

TESTIMONY OF

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ON BEHALF OF

THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF COUNTIES

BEFORE

THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS, FORESTS, AND PUBLIC LANDS

OF

THE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES

UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*“WILDFIRE PREPAREDNESS: AN OUNCE OF PREVENTION  
IS WORTH A POUND OF CURE”*

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## INTRODUCTION

Chairman Grijalva, Ranking Member Bishop, and members of the Subcommittee, I appreciate the opportunity to testify on behalf of the National Association of Counties and Coconino County on wildfire preparedness.

I am Elizabeth Archuleta, Chairman of the National Association of Counties Public Lands Steering Committee and a Supervisor from Coconino County, Arizona. Coconino County is located in one of the largest stands of ponderosa pine in the world. The County spans almost 19,000 square miles and is the second largest in the lower 48. Coconino County contains the City of Flagstaff, the Grand Canyon, the City of Williams, the City of Page and other unincorporated communities.

As many of you know, the State of Arizona has learned some real lessons in the last few years on wildfire preparedness. In 2002, the Rodeo Chediski fire in the White Mountains burned nearly half a million acres and cost the taxpayers more than \$400 million. The February Fire in northern Gila County started in February 2006 and taught us that with extreme drought conditions, fire does not always occur in the summer months. The February Fire burned more than 4,000 acres and cost the taxpayers more than \$3 million.

Last year, the Woody Fire immediately threatened the City of Flagstaff and nearly escalated into a catastrophic wildfire. However, local forest treatment efforts in the wildland urban interface protected the City of Flagstaff from a loss of structures and lives. The Brins Fire in Oak Creek Canyon, outside of Sedona, burned more than 4,000 acres and the aftermath is still being felt today. Potential rockslides, soil degradation and impact on water quality are serious problems Coconino County communities will be addressing for years to come.

With the passage of the Healthy Forests Restoration Act of 2003 (HFRA), communities across the country were urged to create collaborative Community Wildfire Protection Plans (CWPP) to be eligible for Federal hazardous fuels reduction funding. Coconino County and the City of Flagstaff, in collaboration with the Greater Flagstaff Forest Partnership (GFFP) and the Ponderosa Fire Advisory Council (PFAC), developed the Community Wildfire Protection Plan for the City of Flagstaff and surrounding communities. The USDA Forest Service is a member of both the GFFP and PFAC. The result of these efforts has been collaborative planning efforts and prioritized hazardous fuels reduction.

In addition, the Governor of Arizona has created a Governor's Forest Health Advisory Council to develop a statewide strategy for managing Arizona's forests. With the recent release of the draft statewide strategy, the State is holding public hearings throughout the state. The goal of the draft strategy is to present scientific and policy recommendations to the Governor on forest health, unnaturally severe fire and community protection.

While the dialogue in the State of Arizona and Coconino County has changed from a reactive approach to a proactive approach, more work needs to be done. Today, I would like to focus on a few key points to demonstrate how HFRA has helped counties and what additional tools we need to be more effective. First, I will focus on the community partnerships developed to address fire mitigation. Second, I will describe how counties are taking responsibility for growth and development in the Wildland Urban Interface. And finally, I would like to explain the *real* cost of wildfire suppression on the ground and encourage a paradigm shift from funding fire suppression to funding prevention and forest restoration through active forest management.

## **PARTNERSHIPS, PLANNING AND FOREST HEALTH**

The National Association of Counties believes there is a clear and imminent danger to our public forest resources and adjacent communities stemming from years of fire suppression and other management decisions. In addition to increased fuel densities, past management decisions have led to unhealthy forests that are much more susceptible to insect infestation, disease, and catastrophic wildfire.

Federal land management agencies should focus management efforts on high-risk forests utilizing an array of appropriate forest management practices, including thinning and harvesting, and prescribed burning. In addition, Federal land management agencies should increase private, state, and local contracts and partnerships for more effective fire suppression and pre-fire management of federal forest lands.

