

NEWS RELEASE

Flagstaff Watershed Protection Project

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Pardon Our Dust – Progress Underway!

Several significant milestones have been achieved over the past few months, and Project officials are eager to share the news.

First, Phase I, the area around the base of Mt Elden adjacent to Schultz Creek and Mt Elden Roads is nearing completion. 145 acres have been hand-thinned, and another 642 acres of mechanical thinning work was recently completed. Tree cutting and hauling within the Mt Elden Base sale is complete, and the final contract closeout is expected in the next two weeks. Slash from Phase I has been piled and will be burned once the piles have dried and conditions allow. Skid trails, some temporary roads, as well as some non-system social trails have been covered with slash to mitigate erosion. Temporary roads needed for future Project work will be kept in place; other roads will be closed and removed in the coming months. A few pieces of logging equipment remain in the project area are anticipated to be removed within the next two weeks.

Second, Phase II, Dry Lake Hills, is underway! 105 acres were hand-thinned this past summer. But the bigger news is that contracts were recently awarded for both ground-based and helicopter logging on some of the steeper slopes.

The ground-based operator has completed hand felling in two of the contract units, and is now working on a third unit. Hand felling is expected to continue if possible through the winter, with wood removal occurring as conditions allow.

The helicopter contractor is expected to begin in January. Hand felling will occur first, with the helicopter operations to remove the wood to occur later in the spring. More information will be made available as the Operations Plan and timeline are firmed-up.

As Phase II progresses, Closure Orders affecting public access will be implemented for public and operator safety. The affected areas will be of differing size and scope. The ground-based operation area closure will likely remain in effect until the work is completed (2020): note this closure will affect the Rocky Ridge trail.

The helicopter operation closure area will be larger, but much shorter in duration. A large closure area is necessary as the helicopter will haul whole trees via long lines underneath the helicopter. This necessitates a closure that will encompass multiple flight paths across a large portion of the Dry Lake Hills area. Felling and helicopter hauling is expected to be completed by the end of spring, 2019.

As these operations continue, some of the material will be temporarily decked in the Schultz burn scar along Forest Road 420. Removal will occur later as the material is either sold or disposed of through other means. More information will be forthcoming in the next few months.

This winter and spring, USFS and City crews will be burning slash piles associated with hand-thinning operations completed in 2017-2018. Public notice will be issued before ignitions occur: if not already on a notification list, and you wish to be included, contact the US Forest Service Flagstaff District Office.

Moving into next summer, hand-thinning operations will continue in the Brookbank Meadow area, and will likely also occur in other areas throughout Dry Lake Hills. Looking south, toward Mormon Mountain/Lake Mary (Phase III), we are actively working to engage other partners and additional funding sources as operational planning is initiated.

Since we began, other key highlights have included:

- Completion of all environmental analysis (National Environmental Policy Act – NEPA)
- Completion of boundary surveys
- Construction of nearly three and a half miles of temporary roads.
- Rebuild/resurface of nearly eight miles of existing roads.
- Nearly 3,300 acres of tree marking.
- Over 4,000 acres of thinning/harvesting,
- Over 3,000 cords of firewood to area residents, and wood to local forest operators.
- Chipped nearly 1,500 acres of debris, supplying Salt River Project with material used for their electrical generation test at the St Johns power-plant.
- Nearly 3,000 acres of pile and broadcast burning.
- Over 14,000 hours of volunteer labor,
- Installed four streamflow gauge stations (three in Dry Lake Hills, one at Lake Mary),
- Created the City's Monitoring Plan.
- Hosted of over 60 public events/field trips.
- Completed field tests of an emerging tablet technology that may replace tree paint.
- Engagement of NAU students in this outdoor living lab.
- Have trained 32 American Conservation Experience crew members as sawyers.
- Employed 75 seasonal crew members, many from the immediate area.
- Secured over \$7 million in funds (in addition to that approved by the voters), all provided by others, and all directed toward stretching the City's contribution and implementing forest treatment efforts.

Progress is continuing, as we appreciate the public's support as we strive to create resilient landscapes and protect our community and watersheds.