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FORESTS ARE UNHEALTHY, SAY ARIZONANS; FOREST THINNING AND CONTROLLED BURNS SUPPORTED

A majority of Arizonans think the forests in Arizona are unhealthy, according to recent *Grand Canyon State Poll* findings. Three-quarters favor using controlled burns to reduce the damaging effects of wildfire. With regard to forest thinning, more Arizonans favor thinning both large- and small-diameter trees than thinning smaller trees alone. When asked whose forest management recommendations they find most persuasive, Arizonans favored federal land management agencies and universities. Few Arizonans are persuaded by the views of timber companies on how best to manage forested areas.

The *Grand Canyon State Poll* was conducted by the Social Research Laboratory at Northern Arizona University. Calling took place between October 3 and October 20, 2003. Six hundred and ten randomly-selected Arizonans participated in the survey and results are accurate within a +/- 4 percent margin of error, at a 95 percent confidence level.

MAJORITY SEES FOREST HEALTH PROBLEM

A majority of Arizonans (52%) say the forests in Arizona are unhealthy. Seventeen percent believe the forests are “very unhealthy” and 35 percent say the forests are “somewhat unhealthy.” Thirty-nine percent think Arizona forests are healthy.

Three-quarters of Arizonans (76%) favor the use of controlled burns to reduce the amount of fuels in forests, so that wildfires are less damaging. Eighteen percent oppose controlled burns because of the possibility that fire will spread.

The public is divided over how forest thinning should be conducted. Forty-four percent of Arizonans believe forest thinning should remove both large- and small-diameter trees, while thirty-six percent think that only smaller trees should be thinned. Twenty percent say they do not know which approach should be used.

Arizonans are also divided on whether controlled burns and forest thinning should be conducted in the forest/urban interface or in more remote areas. Forty-two percent believe these activities should be focused where forests and residential homes meet, while just under one-quarter (23%) think they should take place in remote forest areas. Twenty-five percent say both types of areas should be targeted.

When it comes to trusting what the experts have to say, Arizonans are most persuaded by the views of federal land management agency personnel (33%) and university scientists (31%). Twenty percent say they most trust representatives of environmental group representatives, while six percent find timber companies most persuasive.

Fred Solop, director of the *Grand Canyon State Poll*, commented, “Arizonans are very concerned with the issue of forest health. The public will tolerate controlled burns and forest thinning, if the federal government and university experts say these are the best ways to restore forest health. The dialogue between government and university experts is important to dealing with this important issue.”



Social Research Laboratory, Northern Arizona University

December 3, 2003

**GRAND CANYON STATE POLL
BACKGROUND MEMO**

Fall 2003

The *Grand Canyon State Poll* was conducted between October 3 and October 20, 2003. A random sample of 610 adult residents of Arizona was asked questions regarding forest health. Survey question results are subject to a sampling error of +/- 4 percent at a 95 percent confidence level. Sampling error is the probable difference in results between interviewing everyone in the population versus a scientific sample taken from the population. Sampling error does not take into account additional sources of error inherent in any study of public opinion. The data referred to in this release are presented below.

Would you say the forests in Arizona are very healthy, somewhat healthy, somewhat unhealthy, or very unhealthy ?

	<u>Percent</u>	
Very healthy	7%	
Somewhat healthy	32%	
Somewhat unhealthy	35%	
Very unhealthy	17%	
Don't know	9%	
Total	100%	(N =607)

When thinking about how to best manage forested areas, whose recommendations are most persuasive—people working in federal land management agencies, environmental groups, timber companies, or universities?

	<u>Percent</u>	
Federal land management agencies	33%	
Environmental groups	20%	
Timber companies	6%	
Universities	31%	
More than one group	6%	
Don't know	4%	
Total	100%	(N =606)

Which view is closest to yours: Do you favor the use of controlled burns to reduce the amount of fuels in the forest so that wildfires are less damaging **OR** do you oppose the use of controlled burns because of the possibility that the fire will spread?

	<u>Percent</u>	
Favor controlled burns	76%	
Oppose controlled burns	18%	
Don't know/neutral	6%	
Total	100%	(N =605)

Which view comes closest to yours: Forest thinning should include removing BOTH large and small diameter trees **OR** forest thinning should focus on thinning ONLY smaller diameter trees.

	<u>Percent</u>	
Focus on both large and small trees	44%	
Focus only on smaller trees	36%	
Don't know/neutral	20%	
Total	100%	(N =596)

Should forest thinning and controlled burns be focused in remote forest areas or should forest thinning and controlled burns be focused on the forest/urban interface, where forests and residential homes meet?

	<u>Percent</u>	
Focus on remote areas	23%	
Focus on urban/forest interface	42%	
Focus on both	25%	
Don't know/depends	11%	
Total	101%	(N=594)