



# **Sitgreaves Communities Wildfire Protection Plan**

**Update 2006**

**Prepared for:**

**Navajo County, Coconino County, City of Show Low,  
Town of Pinetop-Lakeside**

# Sitgreaves Communities Wildfire Protection Plan Update 2006

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Cover photographs: Untreated and treated parcels in Forest Lakes, 2006

## Background

The Sitgreaves Communities Wildfire Protection Plan (SCWPP), borne out of the ashes of the Rodeo-Chediski Fire, was finalized and signed by 18 signatories in 2004. The stakeholders financially supporting the plan include Navajo County, Coconino County, the City of Show Low, and the Town of Pinetop-Lakeside. Other supporters include the University of Arizona, Navajo County Cooperative Extension; Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests; the White Mountain Apache Tribe; the Fort Apache Agency Bureau of Indian Affairs; the Arizona State Land Department; and the following fire districts: White Mountain Apache Tribe, Fire and Rescue; Pinetop; Lakeside; Show Low; Linden; Clay Springs-Pinedale; Heber-Overgaard; and Forest Lakes. Apache County also signed the plan originally, and has since developed its own plan to address wildfire risk.

The plan was developed in accordance with the Healthy Forest Restoration Act of 2003, coming on the heels of six severe fires in the area in the previous seven years in which over 500,000 acres burned. These fires greatly impacted all of the communities in the White Mountain region, including the destruction of over 400 residences and out-buildings, and the evacuation of over 25,000 residents and visitors. The price tag was hundreds of thousands of dollars in lost merchandising revenue and over \$65 million in suppression costs.

The SCWPP identifies needed fuels reduction forest treatments across jurisdictional boundaries of private lands, the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests and White Mountain Apache tribal lands. These seamless treatments—comprised of thinning overstory components of the forest structure, breaking up the continuity of the understory fuels, and removing slash and excess vegetation—provide cumulative improvements in fire risk mitigation. Burning slash and ground fuels is done in a prescribed manner on government agency-managed lands and by permit on private lands.

Vegetation in the plan area is diverse, ranging from grasslands to mixed conifer forests. The dominant overstory component is ponderosa pine (*Pinus ponderosa*). Prominent overstory species include Utah juniper (*Juniperus osteosperma*), alligator juniper (*Juniperus deppeana*), and Gambel oak (*Quercus gambelii*). Prominent understory species include chaparral manzanitas of the genus *Arctostaphylos*, Ceanothus (*Ceanothus fenderli*), mountain mahogany (*Cercocarpus ledifolius*), and other variations of *Cercocarpus montanus*. Grass species are numerous, including; pine drop-seed (*Blephaoneuron tricholeplis*), western wheatgrass, and others of the *Elymus*, *Vulpia*, *Eriopoda*, *Sporobolus*, and *Mahlenbergia* genera.

## Progress update

Within the protection plan area, 40,964 acres of fuel treatment work have been completed. The objective is to significantly reduce the damage that could occur from wildfires in the treated areas.

Much has been achieved, yet much more work remains to be done. Our goal to have fire-safe communities within the plan area has not been realized. Although almost 41,000 acres is impressive, they equate to 13 percent of the lands within the plan area.

Administering and overseeing the plan's recommendations have unearthed a number of obstacles, described below. Coupled with complementary mitigation recommendations, we believe fuel reduction treatments can—and should—continue over the next five to seven years.

- **Dense stands of trees are still prevalent within our plan area.** Due to over-competition for resources, tree mortality on forested lands continues, ultimately adding to the volume of available fuel. Pinyon-juniper woodland fuel types that historically had a fire frequency of 30+ years, are now burning readily every year. Upper elevation, mixed conifer fuel types are also burning at increased frequencies. This expanded dimension of fire risk puts further demands on suppression and mitigation resources. Work needs to continue to reduce dangerous fuel conditions.
- **Fuel treatment work is effective for about 10 years.** Some treated areas are reaching a state where maintenance work is essential to preserve the treatments' effectiveness. Maintenance work is rarely planned for on government or private lands. Education, good planning, and implementing maintenance work will remedy this problem.
- **Often, the most beneficial fuel treatment work is achieved through prescribed burning.** All governments should support this type of fuel treatment. The minor inconvenience of short-term smoke impacts are far preferable than the multiple large-scale impacts created by conflagration-type wildfires.
- **Commercial and residential developments are continuing at an astounding rate.** Few developers are selling fire-safe properties, preferring to pass on the expense of fire mitigation to their buyers. Some existing subdivisions and developments are at high risk of devastating wildfires starting and burning from within. Far too many residents fail to assume their responsibilities of mitigating fire risk on their properties. By omission, they are endangering the safety of their family and investments and placing their neighbors' lives and properties in harm's way as well. Implementing and enforcing prudent ordinances is crucial.

- **A common misconception in our communities is that the major risk to a community is of a fire starting outside the community and burning toward it.** The reality is that most problem fires are started by people within communities. More public education about healthy forest conditions, fire behavior, and fire risk is essential.
- **Public support is waning.** Public awareness of the fire risks generated by the Rodeo-Chediski and Kinishba fires has diminished. Regardless of the amount of moisture our area receives, there will be a fire season every year. Following a very wet year, the Potato Fire threatened the community of Chevelon Canyon Retreat in 2006. It is vital to continue educating the public about fire risks in our area.
- **Federal support is not guaranteed.** Federal inclination is leaning away from continuing to bear the burden of protecting private lands (Office of the Inspector General Audit Report No. 08601-44-SF). It is imperative to explore and implement other ways to finance and attain our objectives. Increased support from state and local governments and redefining fire district priorities are possible alternatives to federal assistance.
- **Firewise is under-utilized.** The Firewise Communities USA program enables communities to improve fire protection at a personal and local level, while enhancing marketable values. The program is supported by over 60 national groups and federal agencies, and has delegated authority to individual State Foresters to administer and implement the program. This nationally endorsed program promotes and provides information on improving fire safety in building, landscape, and community design and construction. Every community in the White Mountains should adopt Firewise building and landscaping standards and strive for Firewise Recognition.

# Ownership and Treatment Summary

The land in the SCWPP is comprised of 307,585 acres, with land ownership divided among six entities. The USDA Forest Service manages 58.15% (178,866 acres) as part of the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests. Private property owners claim 22.64% (69,635 acres) located in two incorporated municipalities and several unincorporated communities. The White Mountain Apache Tribe accounts for 18.35% (56,440 acres) of the total SCWPP land area. State Trust Lands, Arizona Game and Fish, and Navajo County property account for less than 1% combined (2,770 acres). Refer to Figure 1. and Table 1. for treatment acreages within these entities.

