

Fire Managers Say \$8.5 Million Needed To Finish Flagstaff Watershed Protection Project

By RYAN HEINSIUS · SEP 26, 2019

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Local fire managers say funding for the Flagstaff Watershed Protection Project will likely dry up in December of next year. KNAU's Ryan Heinsius reports, millions more will be needed to complete the forest restoration work.



"The Museum Fire started on July 21, 2019 on the steep slopes of the Dry Lake Hills. This photo was taken Sept. 13, 2019 at its origin site. The Flagstaff Watershed Protection Project has resumed thinning work in the area and officials say \$8.5 million is needed to finish it. ">

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Flagstaff voters approved a \$10 million bond in 2012 to fund the project. At the time officials believed it, along with millions in federal grants, would cover all the thinning needed on 15,300 acres crucial to the city's water supply. But since the work began, managers say the costs have become clearer, and they'll need \$8.5 million for the final phase.

"The very nature of the terrain that we're working on here is such that this work, we knew was going to be expensive ... While we had some contractor estimates from potential bidders, we had no hard bids to base that on. Now we do," says Paul Summerfelt, wildland fire management officer for the City of Flagstaff.

The city council could ask voters to consider another bond next year or increase rates or fees to pay for the work. Summerfelt says half of the \$8.5 million could be covered by federal grants and other sources.

Work resumed on the Watershed Protection Project Tuesday. It had been put on hold in July when the 1,961-acre Museum Fire started in the thinning area.