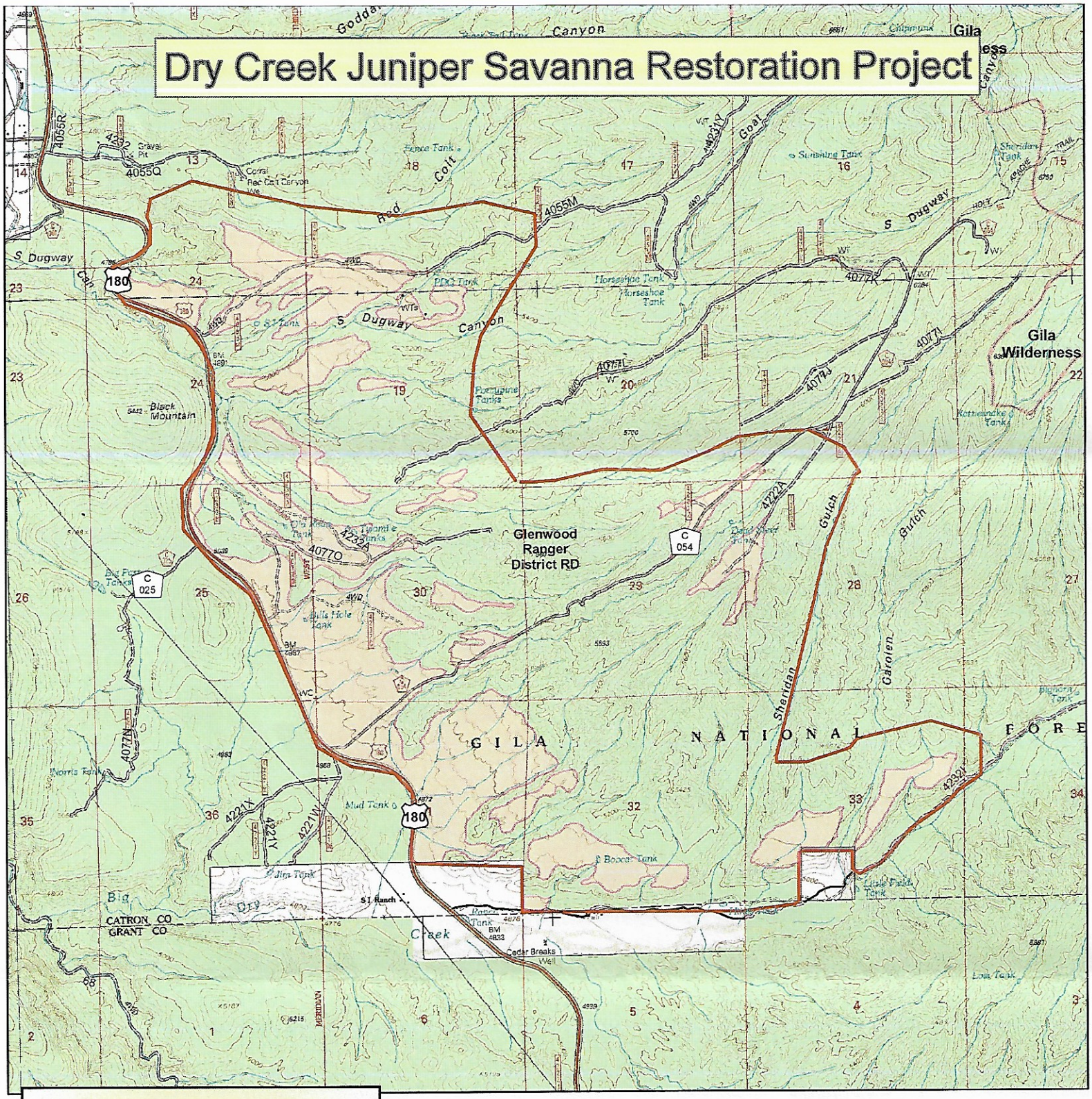
# Dry Creek Juniper Savanna Restoration Project




- Dry Creek Treatment Areas
- Dry Creek Project Boundary
- US Forest Service
- Bureau of Land Mgmt.
- National Park Service
- Private
- State
- State Game and Fish

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0 0.225 0.45 0.9 Miles

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**File Code:** 2670
**Date:** July 7, 2020

Dear Interested Party,

The Glenwood Ranger District, Gila National Forest is seeking comments on the Dry Creek Juniper Savanna Restoration project. The Forest Service has made a preliminary determination that the proposal falls within a category of actions listed in regulations at 36 CFR 220.6, that is excluded from documentation in an environmental assessment or environmental impact statement, and that there are no extraordinary circumstances that would preclude use of a categorical exclusion (CE). The proposed decision memo would use 36 CFR 220.6(e)(6), *Timber stand and/or wildlife habitat improvement activities that do not include the use of herbicides or do not require more than 1 mile of low standard road construction.*

This public scoping represents the only opportunity that will be offered to comment on this proposal. This scoping period is intended to provide those interested in or affected by a proposal an opportunity to request additional information and to provide feedback or information to aid in improving or revising components of the proposed action. Also, this comment period also allows for concerns to be known before the responsible official makes a decision. Written, facsimile, hand delivered, and electronic comments concerning these actions will be accepted. It would be most helpful to receive comments by **August 9, 2020**.

