Narrow Gauge Prescribed Fire

Region and Game Management Unit: Region 3 GMU 19A

Local Habitat Partnership Committee (LHPC):

- Prescott (Not Formulated)

Was the project presented to the LHPC?

YES[] NO[X]

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

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

Project Type: Prescribed Burn

Brief Project Summary: The Narrow Gauge Prescribed Fire project is a 1512 acre prescribed burn on Woodchute Mountain within woodland and chaparral vegetation types. It is part of the Black Hills Vegetation Management Project Environmental Assessment (2011), a 163,000 acre project area with 118,790 acres authorized for prescribed fire. Prescribed fire projects to date include 2000 acres in FY (Fiscal Year) 2012 and 5000 acres in FY 2013. Prescribed fire projects are scheduled in FY15 for two burn units totaling about 6000 acres with funding received through HPC. A main objective of the project is to improve the condition of the vegetation/wildlife habitat for mule deer and also black bear; and reduce the potential for large, high severity wildfire. Project implementation benefits include increased forage and water yields, more resilient stands of woodland and pine, greater diversity and health of plant age class and species, protection of values at risk, and maintaining fire return intervals. Project implementation is scheduled for fall 2015/winter 2016 (FY 2016).

*Note: see Itemized Use of Funds/Cost share section for further information on funds used by the Prescott National Forest for completion of the Black Hills Vegetation Management Project Environmental Assessment.

Big Game Wildlife Species to Benefit: Mule Deer (80%), Elk and Black bear (20%). All species would benefit from increased forage to cover ratio and improved browse and grass forage quality.

Implementation Schedule (Month/Day/Year):

Project Start Date: October 1, 2015

Project End Date: September 30, 2016

Environmental Compliance:

NEPA Completed: Yes[X] No[] N/A[]

Projected Completion Date: November 2, 2011

State Historic Preservation Office - Archaeological Clearance:

Yes[X] No[] N/A[]

Projected Completion Date: _____

Arizona Game and Fish Department EA Checklist: N/A[X]

To be Completed by: _____

Projected Completion Date: _____

PROJECT FUNDING

Special Big Game License Tag Funds Requested: \$ 56,700

Cost Share or Matching Funds: \$ 56,700

Total Project Costs: \$ 113,400 for 1512 acres

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION		
Applicant (please print): Albert Sillas	Address: Prescott National Forest Verde Ranger District 300 E. HWY 260 Camp Verde, AZ 86322	E-mail: asillas@fs.fed.us
Telephone: 928-567-1124		Date: September 2, 2014
AGFD Contact and Phone No. (If applicant is not AGFD personnel): Tom Bagley 928-856-0800 and Virginia Gouldsbury 928-856-0785.		
Project has been coordinated with: Tom Bagley – Wildlife Manager GMU 19A, Virginia Gouldsbury – Wildlife Manager GMU 19A; Jim Gilsdorf – Chino Valley District Ranger; Aaron Hulburd – PNF Forest Fuels Specialist; Jason Clawson – PNF West Zone FMO.		

NEED STATEMENT – PROBLEM ANALYSIS:

The Black Hills Vegetation Management Project (BHVMP) responds to goals and objectives of the Prescott National Forest and managing Mingus Mountain and the surrounding area. Comparison of the existing condition of the BHVMP area and the desired conditions from the Forest Plan indicates a need to:

- improve and manage wildlife habitat for a variety of native species, including species determined to be threatened, endangered, or sensitive;
- manage for a diverse and healthy native vegetation component that is resilient, resistant to extreme weather patterns, and would support wildfires that more closely resemble their historic range of size, frequency, and intensities;
- maintain or improve soil stability, soil productivity, and watershed conditions;
- increase water yield within the chaparral component; and
- reduce risk to life, property, and natural resources from high-severity wildfires while increasing the safety to fire suppression resources.

No significant fire has occurred in the project area in several decades. The foothills and mountain slopes west of Woodchute Wilderness formerly held some of the highest concentrations of mule deer in Hunt Unit 19A. The east-west ridges coming off of Woodchute Mountain in the project area are an important seasonal travel and staging corridor for mule deer as they transition from pine habitat in the summer to lower elevation browse in the winter. Over the past 25 years, the deer population in this area has declined, primarily due to the reduced habitat quality as a result of the overgrown, mature, “decadent” brush that now dominates the area’s vegetative community, due to lack of fire. The recently-redeveloped Arizona Game and Fish Department water catchment at the base of CCC Canyon was designed with an increased water storage capacity to accommodate an elk population that was not present when the catchment was initially constructed in the 1950s. This additional water availability would help support increased deer and elk numbers if the overgrown brush was returned to earlier successional stages through prescribed fire (pers. comm. Tom Bagley, AGFD Wildlife Manager of Unit 19A for the past 22 years).