Locally, our forest ecologists tell us that when a forest is healthy it will support low intensity ground fires every 2-20 years. One of the best defenses against catastrophic crown fires is landscape adaptation to historical fire types. Evidence suggests that a treated area is vital for effective fire suppression. Proactive community-based approaches to wildland fire management combines cost-effective fire preparedness with fire suppression to protect communities and the environment. In 1996, Coconino County experienced several fires within and on the edge of the WUI that clearly focused the public's attention to the risk posed by a catastrophic wildfire and the plight of the forests. As a result, an instrumental partnership was established to comprehensively address fire mitigation in the greater Flagstaff area. Further discussion on the success of this partnership is described below.

### **Partnerships**

For a variety of reasons, partnerships between the Federal government, State and local government, and private organizations are vital to the development of local wildfire management strategies, fuels reduction and management projects, as well as the continuation of local community collaboration on all levels of government. Both Congress and the Administration have pushed for collaborative community management strategies through the Department of the Interior Collaborative Conservation and Healthy Lands Initiatives, as well as Congressional direction through PL 106-291 directing the Secretaries of Agriculture and Interior to develop a strategy that requires "close collaboration among citizens and governments at all levels," including a diverse group of people representing all levels of government, tribal interests, conservation and commodity groups, and community-based restoration groups.

#### **NACo Partnership with Sonoran Institute**

The proactive approach we have adopted in Coconino County has been nurtured across the West by a partnership between NACo and the Sonoran Institute, based in Pima County, Arizona. We know that open space, natural beauty, recreational opportunities, and a desirable quality of life are some of the driving forces behind the growth and development in the wildland urban interface of communities throughout the West. For local elected officials, this period of growth and change presents real challenges. In 1999, NACo and the Sonoran Institute partnered to create the Western Community Stewardship Forum (WCSF) to provide training and support to assist rural county officials effectively manage growth through innovative, community-based land use decisions and solutions.

Since the Forum's inception, more than 300 officials from counties in eight western states have participated in WCSF. Participants receive practical, innovative land-use tools and strategies that have stimulated healthy economies, while preserving local identity and the cultural assets of the community. Through a competitive application process, WCSF selects teams of up to six county officials responsible for local growth-management strategies to participate in an intensive three-day training workshop to explore solutions to community land-use issues, effective growth management plans to balance

environmental, economic, and community concerns through locally-led decisions, and fostering collaboration among participants on a variety of growth issues.

#### Future NACo Partnership with BLM & Forest Service

Contemplating a similar model, the National Association of Counties is currently working with the USDA Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to develop a program that would strengthen the capacity of counties to reduce wildland fire risk in the wildland urban interface. Specifically, the project would assess the current status of county development and implementation of Community Wildfire Protection Plans. County officials will be provided with technical assistance, training, and tools to build their capacity to proactively reduce wildland fire risk and contain associated costs in the wildland urban interface. The first goal of the proposal is to help local officials better understand how their decisions in the wildland urban interface influence public health and safety in their communities.

In addition to capacity building on the local level, the second goal of the proposal would be the development and distribution of a *Best Practices Guidebook* for local officials and the development of training workshops. NACo would create a guidebook outlining practices and strategies in land use planning and fuels management policies for wildland fire protection. The publication would serve as a tool for communities seeking to develop new wildland fire plans.

Coconino County serves as an excellent example of how communities can create successful partnerships to develop and implement Community Wildfire Protection Plans (CWPP). Three key partnerships exist in Coconino County that actively plan and execute existing wildfire protection plans. A brief description of each partnership is below:

#### Greater Flagstaff Forests Partnership

After several near misses with fires in the wildland urban interface in 1996, the Greater Flagstaff Forests Partnership (GFFP) was formed. The GFFP is an alliance of more than 20 environmental, governmental, research and business organizations dedicated to researching and demonstrating approaches to forest ecosystem restoration in the ponderosa pine forests surrounding Flagstaff, Arizona. The Partnership's three primary goals are to, (1) restore natural ecosystem structures, function, and composition of ponderosa pine forests, (2) manage forest fuels to reduce the probability of catastrophic fire, and (3) research, test, develop, and demonstrate key ecological, economic, and social dimensions of restoration efforts.