Written comments may be mailed to: Glenwood Ranger District; ATTN: CE Comments; 18 Ranger Station Dr., P.O. Box 8, Glenwood, NM 88039; faxed to 575-539-2485; or electronic comments to: sandra.taylor1@usda.gov. Electronically filed comments may be submitted by email in word (.doc), rich text format (.rtf), portable document format (.pdf), text (.txt), and hypertext markup language (.html).

In compliance with the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), please be advised that all information provided with your comments will become part of the public record and will be available for public inspection. This includes your name and all contact information provided.

Sincerely,

ERICK M STEMMERMAN
District Ranger

# Glenwood Ranger District
## Dry Creek Juniper Savanna Restoration

**Introduction**

The Glenwood Ranger District, Gila National Forest proposes to treat one-seed juniper (*Juniperus monosperma*) and mesquite trees (*Prosopis spp.*) on approximately 4,300 acres of National Forest Lands with thinning treatments and prescribed fire.

The project is approximately 2.5 miles south of Glenwood, New Mexico and is located in Catron County in T. 12 S., R. 19 W., Sections 17-21, 28-33; T. 12 S., R. 20 W., Sections 13, 24-25, 36 (see attached map). Private land borders the south and west sides of the project area.

**The Purpose and Need**

The Dry Creek project area is predominately composed of one-seed juniper, with piñon pine, alligator juniper and mesquite mixed in.

Wildlife species such as birds, large and small mammals, reptiles and invertebrates utilize juniper habitats for food, shelter and breeding. Lower successional rates or lower densities of juniper provide higher quality habitat for wildlife species. In addition, a mixture of mid-seral stages, grassy openings, and patches of mature trees provide the greatest benefit to wildlife species.

The increasing density and encroachment of one-seed juniper within the project area is reducing herbaceous forage production and decreasing species and structural diversity. The loss of herbaceous forage, decreased plant species diversity and loss of ground cover has decreased habitat quality for mule deer, quail and other wildlife species. The purpose of the project is to reduce encroaching juniper and understory juniper on the pinyon-juniper grass savanna which will help improve the growth of native understory grasses and forbs, allow for a mixture of mid-seral stages, provide grassy openings and patches of mature trees.

Mesquite trees have been increasing in density within the project area. Mesquite trees with a high canopy cover have been found to negatively affect the growth of grass species due to shading. Reducing the canopy cover of mesquite trees to approximately 30% or less will allow for native grasses to grow.

Desired future conditions include:

Juniper Savanna: Pinyon-juniper savanna are characterized by an open savanna-like stand structure, with low densities of trees and shrubs, and a dense herbaceous ground cover of grasses and forbs. Maintain savannas within the project to provide clumps or single tree cover up to approximately 30% and understory vegetation (grasses and mesquite) to approximately 70%. Savannas will be treated by removing regeneration while maintaining spacing of older trees to provide cover. Maintenance will be required in order to maintain desired conditions during the life of the NEPA.

**Proposed Action**

The project proposes to treat approximately 80% of the 1,100 acres (polygons) with thinning treatments and approximately 30% with prescribed fire. The rest of the project area outside the polygons (3,200 acres) will be treated at approximately 15% with prescribed fire. Treatments include:

1. Thinning Treatments and Prescribed Fire- Treatments may include the use of chainsaws and minimal use of rubber-tired/tracked machinery (masticators) to minimize impacts to soil. Approximately 30% juniper canopy cover will be left for nesting and shading for various wildlife species. Retain trees with a crown size of approximately 25ft. Trees with a crown size of approximately 25ft and greater are beneficial to wildlife species as they provide shade, berries and nesting habitat. Prescribed fire would be conducted under a broadcast burn plan/pile burn and would be used in the project area to reach and maintain desired conditions.

2. Lopped and scattered and left, lopped and scattered and burned, or piled and burned will be treatments used to reduce soil erosion and enhance understory plant species diversity. Chipping is another treatment that may be used. Chips will be scattered and/or applied in a light/thin layer on the ground to improve seed germination. Piles may also be left in place to create habitat for small mammals. Trees that are not removed will be limbed 3-4' above the ground. Not all trees that are left will be limbed however, limbing will allow herbaceous vegetation to get established under them and may also prevent them from getting severely impacted by the prescribed fire.

3. Remove juniper from mesa tops with 0-15% slopes. In areas adjacent to polygons, hand thinning may occur on up to 20% slope if needed to meet objectives. BMP's will be identified for ephemeral drainages.

4. Native seed mixture may be applied in areas where surface disturbance has occurred, in areas with an established seed source and in areas where slash will be left to provide protection for grass seed. Seeding will be done with a certified weed-free native seed mix. Seed mix and application rate will be determined in consultation with Forest soil scientist and District range staff.

5. Sufficient rest periods (rotation) from livestock grazing to allow for areas to recover/re-establish from treatments and prescribed fire. Fence off treatment areas or blocks to allow for adequate grazing rest. Monitoring will be conducted to ensure that vegetation has recovered sufficiently to sustain grazing pressure without damage which may include one or more warm growing seasons.

6. There will be no new or temporary construction of roads within the project area however, BMP's will be applied for possible cross-country travel during implementation.

7. Fuelwood treatment areas may be provided to the public. The public will need to adhere to the current Travel Management Plan for access to these areas.

8. Lop, scatter and pile mesquite trees; flush with the ground (70%). Retain up to approximately 30% and remove all but the main bole and prune all lower branches. Other treatments for mesquite trees may include lifting and plucking.

9. Retain all pinyon pine trees.

10. Most Alligator juniper may not be treated in order to reduce re-sprouting, however plucking of small trees (4-5 ft in height) may be used to treat Alligator juniper.