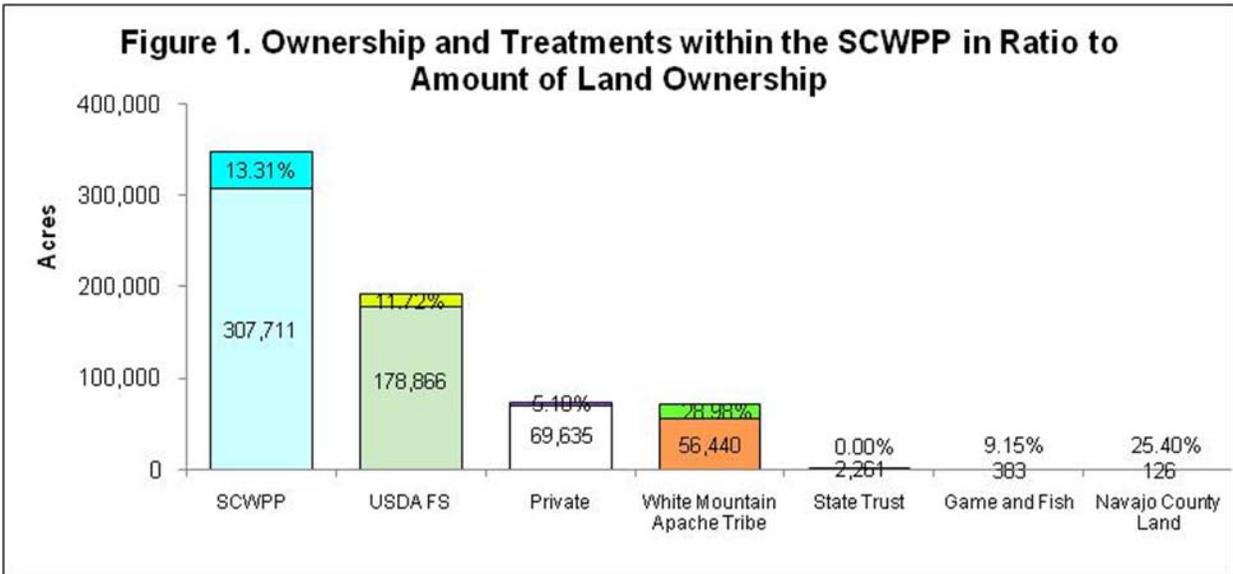
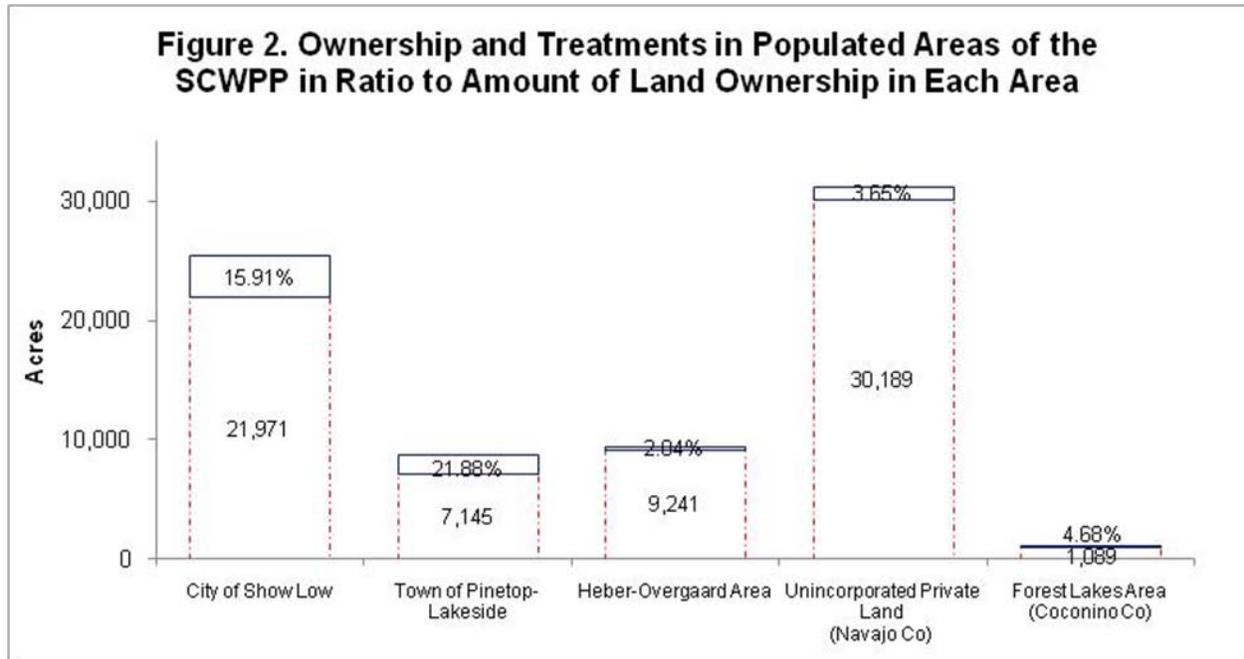


Figure 1. Please note that the bottom box of each ownership column displays the amount of land owned or managed in the SCWPP. The top box displays the percentage of that land that has been treated by mechanical thinning or prescribed fire (e.g. the White Mountain Apache Tribe owns 56,440 acres of the total land in the SCWPP and have treated 28.98% of that area).

**Table 1. Ownership and Treatment Summary Table**

	Ownership Acres	% of Acres Owned in the SCWPP	Treatment Acres	% Treated Land in Ratio to Amount of Land Owned in SCWPP
SCWPP	307,711	100.00%	40,995	13.32%
USDA FS	178,866	58.13%	20,963	11.72%
Private	69,635	22.63%	3,608	5.18%
White Mountain Apache	56,440	18.34%	16,359	28.98%
State Trust	2,261	0.73%	0	0.00%
Game and Fish	383	0.12%	35	9.15%
Navajo County Land	126	0.04%	32	25.40%

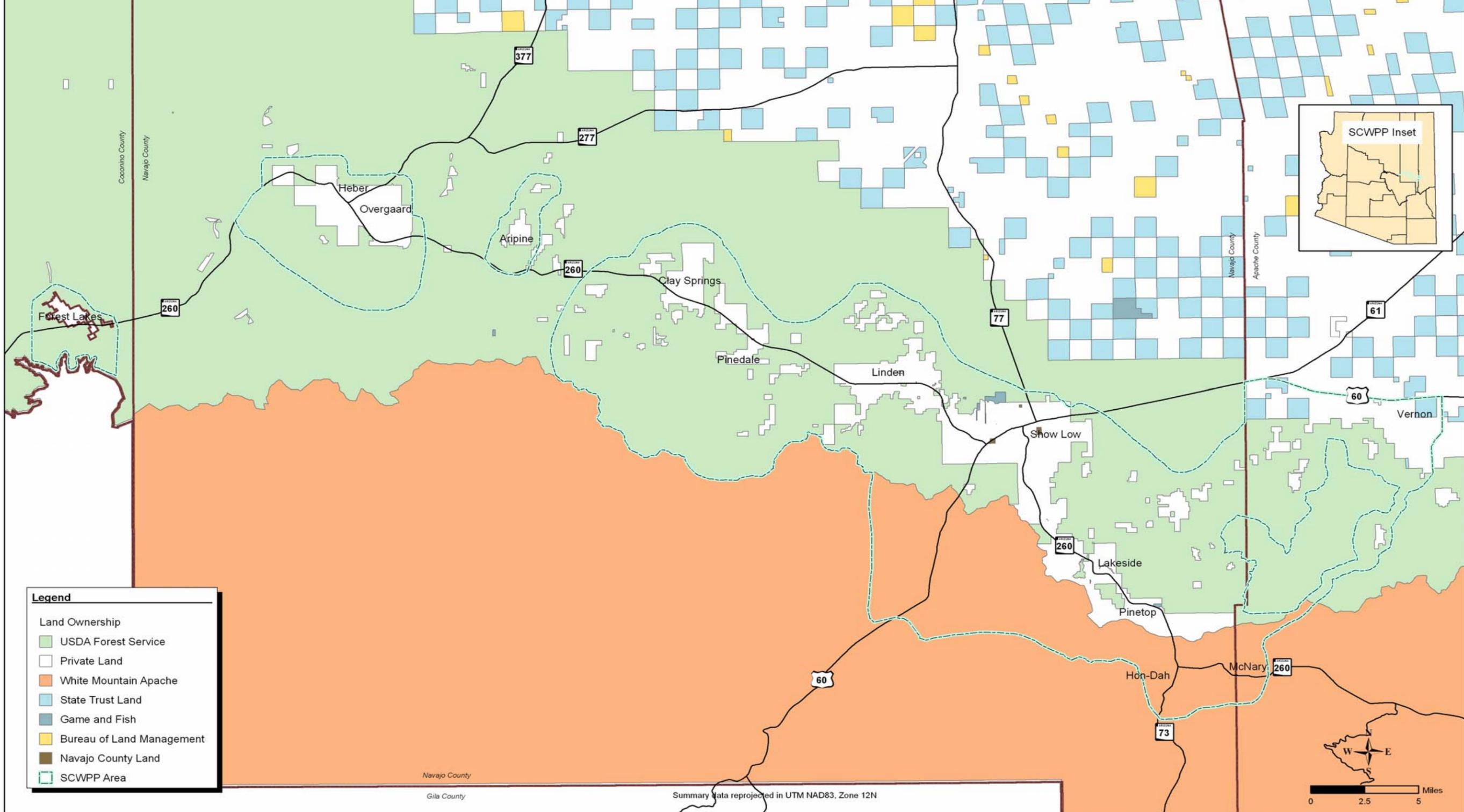
# Populated Area Ownership Treatment Summary