#### Ponderosa Fire Advisory Council (PFAC)

Created after the Yellowstone fires in 1988, PFAC is comprised of members of local fire departments, rural fire districts, emergency services, law enforcement, and the USDA Forest Service. PFAC focuses on ensuring that all agencies are properly prepared, trained in Incident Command System (ICS), share operating guidelines, operate under mutual aid contracts, and participate in interoperable communications planning. In addition, PFAC is committed to public fire wise education and community preparedness in the event of a wildfire emergency. PFAC is also actively involved in implementing the CWPP for the greater Flagstaff Area.

#### Wildfire Advisory Council (WFAC)

Similar to PFAC, WFAC is comprised of local representatives from the greater Williams area, including representatives from local fire departments, rural fire districts, the Kaibab National Forest, Coconino County Sheriff's Office and the Department of Arizona State Lands. WFAC developed and is implementing the community wildfire protection plans for the community of Tusayan (gateway community to the Grand Canyon) and the City of Williams.

The County participates in all of the collaborative forest partnerships discussed above to promote and facilitate forest restoration and fuels reduction throughout the County.

## **Planning**

### **Community Wildfire Protection Plans**

Community Wildfire Protection Plans are authorized in the Healthy Forests Restoration Act (HFRA) enacted in 2003. The HFRA provides communities with a tremendous opportunity to influence where and how federal agencies implement fuel reduction projects on federal lands and how additional federal funds may be distributed for projects on non-federal lands. A CWPP is the most effective way to take advantage of this opportunity. Additionally, the HFRA directs the Forest Service and BLM to give preference to communities with CWPPS when allocating hazardous fuels reduction funding.

The partnerships outlined above have created Community Wildfire Protection Plans (CWPP) in Flagstaff, Williams, and Tusayan. The County was actively involved in the development of the CWPPs and has provided funding for their development. In addition, plans are currently being developed for the Blue Ridge and Forest Lakes areas of the County, and the County has contributed funds to the development of these plans. The partnerships developing the CWPPs include a variety of interests from federal and state land management agencies to homeowner associations to environmental organizations. Collaboration and interagency cooperation is essential to addressing wildfire protection issues because wildfire and forest health issues do not respect jurisdictional boundaries. The goal of the CWPPs is a community-based approach to wildland fire issues, which combines cost-effective healthy forest mitigation, fire preparedness and suppression to protect communities with a proactive approach to achieving a healthy forest ecosystem.

Some examples of the fire mitigation projects resulting from the partnerships' CWPP efforts include:

- Clint's Wells Fuels Reduction - Target 2/2008
- Elk Parks Fuel reduction In progress
- Munds Parks fuel reduction 10/2007
- GFFP eastside fuel management 5/2007
- Oak Creek Canyon fuel reduction 6/2007
- Grand Canyon Airport Fuel reduction 12/2007 Tusayan Community (gateway to Grand Canyon)
- Bill Williams Mountain Communication/Electronic Site Hazardous Tree Reduction 9/2007

In addition, the City of Flagstaff is implementing a number of fire mitigation projects in the wildland urban interface adjacent to Flagstaff.

### **Coconino County Hazard Mitigation Plan 2006**

In addition to the CWPP work done by the forest partnerships, Coconino County developed a County Hazard Mitigation Plan, which was approved by FEMA in 2006. The Hazard Mitigation Plan identified wildland fire as the most significant risk to the communities within Coconino County. Potential economic loss due to a catastrophic fire could exceed \$2.5 billion. A primary goal of the County Hazard Mitigation Plan is to promote public understanding, support, and demand for hazard mitigation...In addition, the plan aims to educate the public; promote partnerships between states, counties, local and tribal governments, and to identify, prioritize and implement mitigation actions.