PROJECT OBJECTIVES:

The purpose of this burn is to improve the forage to cover ratio for wildlife and range, re-establish a natural fire regime back into the environment, and improve the horizontal age class diversity of the woodland and chaparral vegetation types. Reducing the overstory density would improve watershed conditions by improving herbaceous species growth and density to a more desired level. There will be many beneficial aspects of this project relating to food production for mule deer, elk and black bear. In

addition, the result of mosaics of different vegetation types and age classes with openings will produce a variety of different habitat niches and edge spacing desired by these wildlife species. This burn should also increase the water supply available for plants and water sources such as stock tanks, springs and ephemeral streams.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION AND STRATEGIES:

The Narrow Guage Prescribed Fire Project is a continuation of vegetation treatments within the Black Hills Range to enhance or benefit forest conditions and wildlife habitat in the area. Black line will be established where needed to protect values and burn perimeters prior to ignition of the main burn. Cultural sites, power lines, and range improvements will be protected by either removing brush or avoiding ignitions in proximity to these improvements. Previous experience in this fuel type in using aerial ignitions has proved very successful in producing mosaic burn patterns across the landscape. The use of a helicopter for aerial ignitions is planned for this prescribed burn. This strategy protects soils and drainages from large scale erosion, increases edge effect, protects visual integrity and creates additional protection opportunities for firefighters in the event of an unplanned ignition.

PROJECT LOCATION: The proposed project is adjacent the Woodchute Wilderness on Woodchute Mountain, Chino Valley Ranger District, Prescott National Forest (Township 16N, Range 1 and 2 East). See Appendix A for maps.

LAND OWNERSHIP AT THE PROJECT SITE(S):

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

- Prescott National Forest

IF PRIVATE PROPERTY, IS THERE A COOPERATIVE BIG GAME STEWARDSHIP or LANDOWNER AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE LANDOWNER AND THE DEPARTMENT?

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

HABITAT DESCRIPTION:

The project area is predominately woodlands and chaparral vegetation types at elevations of 5200 to 6500 feet. CCC Canyon is an ephemeral drainage in the project area. There is a newly reconstructed AGFD water catchment and several watering stocktanks present in the project area.

ITEMIZED USE OF FUNDS:

Special Big Game License Tag Funds

Cooperator and Project Component	Cost-Share Dollars Available	HPC Funds Requested
Line preparation and Implementation of Narrow Guage Prescribed Fire	\$56,700	\$56,700
Total	\$56,700	\$56,700
Total Project Cost = \$113,400		
Cost Share Ratio HPC:PNF = 1:1		

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

The Prescott National Forest funded all aspects to complete the NEPA Environmental Assessment for the Black Hills Vegetation Management Project (2011). The PNF has also funded for archeological clearances within the project area. To date, the PNF has funded the Grapevine Rx Burn, Crater Mt. Rx Burn, Pinto Mesa Rx Burn, Gaddes Rx Burn, and Geronimo Rx Burn within the project area.

LIST COOPERATORS AND DESCRIBE POTENTIAL PARTICIPATION:

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

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

PROJECT MONITORING PLAN:

In order to meet monitoring objectives the forest will initiate its Level 1 monitoring plan.

Level 1- General Landscape and Environment Monitoring

This level provides managers with a quick general photo of an area or landscape to demonstrate a change in conditions on a broad scale. Analysis is limited to ocular estimates and subjective assessments usually by qualified fire effects monitors or fuels technicians. These photo plots may or may not have permanent markers to indicate the location of the photos; however the location of the plot center (latitude and longitude), the camera, and the direction of photo should be noted. If change over time is an objective, photos should be taken at established and recorded locations to allow for return visits.

PROJECT MAINTENANCE:

As this area shifts toward the desired condition, natural disturbances such as wildfire can be better utilized and managed easier to maintain the project area. The interpolation of on-site post treatment monitoring data will be utilized to indicate the need for maintenance in the project area. If the monitoring data indicates a change, re-entry with prescribed fire or other management tools will be identified and implemented when feasible.