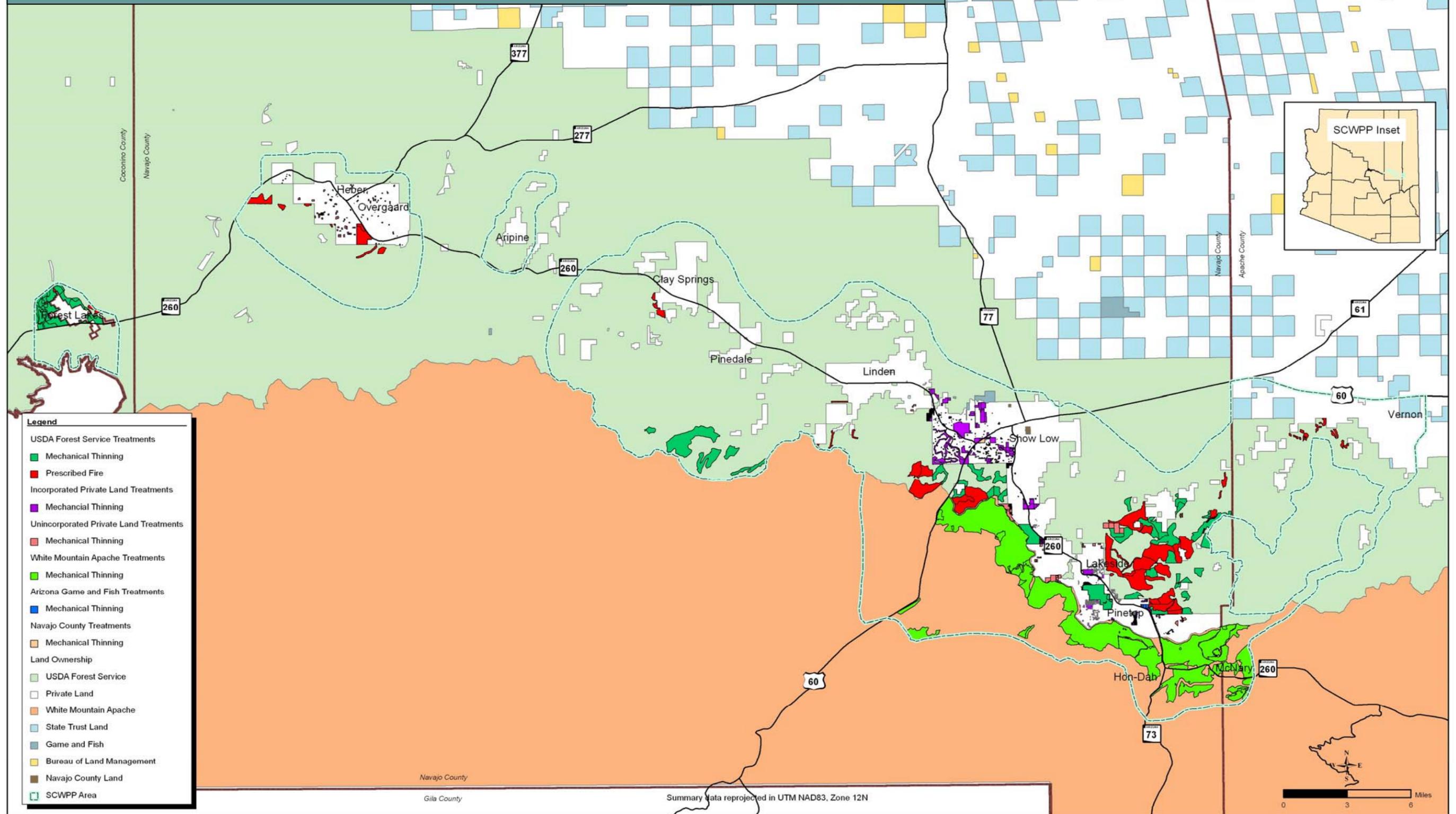
**Table 2. Populated Area Ownership and Treatment Summary**

	Ownership Acres	% of Acres Owned in the SCWPP	Treatment Acres	Mechanical Treatment	Prescribed Fire Treatment	% Treated Land in Ratio to Amount of Land within Populated Boundary
<b>Show Low</b>	<b>21,971</b>	<b>7.14%</b>	<b>3,495</b>	<b>2,640</b>	<b>855</b>	<b>15.91%</b>
USDA FS	9,009		1,531	676	855	17.00%
Private	12,579		1,932	1,932	0	15.36%
Game & Fish	280		0	0	0	0.00%
Navajo County Land	101		32	32	0	31.35%
<b>Pinetop-Lakeside</b>	<b>7,114</b>	<b>2.32%</b>	<b>1,564</b>	<b>1,564</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>21.88%</b>
USDA FS	3,143		1,007	1,007	0	32.04%
Private	3,918		522	522	0	13.31%
Game & Fish	39		35	35	0	89.99%
Navajo County Land	14		0	0	0	0.00%
<b>Heber-Overgaard Area</b>	<b>9,241</b>	<b>3.00%</b>	<b>188</b>	<b>188</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2.03%</b>
Private	9,241		188	188	0	2.03%
<b>Unincorporated Private Land in Navajo County</b>	<b>28,158</b>	<b>9.81%</b>	<b>1,102</b>	<b>1,102</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>3.65%</b>
Private	28,158		1,102	1,102	0	3.65%
<b>Forest Lakes Area</b>	<b>1,089</b>	<b>0.35%</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>4.68%</b>
Private	1,089		51	51	0	4.68%

# Sitgreaves Communities Wildfire Protection Area



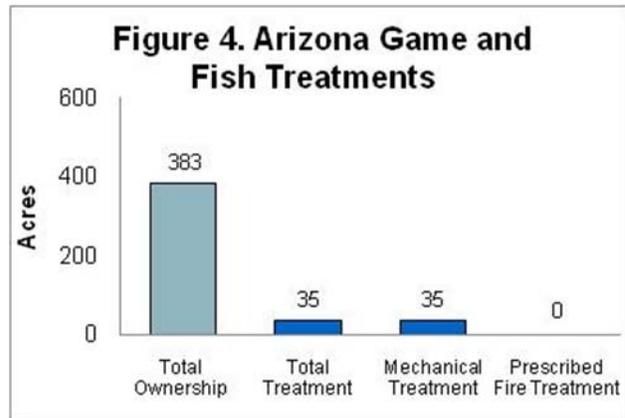
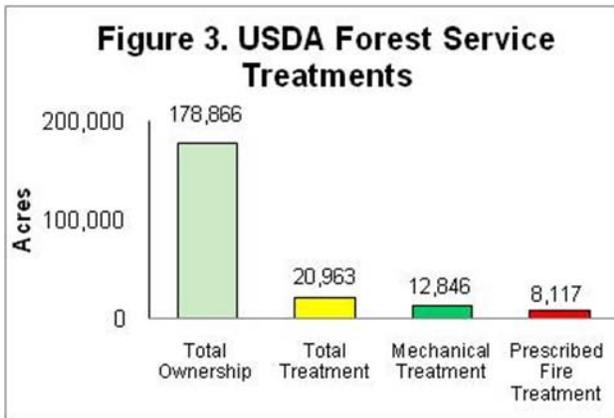
# Sitgreaves Communities Wildfire Protection Plan Land Ownership and Fuel Treatments



# Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests and Arizona Game and Fish Fuel Treatments



On lands administered by the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests, 20,963 acres have been treated within the plan area. Prescribed burning accounted for 38% of those acres. The Arizona Game and Fish department mechanically treated 35 acres surrounding its Pinetop regional office.