## Creative Implementation Strategy

Coconino County established the Coconino Rural Environment Corps (CREC) in 1997 to promote environmental stewardship and youth job development skills. Over the past several years, CREC has become a key organization for implementing hazardous fuel reduction projects identified by the forest partnerships. In most cases, CREC assists USDA Forest Service and local fire districts with fuel management projects. In 2006 alone, CREC conducted forest fuels reduction projects on over 1,200 acres in Coconino County, most of which are in the wildland urban interface. CREC also tackles other environmental improvement projects, such as clearing riparian areas of tamarisk, planting trees in burned areas, and restoring grassland habitats.

## Public Education, Outreach

In addition to planning and implementing Community Wildfire Protection Plans, the partnerships, and in particular PFAC and the County, led public fire wise education efforts throughout the County. Each year the County provides fire wise information and emergency preparedness planning to residents through our annual County Newsletter, which is mailed to all county residents. In addition, the partnerships support the development and dissemination of an annual Survival Guide, which is an insert in our local newspaper. The guide provides residents with information on fire wise actions they can take to reduce fire hazards on their property as well as emergency preparedness tips.

## **DEVELOPMENT IN THE WILDLAND URBAN INTERFACE**

Wildland fires continue to threaten lives, structures, infrastructure, watersheds, community parklands, and other vital community assets, particularly in the wildland urban interface (WUI). The National Association of Counties has adopted national policy calling on counties to enact better local land use ordinances and local fuels management policies for wildland fire protection in and around communities at risk of wildland fire. NACo supports Federal, state and local efforts to collaborate and cooperate on efforts to mitigate fire in the wildland urban interface. Coconino County again serves as a good example of community development planning that takes into consideration fire reduction within the WUI.

## Land Ownership Patterns in Coconino County

Approximately 13% of Coconino County is private land. The remainder is owned by the USDA Forest Service (28%), National Park Service (7%), Bureau of Land Management (5%), State of Arizona (9%), and Indian Reservations (38%). Most of the private land in the County encompasses very large ranches that have been historically subject to minimal development. The counties forested areas (which are subject to the greatest fire risk) are predominantly owned by the USDA Forest Service. While development occurs in small private inholdings that prevent growth from spreading very far into the forest, these developments, in effect do expand the wildland urban interface zone. However, the reality in Coconino County is that the vast majority of development exists in the greater ponderosa forest of Northern Arizona. One could consider the communities of Flagstaff, Williams, Parks, Kachina Village, Mountaineer, Fort Valley, Doney Park, Blue Ridge, Pinewood, and Forest Lakes as "pockets" of development within the forest.

## Coconino County's Response to Development in Forested Areas

Coconino County is exploring the adoption of a specific WUI code or ordinance. However, there are many aspects of fire risk reduction that have been incorporated into the County's planning and development process already. Coconino County has taken a multi-pronged approach to addressing development in the wildland urban interface. This issue is addressed in the form of goals and policies in the *Coconino County Comprehensive Plan*, as well as local Area Plans for unincorporated communities. The WUI issues are addressed in the development review process in the form of conditions or stipulations that are placed on subdivisions and conditional use permits. In addition, fire prevention is addressed through the County's participation in collaborative partnerships and interagency cooperation. Lastly, the County's Community Development Department actively promotes public education and outreach regarding fire wise building and development. One of our approaches to public education is to provide informational materials to all persons seeking building permits. We provide handouts on Firewise landscaping and construction techniques, prescribed fire, tips for homeowners on reducing wildfire danger, and even a citizen's guide to evacuation procedures.

