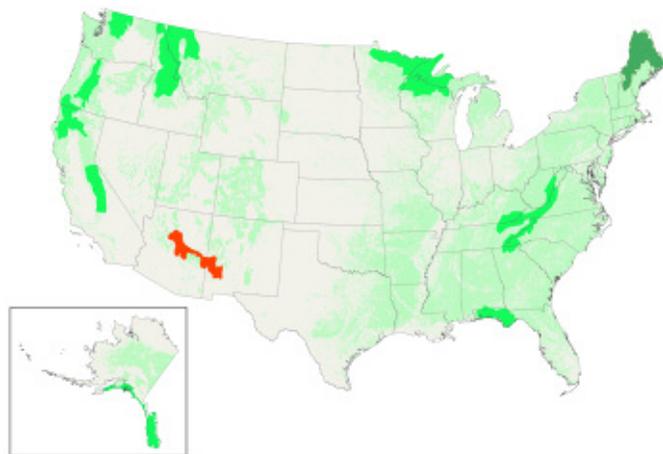


KEYSTONE FOREST



Physical Description

Stretching from Flagstaff, Arizona almost to the Rio Grande Valley in New Mexico, the Mogollon Keystone Forest marks the southern edge of the Colorado Plateau where it meets the great Sonoran and Chihuahuan deserts. It is part of the larger Arizona Mountains forests ecoregion. The prominent feature is a long escarpment, known as the Mogollon Rim, that extends for several hundred miles, with an average elevation of 7,000 feet.

The Mogollon Keystone Forest is

best characterized by its vast stands of Ponderosa pine, the largest of its kind in the United States, but also is marked by the pinyon-juniper ecosystem of the upper deserts to the high elevation spruce fir forests. The effects of grazing, logging and fire suppression since the late 1880s on Ponderosa pine forests have been profound. Fire, a critical component to the Ponderosa pine ecology, has been very suppressed for many years. There are currently many efforts, some controversial, to restore this ecological process. In 1991, the National Biological Survey declared the

Southwest Ponderosa pine forests one of the nation's most endangered ecosystems.

The Blue Range of Arizona and New Mexico is currently the site of the 7,000 square-mile Mexican gray wolf recovery area. The jaguar, having once roamed these same landscapes, has made recent forays across the U.S./Mexico border. The tassel-eared Abert's squirrel, mule deer, rocky mountain elk and two seriously imperiled bird species, the Mexican spotted owl and Northern goshawk, also live among the pines.

Critical to the wildlife and human populations of this arid region are its rivers; the most notable being the Gila, Verde, San Francisco and Blue. The Wild and Scenic Verde River is the only river in this keystone forest area that has this status. However several other rivers, including the San



Gila National Forest, New Mexico.

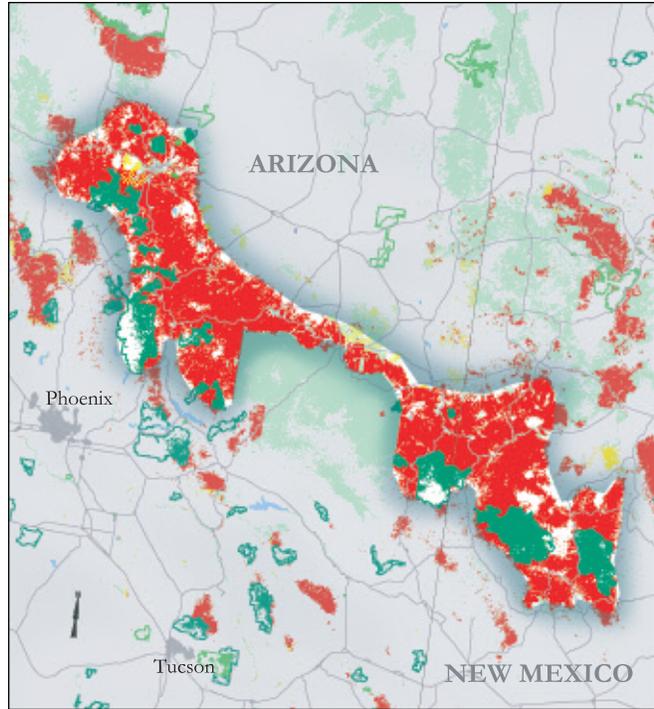
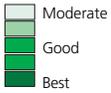
Forested BLM Lands (non-wilderness)	14,123
Forested National Forest Lands (non-wilderness)	5,163,744
Forested National Wildlife Refuge Lands (non-wilderness)	0
Forested National Park Lands (non-wilderness)*	3,459
Forested Wilderness	937,303
Forested miscellaneous public and private preserves	62,833
Privately owned, unprotected forest lands	349,759
Total Forested Lands	6,531,221

*Available data did not necessarily distinguish wilderness from non-wilderness within national parks, so some wilderness within national parks may be included within this statistic.

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Forest Quality



Forest Ownership



Francisco, are strong candidates. Wilderness areas along the Mogollon Country include San Francisco Peaks, Matazal, Mount Baldy and Blue Wallow, Gila-Aldo Leopold Complex and Blue River Primitive Area. These protected areas are considered biological hotspots.

Threats

The major threats to the Mogollon Keystone Forest include logging, road-building, mineral extraction, grazing and water diversion for human consumption. Old-growth logging, however, is not entirely an anachronism, as “forest health” has become the latest dictum of the federal government. The string of federal wilderness serves as anchors for this wild, ponderosa country, but the growing wildland-urban interface presents unique challenges, e.g., maintaining the fire-based ecology.

Efforts to Increase Protected Areas

Several organizations are advocating for greater protection of the Sky Islands ecoregion, as well as the greater Mogollon Keystone Forest area, by reforming land management policies and creating national and international reserves.

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