

## For Immediate Release

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## SUU signs demonstration forest agreement with Division of Forestry, Fire and State Lands

CEDAR CITY — Southern Utah University and the Utah Division of Forestry, Fire and State Lands signed an agreement Tuesday that designates parts of the university's 2,200-acre Mountain Ranch on Cedar Mountain as a "demonstration forest."

SUU President Michael T. Benson and State Forester Richard J. Buehler, director of the Division of Forestry, signed a memo of understanding that provides for a 20-year joint venture to use Mountain Ranch forest land for teaching forest- and range-management techniques and outcomes.

In a signing ceremony at the SUU Mountain Center, Southwest Area Forester Patrick Moore of the Division of Forestry outlined a three-fold mission of the agreement centered on education and resource management.

Moore said the demonstration forest will provide a living outdoor laboratory for SUU students and faculty "with exposure to resources that otherwise might not be available."

Meanwhile, the Division of Forestry will be able to teach techniques of forest management that will enhance natural resources, especially wildlife, water quality and quantity, and air quality, he said.

Foresters will also work to reverse aspen decline, seek remedies for other adverse forest conditions created by 150 years of fire suppression, and protect public and private lands through a progressive fuels-reduction program, Moore added.

"The forest health challenges we're facing here are not unique," Moore said. "What we learn here can be applied elsewhere in Utah and across the West."

Moore joined Brian Cottam, SUU associate director of Government Relations & Regional Services, and other Division of Forestry employees in guiding a tour of the demonstration forest and explaining the aims and goals of the project.

Noting that "forests in the U.S. are in the worst condition they've ever been in," Buehler blamed fire-suppression policies of the past.

"Fire kept our forests young and fresh," he said. "However, we can no longer just allow fires to burn and threaten infrastructure, so we need to do other things to manage our forest lands."

The demonstration forest will allow the Division of Forestry, in partnership with the university, to show other property owners what is possible.

"It's a collaborative approach to managing our natural resources," he said.

Benson called attention to the majestic view of Cedar Breaks National Monument through the picture window of the cabin and said the university is "so incredibly fortunate to have these natural resources" available to students, faculty and staff.

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The agreement with the state’s Division of Forestry will enhance experiential learning for SUU students, Benson said.

“It’s one thing for our students to listen to a lecture about reforestation in the classroom, but it’s quite another for them to walk through the demonstration forest and see reforestation in action,” he said.

Wes Curtis, vice president for Government Relations & Regional Services, echoed that sentiment.

“The Mountain Ranch will be an outdoor classroom for practicing, showcasing, monitoring and studying progressive and experimental forest and range-management practices,” he said.

SUU and the Division of Forestry will collaborate to create and maintain a forest stewardship plan and a community wildfire protection plan that engages and accounts for adjacent property owners.

In addition, they will cooperate on forest and range management while developing outreach and educational programs to take full advantage of the Mountain Ranch property.

They will provide resources and expertise designed to accomplish the management operations and practices outlined in the memo of understanding. They will also work together to monitor the impact of the forest stewardship and wildfire protection plans on the Mountain Ranch property.

According to the memo of understanding, SUU will include the Division of Forestry as a member of the university’s Mountain Ranch Resource Advisory Council and will provide access to the Mountain Ranch for division staff.

The university will also provide administrative oversight of the forest stewardship and wildfire protection plans while serving as the lead entity for educational and research uses of the demonstration forest.

In addition to serving on the Resource Advisory Council, the Division of Forestry will facilitate and complete planning for the forest stewardship wildfire protection plans, perform and maintain a forest inventory, administer the fieldwork for contracts that meet the intent of the two plans, and develop and implement management practices to be demonstrated at the ranch.

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Patrick Moore, Southwest Area forester with the Utah Division of Forestry, Fire and State Lands (right), explains the goals and aims of the demonstration forest on Southern Utah University’s Mountain Ranch property on Cedar Mountain.

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Southern Utah University President Michael T. Benson (right) and Utah State Forester Richard J. Buehler, director of the Division of Forestry, Fire and State Lands, sign a memo of understanding that provides for a 20-year joint venture to use SUU Mountain Ranch forest land for teaching forest- and range-management techniques and outcomes.