### Comprehensive Plan – Goals & Policies Related to the WUI

The current version of the *Coconino County Comprehensive Plan* was adopted September 23, 2003. It is a conservation-based plan that recognizes that we have an ethical obligation to the land, that we all, collectively and individually, have a responsibility for the health of the land. The concept is that the health of the land is the foundation of the health of the human community. The *Coconino County Comprehensive Plan* includes a *Natural Environment* element that addresses forest ecosystem health in a general way, but the *Public Safety* element more specifically addresses the “Wildland Urban Interface.”

The Wildland Urban Interface goal is simply to: “[r]educe the threat of catastrophic wildfire in the wildland urban interface.” There are three policies related to this goal:

1. A forest stewardship/fuels mitigation plan is required for major developments and subdivisions in the interface;
2. Fire wise landscaping and building design and materials is encouraged in the interface; and
3. Property owners and developers are encouraged to consult with adjacent land management agencies when they are developing fire mitigation plans to ensure compatibility between adjacent owners and land managers.

In addition, the County regularly consults with and seeks input from the USDA Forest Service when we have development proposals adjacent to National Forest land. Community Development usually accommodates Forest Service concerns and issues through stipulations attached to development approval. Likewise, where rural fire districts exist, we seek their input and address their concerns through conditions of approval.

### Development Approval – Subdivisions and Conditional Use Permits for Development in the WUI

For over ten years, Coconino County has required developers of subdivisions in forested areas to include a forest stewardship/fuels mitigation plan as a condition of approval of their preliminary plat. In some of the earliest cases, the Forestry Division of the State Land Department assisted the developers in writing these forest stewardship plans. More recently, developers have hired forestry consultants to write the forest stewardship plans. The stewardship plans have to be completed and accepted by the County prior to approval of the final plat. If the plan calls for thinning and burning (or other fuels mitigation measures are required), then the developer is responsible for completing that work prior to final plat approval, or it

must be bonded as with other required improvements. Similar requirements are attached to conditional use permits where appropriate.

### Example of a Development with Fire Protection Requirements in Place

An excellent example of a subdivision that developed a fuels mitigation plan is the Flagstaff Ranch development southwest of Flagstaff, which consists of 525 housing units along with a clubhouse and community center on about 480 acres of land. The plan called for thinning of the entire property, use of fire-resistive construction throughout the development, the formation of a fire district to provide fire protection for the subdivision, and use of fire sprinklers in every building.

### **FUNDING SOURCES VITAL FOR WILDFIRE PREPAREDNESS**

Mr. Chairman, as Congress and the Administration struggle to find a way to contain the skyrocketing costs of wildland fire suppression, I urge you to pause and take a look at the cost containment issue from outside the beltway, on the ground in one of America's public lands counties.

As I have tried to make clear earlier in my testimony, Coconino County, Arizona Counties, NACo and many other counties across the country, are finding ways to reduce the risks – and the costs – of wildland fire in the WUI. We worry, however, that there may be a movement afoot in some quarters to force states and local governments to shoulder a greater share of the costs of suppression in the WUI. We believe that this would be a very costly mistake.

First of all, please remember the enormous footprint the federal estate has in counties like mine. The United States is, by far, the largest and wealthiest landowner in so many of our counties, not only in the West, but also in places like Pocahontas County in Chairman Rahall's district in West Virginia. For our public lands county governments to maintain basic public services – not to mention enhanced wildland fire suppression capacity – we depend on the federal government fulfilling the promise of the Payments in Lieu of Taxes (PILT) Act and the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self Determination Act.

We are grateful that you and your colleagues in Congress were able to extend the latter for one year in the Supplemental Appropriation sent to the President in April. This "stay of execution" will allow us to continue to maintain essential transportation infrastructure and keep our rural schools open. It will also continue authorization of the Resource Advisory Committees (RAC's) formed under Title II. Nationally these 15 person stakeholder committees have studied and approved over 2,500 projects on federal forestlands and adjacent public and private lands using funds that are approved by Forest County Boards of Commissioners for these purposes. These projects have addressed a wide variety of improvements drastically needed on our National Forests, including fuels reduction and reforestation projects.