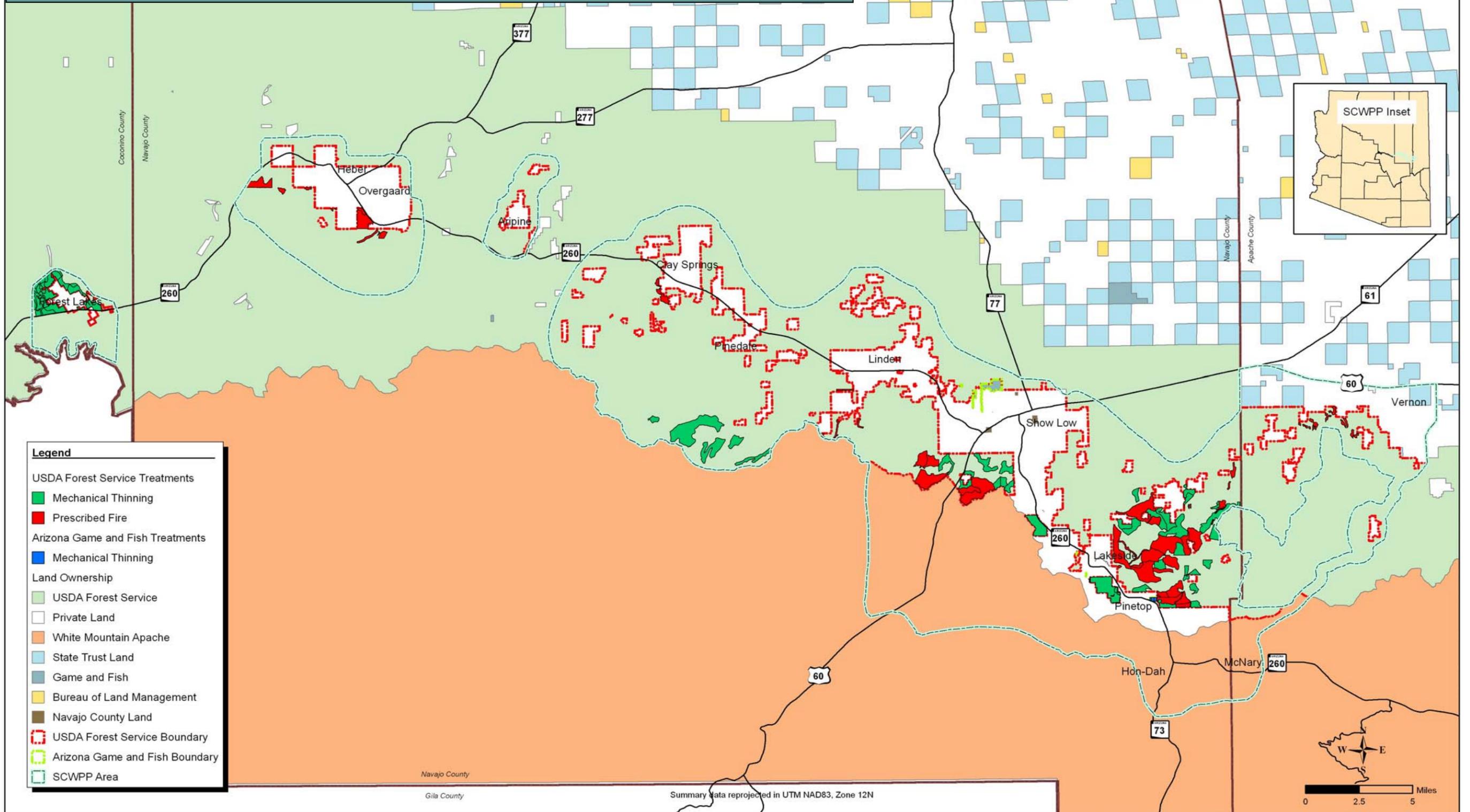
**Table 3. USDA Forest Service Treatments**

	Total Ownership	Total Treatment	Mechanical	Prescribed Fire
Acres	178,866	20,963	12,846	8,117
% of Acres Treated		11.72%	61.28%	38.72%

**Table 4. Arizona Game and Fish Treatments**

	Total Ownership	Total Treatment	Mechanical	Prescribed Fire
Acres	383	35	35	0
% of Acres Treated		9.14%	9.14%	0.00%

# Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests and Arizona Game and Fish Fuel Treatments

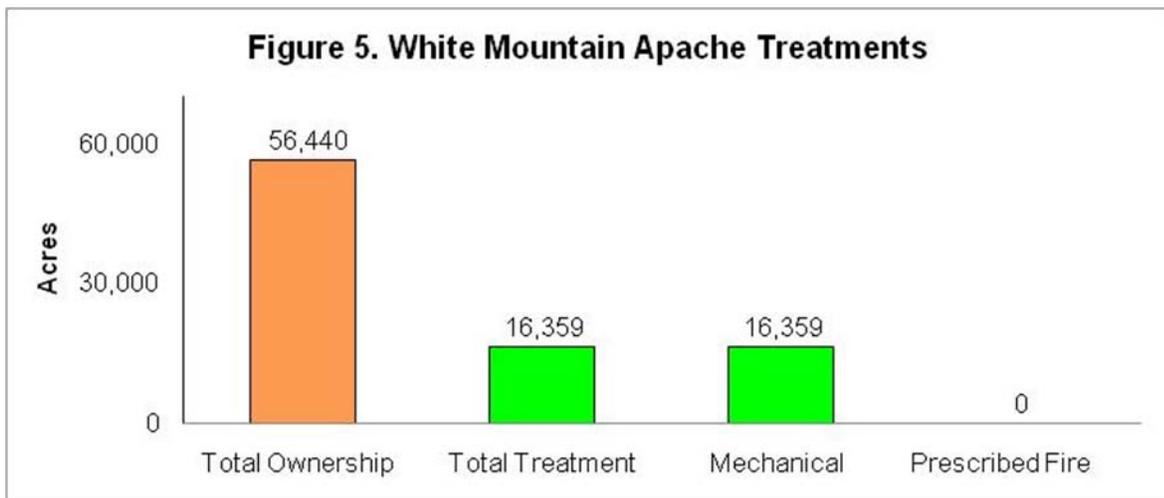


# White Mountain Apache Tribal Lands Fuel Treatments



Over 16,300 acres of the wildland-urban interface have been treated on White Mountain Apache tribal lands. Treatments include thinning and prescribed burns. Five hundred acres were thinned south of Show Low along Highway 60. Mechanical work in the Williams Creek area with a large brush cutter (Fecon) totaled 2,400 acres. Maintenance work along the Rim Road on an existing fuelbreak accounted for 2,000 acres of treatment. Continuing maintenance work was done during the 2006-07 winter

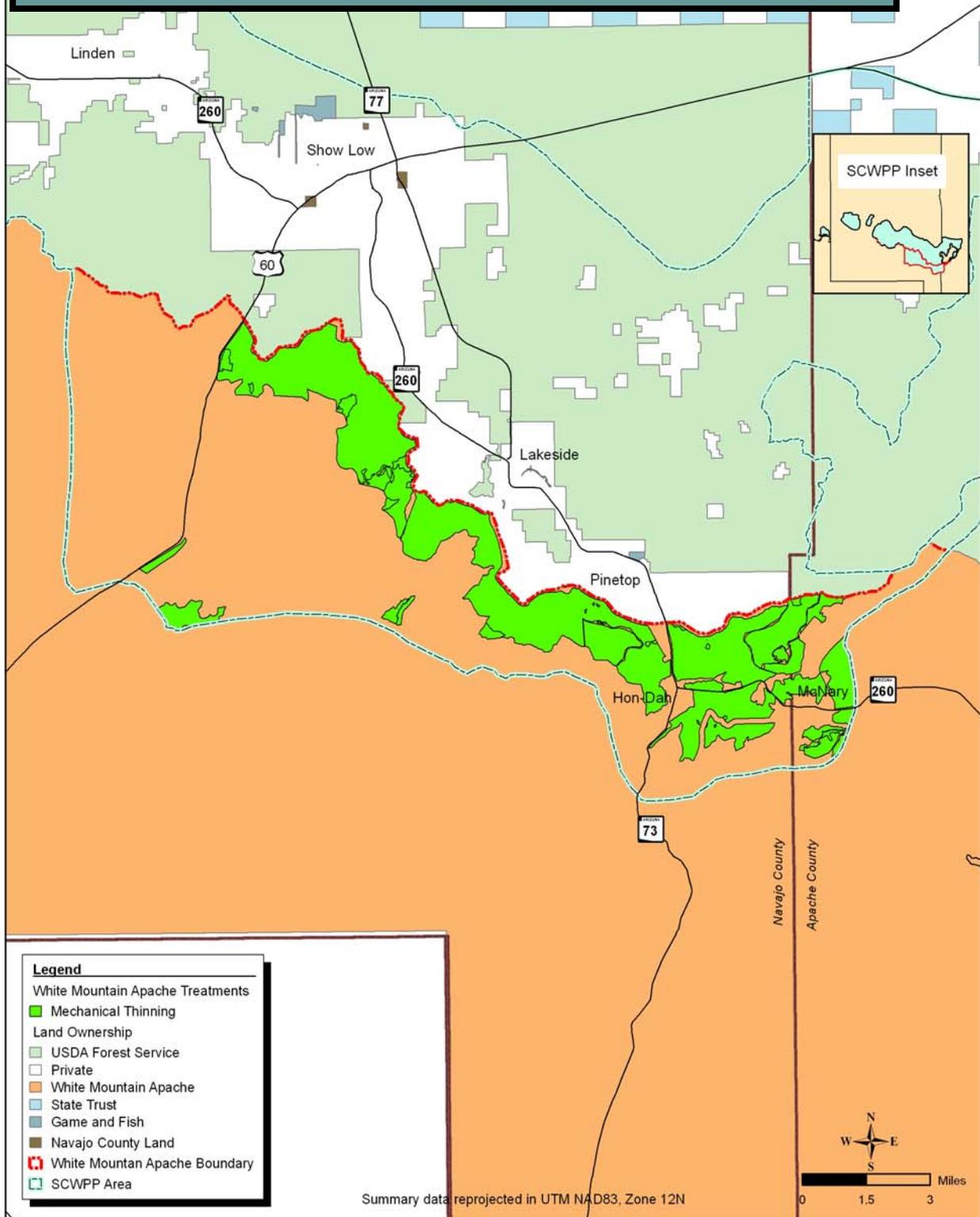
with the ignition of brush piles along the reservation boundary and at other significant wildland-urban interface locations. The results of the prescribed burning will be presented in a future report.



