

Inter-Disciplinary Team
Warm Fire Recovery Project
U.S.D.A. Forest Service
Kaibab National Forest
800 South 6th Street
Williams, AZ 86046-2899
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Dear Warm Fire IDT,

January 26, 2007

Please accept these scoping comments on the Warm Fire Recovery Project by Firefighters United for Safety, Ethics, and Ecology (FUSEE). FUSEE is a nonprofit organization whose members include wildland firefighters and other fire management experts who advocate for safe, ethical, and ecological fire management.

We are deeply troubled by the ethical and ecological implications of the proposed project to commercially extract 84.5 million board feet of burned trees from the Warm Fire area. Our main concern is that the Warm Fire was originally managed as a Wildland Fire Use (WFU) fire, then converted to a wildfire where the objective became total suppression. Allowing WFU fires to become opportunities for post-fire “salvage” timber sales sets up a dangerous precedent for the whole WFU program.

First, fire managers already face plenty of challenges trying to educate the public and gain their support for the beneficial role of WFU in managing fuels and restoring ecosystems. Indeed, the Warm Fire generated significant controversy in local communities while it was being managed as a WFU, and this controversy increased when managers converted the fire to a wildfire suppression incident. Public outrage will intensify if the Forest Service chooses to go into the fire area and salvage log—especially since this same area was the site of a prolonged public battle over an earlier timber sale proposal that was ultimately declared illegal by a Federal Court of Appeals. The public may never trust the agency to competently manage WFU fires again, especially if they suspect that land managers are “pushing the envelope” on WFU fires because it may provide opportunities for future salvage timber sales.

Second, wildland firefighters with strong professional and environmental ethics will be repulsed to learn that WFU can be used to promote “salvage” timber sales, especially in areas where commercial logging is restricted due to ecological concerns. The proposed timber sale of the

Warm Fire Recovery Project risks damaging the morale of wildland firefighters who care deeply about protecting endangered species habitats, old-growth stands, and roadless wildlands. Even worse, if the general public comes to suspect that firefighters are being used as de facto timber marking crews—using WFU and large-scale burnout to increase the amount of “salvageable” timber—this will cause great harm to the reputation of firefighters.

FUSEE opposes as a matter of principle the use of any WFU fire as a means of generating “salvage” timber sales. We strongly urge the IDT to withdraw the proposed commercial logging in the Warm Fire area.

We request to receive copies of all forthcoming documents and notices related to this project. Thank you for this opportunity to provide scoping comments.

Sincerely,

/s/ Timothy Ingalsbee, Ph.D.
Executive Director, FUSEE