Many forest counties have also invested Title III funds in developing fire prevention strategies and educating citizens in fire safe actions. Since the passage of the Healthy Forest Restoration Act, over 100 counties have been actively engaged in developing Community Wildfire Protection Plans using Title III funding, including Coconino County. These same counties will be investing Title II funds through the RAC process to implement their community wildfire protection plans through HFRA. Reauthorization of PL 106-393 is vital to the continuation of fire prevention strategies and forest health projects in our communities.

With the expiration of this fiscal year just around the corner, NACo respectfully asks that the Subcommittee continue to explore ways to provide stability and security for the citizens of America's public lands counties, including by fully funding PILT and reauthorizing the Secure Rural Schools and



Community Self Determination Act on a multi-year basis. Only with a stable, predictable bottom line will rural public lands county officials be able to be the kind of leaders for forest health and community safety that we ought to be.

### Costs of Fire Suppression versus Fire Prevention

Last December, Northern Arizona University researcher Gary Snider published an article in the Journal of Forestry that examined our current investment in fire suppression versus inadequate investment in reducing fire risk by implementing hazardous fuel reduction treatments. The researchers found that by spending \$238-601/acre for hazard reduction treatments in the southwest today, these treatments will more than pay for themselves by avoiding the future costs of fire suppression. The economists concluded that current federal policy that inadequately invests in hazard reduction treatments does not represent rational economic behavior, because funding hazard reduction can pay for itself by lowering future fire suppression costs.

Taking this research and applying it to the Rodeo-Chediski Fire that burned over 469,000 acres you can see the fiscal wisdom of a prevention approach. A full cost accounting of all costs associated with the fire shows costs over \$400 million. This includes \$43 million in suppression costs, \$75 million in lost timber and \$120 million in private insurance payments to cover losses of over 490 residences, as well as many other damages.

Research shows that if you strategically treat 1/3 of the landscape you can effectively reduce extreme fire behavior. If we had invested in treating 150,000 acres at a representative cost of \$500/acre, then it would have cost us \$75 million to reduce the probability of this catastrophe. Although this initially appears expensive, it is dwarfed by what the fire ultimately cost the federal, state and local governments, the White Mountain Apache Tribe and the citizens who were victims of this tragic event.

In addition to this research, the General Accounting Office determined that from 2000 to 2004 the Forest Service and Department of Interior transferred more than \$2.7 billion from other programs to cover fire suppression costs. GAO indicated that the agencies "repeatedly underestimated how much money would be needed to pay for fire suppression" (GAO 2004).

### Post Fire Costs

In many cases the costs that occur after a fire is suppressed can be significant and are generally the responsibility of the County or local jurisdiction. For example, the Brins Fire adjacent to Sedona and Oak Creek continues to create hazardous flooding and debris flow risk for the residents of Oak Creek Canyon due to the loss of ground vegetation from the intense fire behavior. Beyond the physical mitigation efforts, the County has implemented public education, awareness, rapid emergency notification and coordinated emergency response. A task force of Federal, state and local resource managers, geologists, public safety, ADOT, and National Weather Service personnel have partnered to provide for a safer and better informed Oak Creek Canyon community.

## **FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES**

### **Opportunity for Stewardship Contracting and Sustainable Forest-Based Enterprises**

Stewardship contracting can achieve forest management while meeting local and rural community needs as well as create renewable energy businesses. Forests can be a source of renewable biomass energy, a

less-polluting energy source that can reduce dependence on foreign fossil fuels. Biomass utilization of materials from restoration treatments can create jobs and support local economies while assisting the complementary goals of community protection and forest restoration. Some costs of restoration would be offset, because forest and wood-product enterprises would pay for harvested material such as saw logs, small-diameter trees, and woody biomass. There would be no need to pay for dead tree removal and disposal.