**Table 5. White Mountain Apache Treatments**

	Total Ownership	Total Treatment	Mechanical	Prescribed Fire
Acres	56,440	16,359	16,359	0
% of Acres Treated		28.98%	100.00%	0.00%

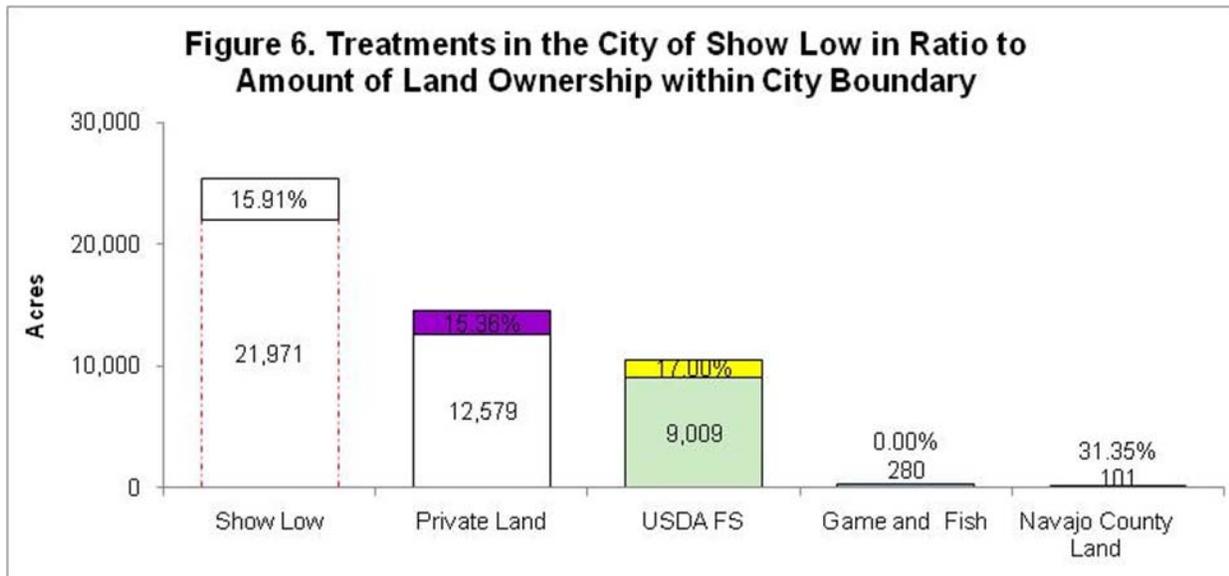
# White Mountain Apache Tribal Lands Fuel Treatments



# City of Show Low Fuel Treatments



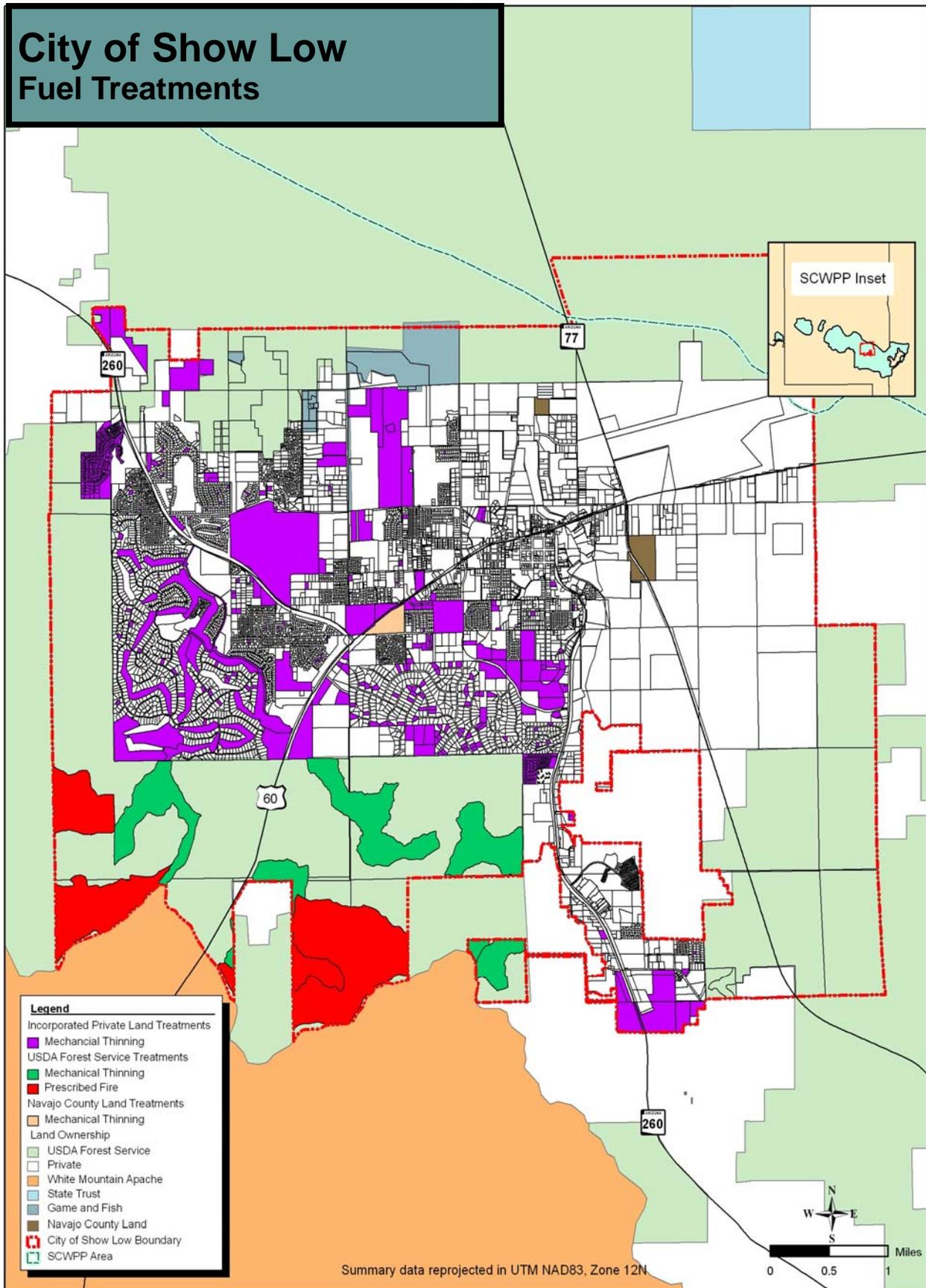
Sixteen percent of the land within the City of Show Low has been treated. City Park was thinned in 2006 to mitigate fire risk and promote healthier trees.



