

Fort Huachuca Sentinel Landscape, Forest Health Through the Years

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In the fall of 2022, the U.S. Forest Service Sierra Vista Ranger District and the USDA-NRCS Douglas Field Office submitted a *Fort Huachuca Sentinel Landscape, Phase Two* proposal to the Joint Chiefs' Landscape Restoration Partnership program. The proposal builds on previous accomplishments towards the FHSL strategic goals where 33,875 acres of forest and woodland restored were restored, 50,000 acres of aquatic invasive control were applied, and eight aquatic sites for listed species were established using previous Joint Chiefs' Landscape Restoration Partnership and REPI Challenge grants.

The previous grants included a submission in 2019 by the U.S. Forest Service Sierra Vista Ranger District and the USDA-NRCS Douglas Field Office to the Joint Chiefs' Landscape Restoration Partnership titled the *Fort Huachuca Sentinel Landscape Restoration Project*. The overall project area encompassed the Fort Huachuca Sentinel Landscape (FHSL) which covers 1.65 million acres in southeastern Arizona. At the time of the application submission, the Fort Huachuca Sentinel Landscape Partnership operated off from its Strategic Plan for 2019-2024 that outlined objectives to aid partners in prioritization of restoration and conservation efforts that align with the over-arching goals of the FHSL. Projects included in the proposal served to meet those strategic objectives, which included:

Fuel treatments

- Utilize cross boundary treatments to reduce hazardous fuels, accomplish ecological goals, and provide for public safety
- Encourage reduction of hazardous fuels by considering other techniques such as hand thinning, mastication, and herbicide treatments

Habitat enhancements

- Work with State and Federal partners to implement recovery plans for federally listed species
- Work with willing public and private landowners to preserve and enhance appropriate habitat areas for listed species

Bolstering agriculture economies

- Keep open space and rural working lands sustainable by helping improve the economic viability of local ranches to reduce development pressure

Partners for the Joint Chiefs' Landscape Restoration Partnership application included DOD-U.S.

Army Fort Huachuca, U.S. Customs and Border Protection; U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service; Arizona Game and Fish Department; Arizona Department of Forestry & Fire Management; Quail Forever; and Borderlands Restoration.

Shortly thereafter, the Arizona Land and Water Trust (the Trust), submitted a REPI Challenge proposal in the spring of 2020 which included land acquisition and forest health opportunities. In conjunction with the Trust's land conservation work, the U.S. Forest Service agreed to lead hazardous fuels reduction projects in the Coronado National Forest, using internal staff, third-party contractors, and seasonal technicians. The U.S. Forest Service also agreed to coordinate partnerships with AZ Conservation Corps, Borderlands Restoration, Quail Forever, National Forest Foundation, National Wild Turkey Federation, and Sheltowee Environmental Education Coalition to complete the projects.

Projects included in the proposal served to also meet the goals of the FHSL Strategic Plan and included the following:

Land acquisition

- 800-acre conservation easement, plus an additional 1,300 acres of landowner donations, which remain critical maintain to the integrity of the Fort's nested testing ranges including the Sunnyside Test Range, the R2303 Restricted Military Air Space, the Buffalo Soldier Electronic Testing Range (BSETR), and the Tombstone Military operating Area (Tombstone MOA).

Forest health

- Proposed fuels reduction treatments included hand thinning, chemical applications, mastication of biomass and prescribed burns in key areas. In addition to reduced risk to the installation, treatment areas remain strategically beneficial for the Fort's testing and training.

As witnessed by these successful examples, the U.S. Forest Service Sierra Vista Ranger District and the USDA-NRCS Douglas Field Office continue to work together to improve the natural resources around Fort Huachuca and help protect the Fort Huachuca Sentinel Landscape.