PROJECT COMPLETION REPORT TO BE FILED BY:

A project completion report will be filed by the Project leads: Albert Sillas (Fisheries & Wildlife Biologist), Aaron Hulburd (Forest Fuels Specialist), and Jason Clawson (West Zone FMO). Project leads will maintain contact with wildlife managers, Tom Bagley and Virginia Gouldsbury through the project to provide informal and formal status updates.

WATER DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS (please use the worksheet below):

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

Appendix A

Figure 1. Narrow Gauge Prescribed Fire Project Area Map, Prescott National Forest.

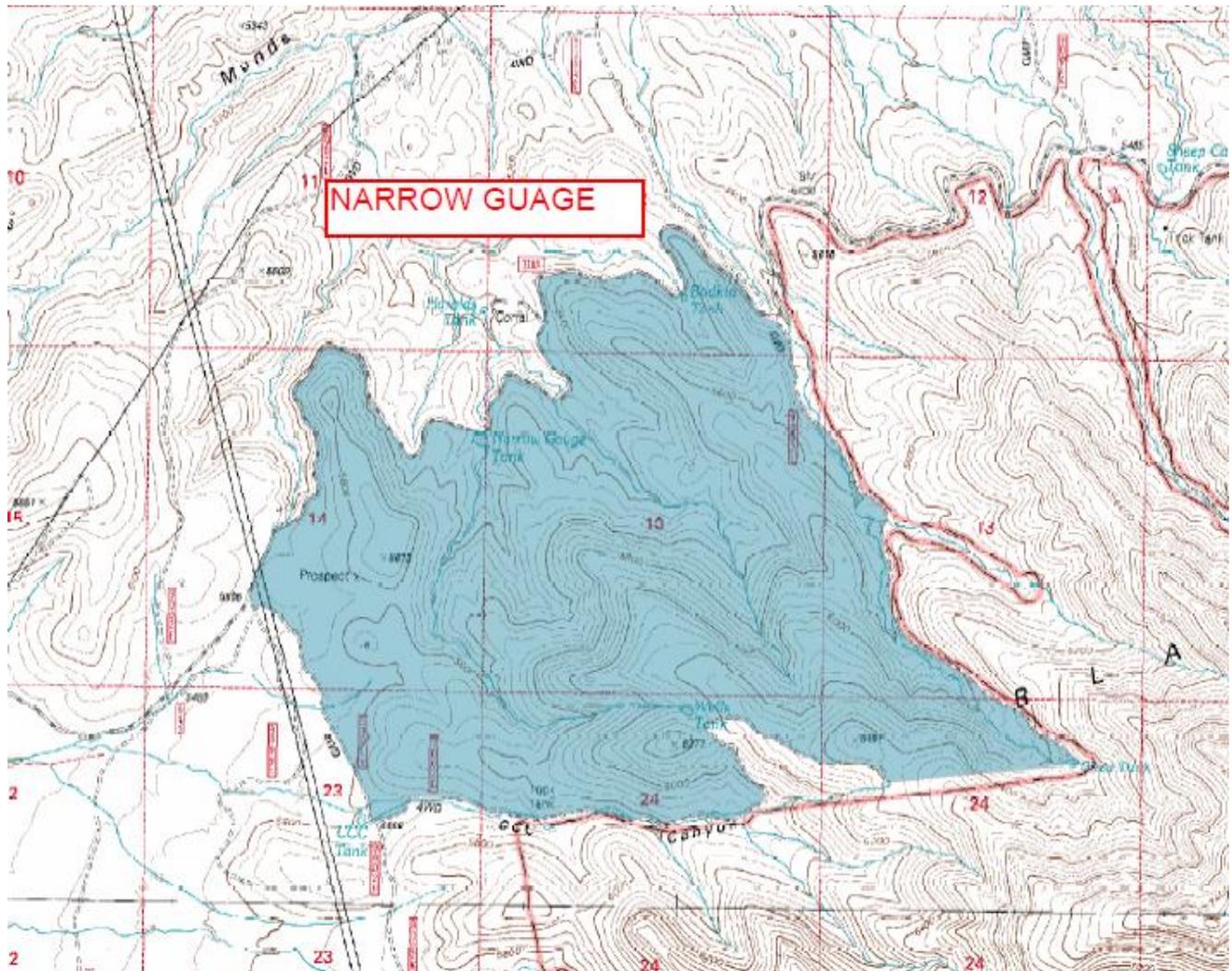


Figure 2. Black Hills Vegetation Management Project Map, Prescott National Forest.