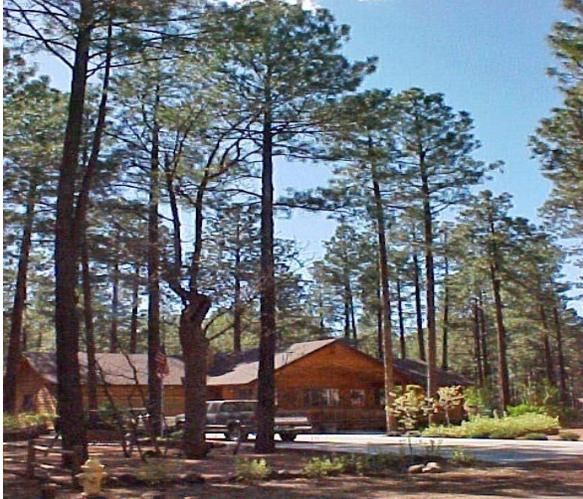
**Table 6. Treatments within the City of Show Low in Ratio to the Amount of Land Ownership within City Boundaries**

	Show Low	Private Land	USDA FS	Game and Fish Land	Navajo County Land
Ownership Acres	21,971	12,579	9,009	280	101
Acres Treated	3,495	1,932	1,531	0	32
% of Acres Treated	15.91%	15.35%	16.99%	0.00%	31.68%

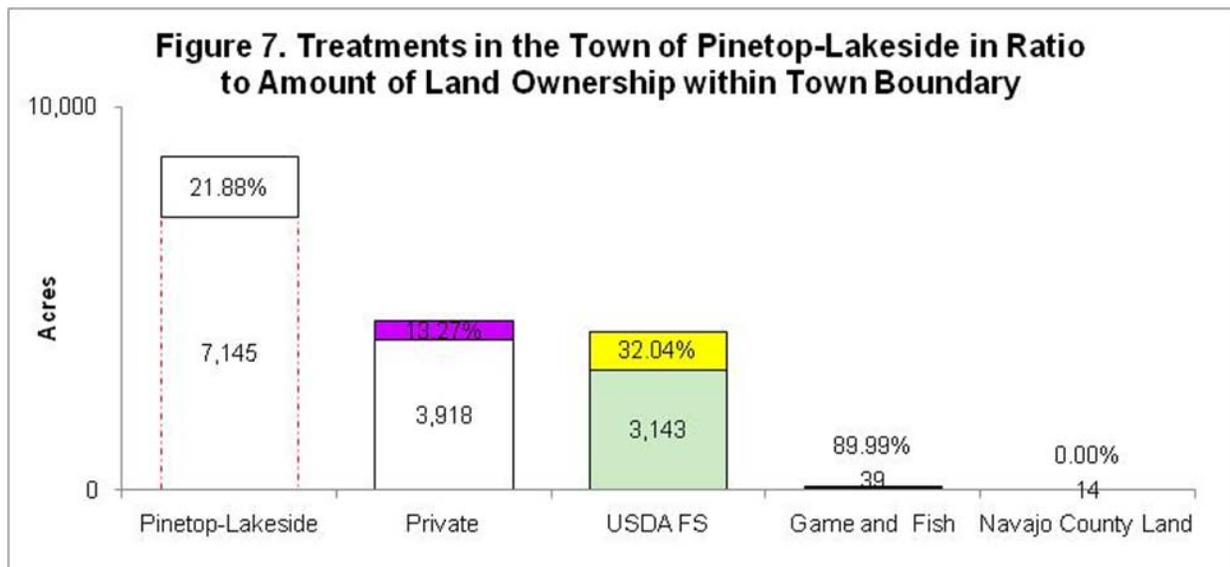
# City of Show Low Fuel Treatments



# Town of Pinetop-Lakeside Fuel Treatments



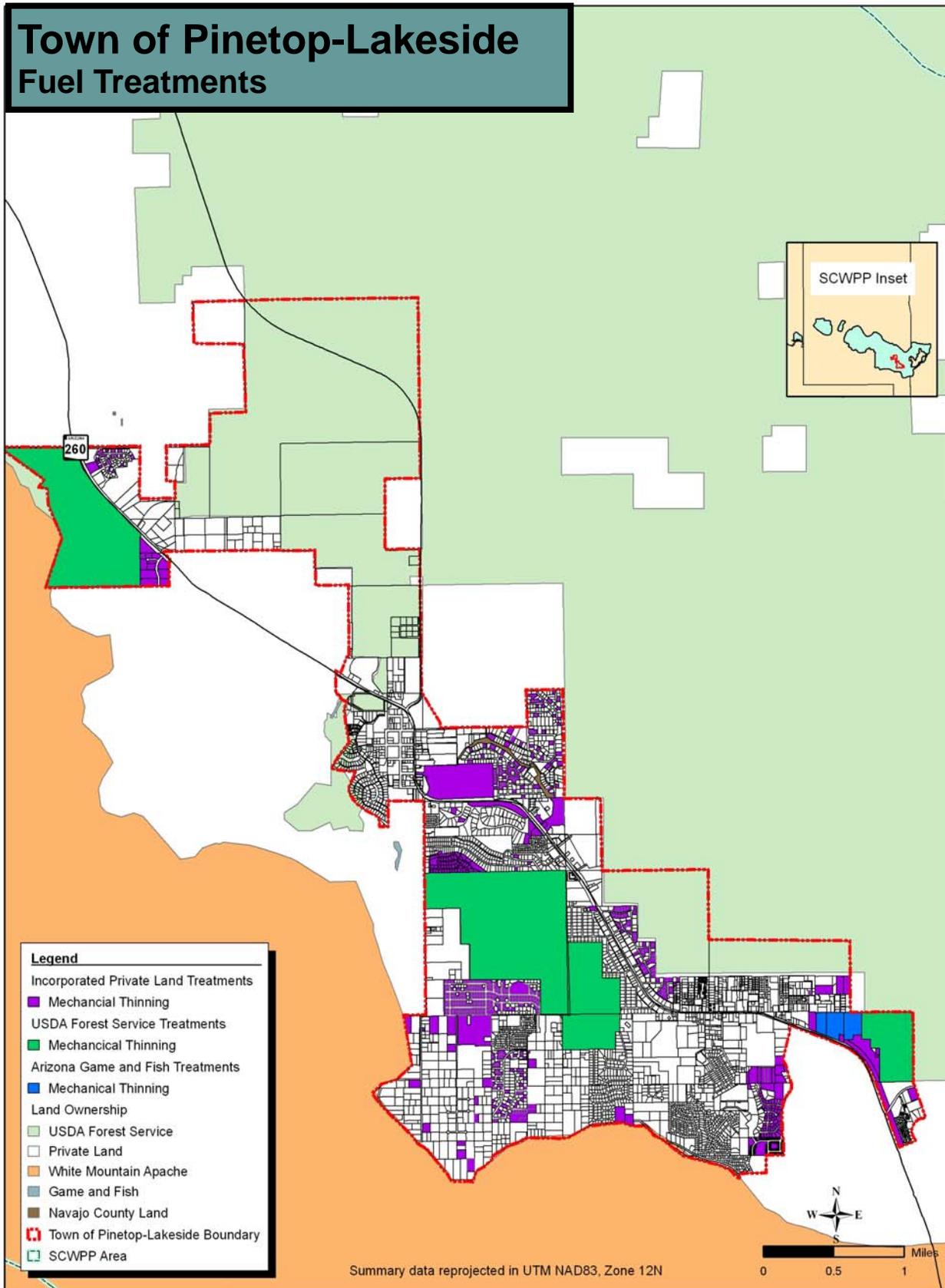
Pinetop-Lakeside has treated 1,529 acres. Significant work was done on National Forest-managed lands in the Camp Tatiyee/Camp Grace area in 2006 and the Woodland Lake area in 2005.