The stewardship contracting procedure allows forest administrators to take factors other than bid price into consideration when awarding the contract. Issues such as local job creation, how the material would be utilized, and the use of local subcontractors are important aspects of the decision. This allows smaller local businesses to outbid larger timber companies for the contract. Western communities and public land managers have been struggling for years to develop markets for the small diameter material that results from fuel reduction activities. Stewardship contracting would create the market for small-diameter wood. Markets for a sustainable small diameter industry are dependent on government commitments through long-term contracting agreements.

#### Example of Stewardship Contract

*The White Mountain Stewardship Contract* on the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forest is designed around the goal of building a small-scale woody biomass industry based on the need for hazardous fuel reduction treatments following the devastating 486,000 acre Rodeo-Chedeski Fire of 2002.

This contract is the largest of its kind and covers fuel reduction and treatment of up to 15,000 acres per year for the next ten years. The contract was awarded to Future Forest, which is a partnership between a wood contracting business and a wood pellet manufacturing company that produces pellets for heating wood stoves. A local bio-energy plant also purchases 50,000 tons of limbs, tree tops, and small trees from Future Forest every year. A power plant that is being constructed in the area to produce green power credits for Arizona power companies is also expected to buy 170,000 green tons of biomass annually. Other businesses that are taking advantage of the woody materials that Future Forest can provide include a custom log home business, a post & pole operation, a chemical wood hardening company, and a small-diameter sawmill. The Contract supported 15 firms with total expenditures of almost \$16 million. The forestry firms employ 245 full time employees with an additional 85 created through the multiplier process.

#### **Increased Funding for Hazardous Fuels Reduction**

There is an opportunity to reduce treatment costs by increasing the value of small trees thinned. Strategic planning of treatment types and sequencing can reduce per-acre costs by positioning relatively costly mechanical treatments in a way that facilitates wildland fire use, comparatively less expensive across broader landscapes. Reduced treatment costs would create increased funding for hazardous fuels reduction. This will provide assistance to community property owners for vegetation reduction on property sites, which create a fire hazard for the community. Ultimately, hazardous fuels reduction treatments will ensure a safer community for residents with protection from and prevention of wildfires.

#### **Paradigm Shift from Funding Fire Suppression to Funding Fire Prevention**

Public awareness and support can lead to social changes in thought patterns that would encourage a proactive approach in preventing catastrophic wildfires through long term restoration, community protection and fire management. From my County's perspective, a proactive approach is far more responsible than a reactive approach in dealing with the social, economic, and environmental damages following catastrophic fires in our community.

## CONCLUSION

Coconino County has successfully used the Healthy Forest Restoration Act to create collaborative Community Wildfire Protection Plans to assist our communities in prioritizing fuel management projects. The County developed partnerships with Federal land management agencies, state agencies, cities, adjacent counties, universities, scientists and environmental groups to create strategies to mitigate and reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire. Importantly, HFRA has provided streamlined compliance work under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) for fuel management projects.

As we move forward, Coconino County encourages increased funding to federal land management agencies and to the state to create the financial capacity for significant forest restoration treatments. We support increased funding to enable communities, stakeholder groups, and tribes to collaborate in land management activities. These points are consistent with the Governor's Forest Health Advisory Council's Statewide Strategy.

Coconino County encourages federal agencies to emphasize preventative treatments through active management over suppression efforts when setting priorities. For example, the FY2006 enacted level for the USDA Forest Service included \$282 million for hazardous fuels treatment compared to \$690 million for fire suppression. In addition, Congress should use the appropriations process to change the emphasis from suppression to treatment.

Coconino County is excited at the possibility of bringing a wood utilization industry to Northern Arizona and look to the federal agencies and Congress to help with this effort. Stewardship contracting is crucial to successfully implementing this critical economic development opportunity and to re-establishing a healthy forest ecosystem.