



Fire Funding Impacts

Tonto National Forest

Arizona

FOREST OVERVIEW

The Tonto National Forest embraces almost 3 million acres of rugged and spectacularly beautiful country, ranging from Saguaro cactus-studded desert to pine-forested mountains beneath the Mogollon Rim. This variety in vegetation and range in altitude (from 1,300 to 7,900 feet) offers outstanding recreational opportunities throughout the year, whether it's lake beaches or cool pine forest. As the fifth largest forest in the United States, the Tonto National Forest is one of the most-visited "urban" forests in the United States (approximately 5.8 million visitors annually). Its boundaries are Phoenix to the south, the Mogollon Rim to the north and the San Carlos and Fort Apache Indian reservations to the east.

Redirected funds will restrict the ability to accomplish mission critical programs, such as the following.

FOREST HEALTH AND RESTORATION

One particular program area where the forest has suffered from reduced appropriations is our forest restoration program that is funded via both Integrated Restoration Funds and Hazardous Fuels Reduction Funds. The region has clear forest health goals identified in a 5-year restoration plan and reduced funding has resulted in the Tonto's inability to help meet these. In one example from several years ago, reduced funding for mechanical fuels treatments in the amount of \$600,000 resulted in the inability to partner with adjacent private landowners to reduce wildfire threat to over 800 acres near populated areas. The \$600,000 represents approximately 30 percent of planned annual funding and the lack of funding to identify, plan, and partner with adjacent communities makes it difficult to build and maintain effective working relationships with partners who have similar goals to reduced unmanaged wildfire impacts.



Reduced program funding impacts our ability to partner with adjacent communities and build effective working relationships.

FACILITIES MAINTENANCE

Another program area on the forest that suffers from reduced appropriations is the maintenance and repair of administrative and recreational infrastructure. Construction and maintenance funds to adequately provide for upkeep of roads, buildings, campgrounds and associated utility systems are inadequate to safely maintain these assets. In one particular case, lack of scheduled maintenance work on a significant road to a popular campground has resulted in a lower standard of road with increased safety and environmental impacts. In another case, drinking water systems at several popular campgrounds have been abandoned due to inadequate funding for maintenance personnel. Overall, the forest is continually being placed in the difficult position to decide whether to keep infrastructure open at reduced service levels or close them due to unacceptable safety risks.