**Table 7. Treatments in the Town of Pinetop-Lakeside in Ratio to the Amount of Land Ownership within Town Boundary**

	Pinetop-Lakeside	Private Land	USDA FS	Game and Fish Land	Navajo County Land
Ownership Acres	7,114	3,932	3,143	39	14
Acres Treated	1,529	522	1,007	35	0
% of Acres Treated	21.49%	13.28%	32.04%	89.74%	0.00%

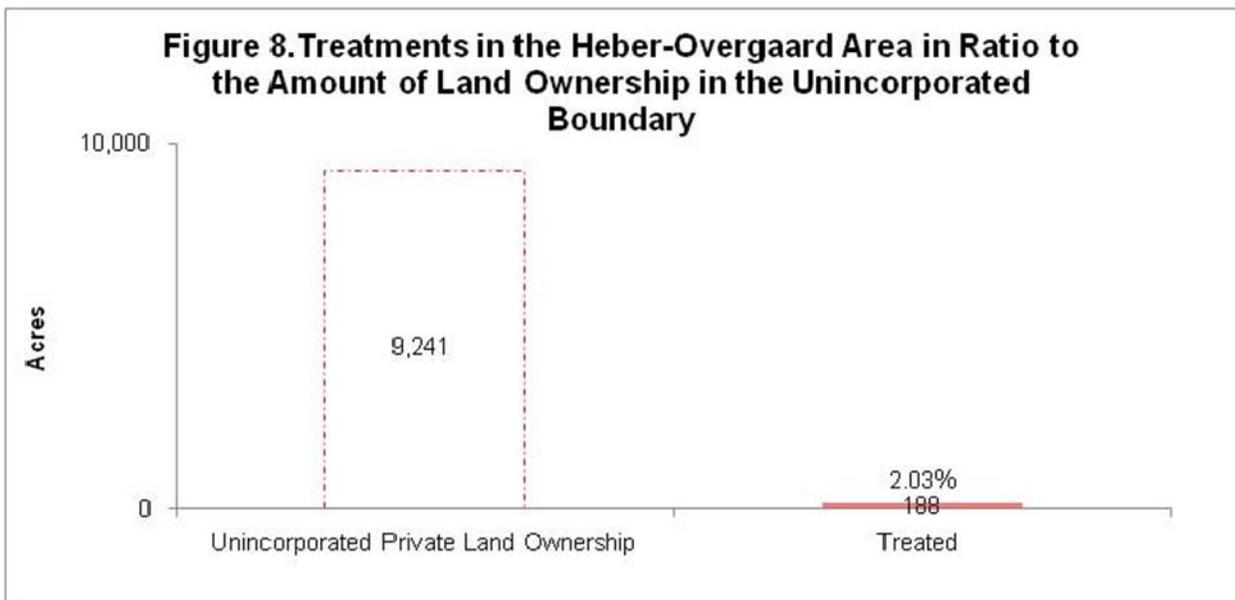
# Town of Pinetop-Lakeside Fuel Treatments



## Heber-Overgaard Fuel Treatments



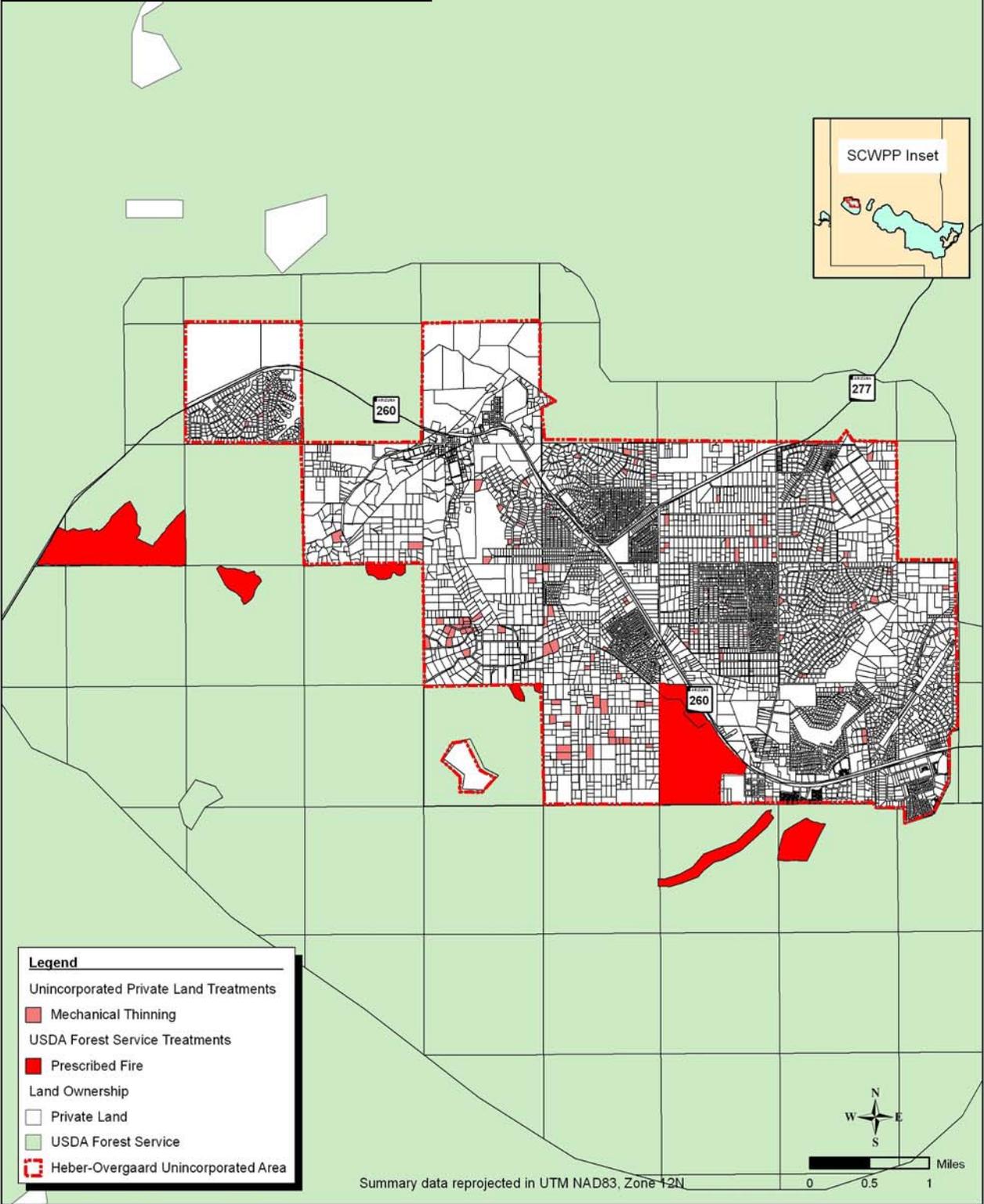
Strong support from the Heber-Overgaard Fire Department in administrating State Fire Assistance grants has aided in the treatment of over 180 parcels within the fire district.



**Figure 8. Treatments in the Area of Heber-Overgaard in Ratio to the Amount of Land Ownership in the Unincorporated Boundary**

