

National Fire Plan

Utilization of Small Diameter Trees Southwestern US



Implementation of the National Fire Plan and other efforts in the Southwest are resulting in some significant new uses for small diameter trees. The Four Corners Sustainable Forest Partnership has distributed National Fire Plan grants to public groups, local governments, and private entities to develop plans to utilize small diameter trees, which currently have little or no market value. Here are a few examples of how the grant money is being used:

- P & M Sign in Mountainair, N.M., received a National Fire Plan grant to develop a sign making operation for outdoor signs (for the USDA Forest Service and others) made from small diameter pinyon and juniper trees. Wood from these trees will be combined with recycled plastic for a highly durable sign that porcupines cannot destroy.
- Forest Energy Corporation in Show Low, Ariz., received a small grant and additional funding to develop a power generating facility and expand their production of both residential and commercial wood pellets.
- In Springerville/Eagar, Ariz., a business is using small diameter trees to generate power for the old Stone Forest Industries sawmill.
- Some small-diameter trees have been exported from the Southwest in the form of pulp chips. Prices are currently low, making this infeasible, but as prices fluctuate in the future, this market should again be available.
- A consortium of investors is in the final stages of studying the viability of a pulp mill, which utilizes small diameter trees. They have purchased land in Belen, N.M., and water rights in the area.

Most of these grants are funding small business ventures based on local community needs and capabilities. Many of these efforts are still in the final stages of study and planning. The Southwest Regional Office of the USDA Forest Service and the New Mexico State Forester are working together to show the tremendous supply of small diameter trees available and the need to thin these trees in an economically profitable way. The end result is improved forest health and a decrease in the amount of hazardous fuels.

In addition to these projects, a significant study of market potential is underway around Flagstaff, Ariz. The Grand Canyon Forest Partnership is funding a study of potential uses of small diameter trees and the economics of bringing new industries to the study area. A market analysis for small diameter trees is also underway this fall for the entire Four Corners Region (Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado, and Utah). The Forest Service and the Department of Energy are funding these projects.

For additional information on the National Fire Plan, visit www.fireplan.gov