



American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA)
Reforestation on Vigil and Abeyta Mesas
Category: Habitat Restoration

BLM
Colorado

Reforestation Improves Habitat in Southwestern Colorado

The BLM has planted more than 250 acres with ponderosa pine seedlings on Vigil and Abeyta Mesas in southwestern Colorado, thanks to ARRA funding of \$220,000. An additional 150+ acres were planted with an American Forests Global ReLeaf grant. This project represents a proactive approach to improve forest health and remove dangerous fire fuels.

The plantings were necessary to restore native ponderosa pine forests in two high elevation mesas near the New Mexico border. The areas had been planted with pines in the 1960s, but recent genetic tests revealed the seeds used were not native, but came from the lower elevations of South Dakota's Black Hills. The mature trees—not well adapted to the climate, soils and higher elevation—showed signs of extreme stress in drought years; stem and branch diseases were increasing, causing die-offs.

Over several years, the BLM mowed, mulched and burned the dead and dying trees to make way for a massive replanting, using seedlings native to the area. Most of the planting was completed in spring 2010, with some to be finished in 2011. The project includes crucial follow-up, such as survival surveys and maintenance and removal of the tree shelters.

The replanting project employed 36 individuals in addition to local contractors hired for snowplowing and seed storage. Additional contributors included Forest Service geneticists, pathologists and entomologists, the Forest Service's Bessey Nursery (which supplied the seedlings), and the National Forest Gel Electrophoresis Lab.

The new forest will be better able to withstand the extreme conditions of Colorado's high elevation mesas (averaging more than 8,000 feet).



Tree shelters help protect ponderosa pine seedlings from animals, wind and excessive sunlight.

The project has eliminated the threat of genetic intermixing of the old forest with nearby native ponderosa stands. Reduced fire fuels will help protect communities in the area. Reestablishment of appropriate forest stand structure and composition will also greatly benefit wildlife.



Prescribed burning helped reduce dangerous fire fuels and cleared the way for plantings.

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