	Acres
Ownership	9,241
Treated	188
% of Acres Treated	2.03%

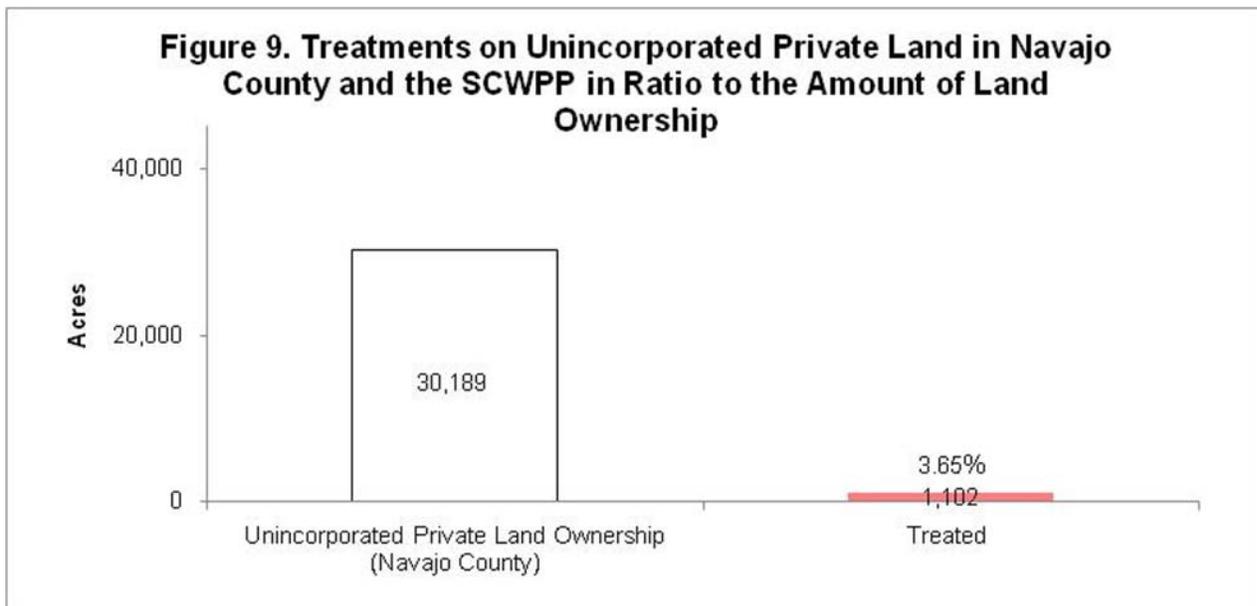
# Heber-Overgaard Fuel Treatments



# Navajo County Unincorporated Areas Fuel Treatments



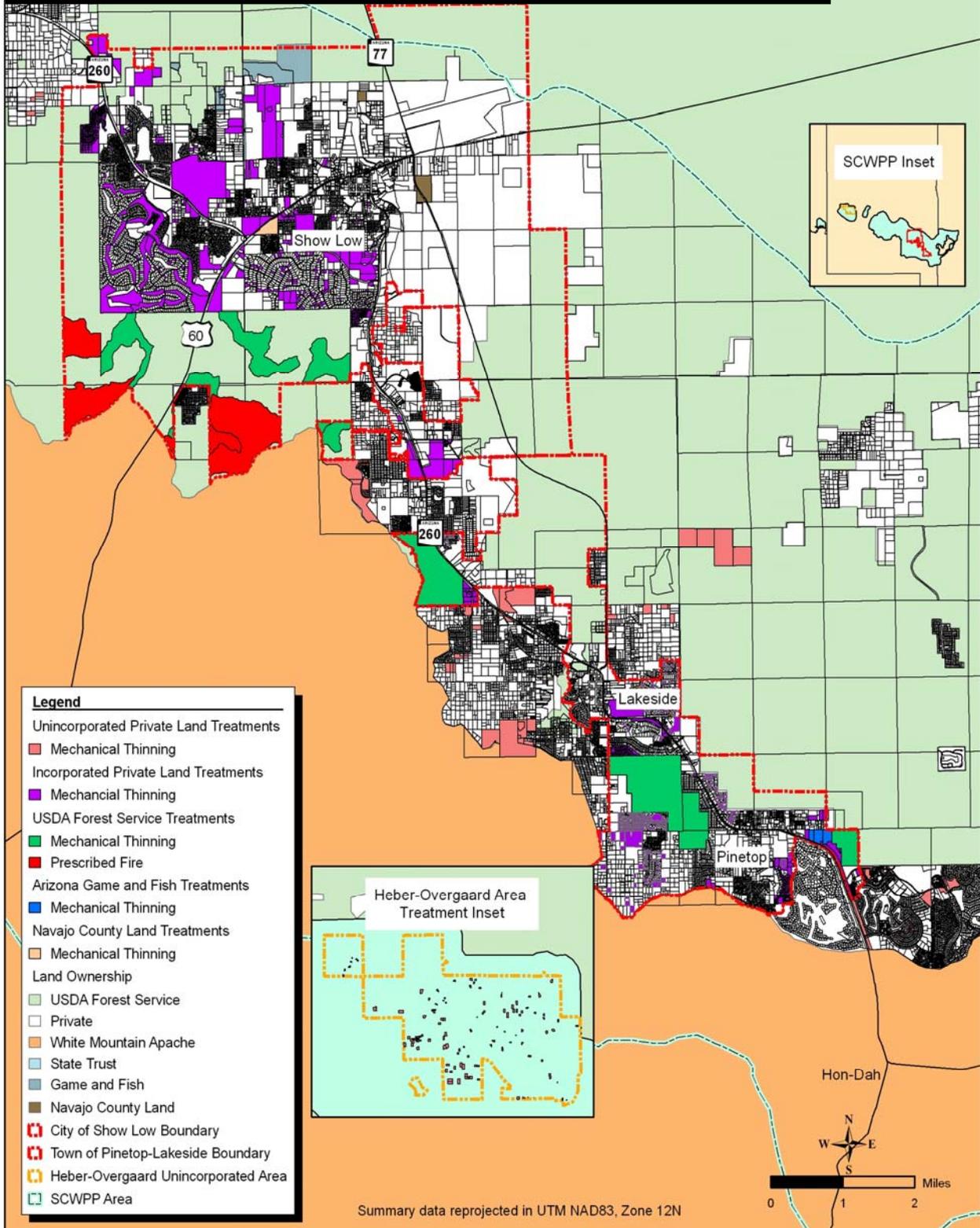
Residents in unincorporated Navajo County have treated over 1,100 acres of privately owned lands (including 188 acres in Heber-Overgaard).



**Table 9. Treatments on Unincorporated Private Land in Navajo County and the SCWPP in Ratio to the Amount of Land Ownership**

	Acres
Ownership	28,158
Treated	1,102
% of Acres Treated	3.92%

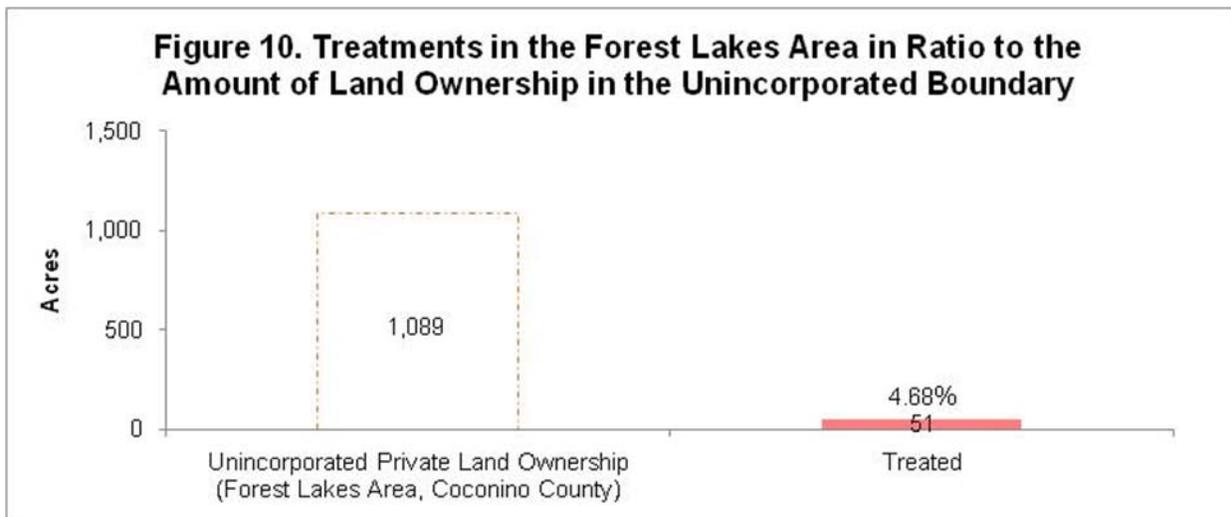
# Navajo County Unincorporated Areas Fuel Treatments



# Coconino County Forest Lakes Fuel Treatments



Forest Lakes residents have thinned 51 properties with the aid of State Fire Assistance grants administered by the Forest Lakes Fire Department. The USDA Forest Service has completed substantial fuel treatment work along the perimeter of Forest Lakes.



**Table 10. Treatments in the Forest Lakes Area in Ratio to the Amount of Land Ownership in the Unincorporated Boundary**

	Acres
Ownership	1,089
Treated	51
% of Acres Treated	4.68%

# Acknowledgments

The following individuals and entities are thanked for their contributions to this report:

**The University of Arizona, Navajo County Cooperative Extension**

Meckenzie Helmandollar

**The City of Show Low**

Rob Jones  
Brandon Merklin  
Ann Kurasaki

**Navajo County**

Ryan Taylor

**USDA Forest Service**

Pamela-Klein Taylor  
Steve Richardson  
Patty O'Connor

**The Bureau of Indian Affairs Fort Apache Agency and The White Mountain Apache Tribe**

Rachel Endfield  
Ralph Thomas