

## Lack of transparency about Santa Fe deforestation

by Jan Boyer

*Note: This is an updated version of the editorial of the same name which appeared in the Santa Fe New Mexican on March 7, 2020.*



Black Canyon thinning, Santa Fe National Forest, 2019

Are you aware that the U.S. Forest Service and its collaborators and contractors may soon be doing extreme thinning and/or burning of trees across over 250 square miles of forest around Santa Fe?

The following projects add up to over 250 square miles: The Santa Fe Mountain Landscape Resiliency project proposes to do fuel treatments on up to 43,000 acres. The Encino Vista project is proposed to treat 128,000 acres. The state has already bulldozed 500 acres on Glorieta Mesa

(as part of 48,000 acres of similar projects around the state). And the Forest Service plans to treat 750 acres in our sacred Santa Fe Watershed and then they will reburn every 5 to 15 years. There are many more projects listed on [inciweb.nwcg.gov](http://inciweb.nwcg.gov).

These plans are to reduce fuels. But some experts say fuel reduction does not prevent wildfires. “An increasing number of scientists have concluded that climate/weather, not fuels, drives all large blazes,” said forest expert George Wuerthner. You cannot log your way out of these fires because they are caused by climate disruption, not fuels.

350,000 acres were prescribed-burned around Paradise Calif., and it burned to the ground anyway. Australia has been burning millions of acres for decades, and it is still burning. Australians are calling their land “the sacrifice,” hoping the devastation there will awaken the rest of the world to the climate change cause.

The Forest Service does not seem to be willing to do an environmental impact statement, which requires public involvement and the best available science to be used. They say there will not be “significant impact.” They refuse to do a cost/benefit analysis.

They refuse to meaningfully analyze the health impacts. Many of us have noticed the severe impacts on our health of the smoky days. The prescribed burn smoke includes toxic ignition devices made of potassium permanganate and antifreeze. Potassium permanganate is a neurotoxin. Univar USA Inc.’s Material Safety Data Sheet states, “May be fatal if inhaled.” “Firefighters should wear full protective clothing including self-contained breathing.” “Do not allow in waterways or low places.” And, of course, the smoke contains the mercury plutonium, DDT, etc. that the trees stored.

What about the impact on our tourism and economy? Will tourists still come if the mountains are white with smoke? I know two professional photographers who don’t come here anymore because they can’t count on clear shots.

The Forest Service refuses to analyze the impact of burning on climate change. According to Environment Canada, each acre of coniferous trees burned releases 4.81 tons of carbon which adds up to over a million tons of carbon released just for these projects. Piñon and juniper are

fire-resistant and are used as fire blocks, but the New Mexico State Land Office says they are not on the “save list” because they are “invasive species.” Do you want them denuding all the beloved piñon and juniper of New Mexico?

The lack of transparency is the biggest issue. Why are there not big public discussions of such big changes? The Forest Service meetings are simply one-sided presentations of the party line of “cut and burn.”

For research, references and action steps, go to [OnceAForest.org](http://OnceAForest.org), [SantaFeForestCoalition.org](http://SantaFeForestCoalition.org), [TreehuggerSantaFe.org](http://TreehuggerSantaFe.org), [You Tube Deforestation Santa Fe](http://YouTubeDeforestationSantaFe).

*Jan Boyer is the founder of OnceAForest. She lives in Santa Fe.*