



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

July 2004

Public Scoping

North Washoe Valley Wildfire Risk Reduction and Ecosystem Enhancement Project

Carson Ranger District, Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest
Washoe County, Nevada



COMMENTS WELCOME

The Carson Ranger District of the Humboldt Toiyabe National Forest welcomes your comments on its proposal to reduce the threat of wildfire in the North Washoe Valley area (See Map). The proposal includes thinning, prescribed burning, and temporary road construction.

BACKGROUND / PURPOSE AND NEED FOR ACTION

The North Washoe Valley project is proposed at this time to respond to goals and objectives of the National Fire Plan and the Toiyabe Forest Land and Resource Management Plan as amended by the Sierra Nevada Forest Plan Amendment (Forest Plan). Comparison of the existing condition of the project area and the desired conditions from the Forest Plan indicates a need for:

- reduced forest fuels loading;
- reduced ladder fuels;
- reduced risk of uncharacteristically intense fire;
- reduced risk to life, property, and natural resources;
- increased safety to fire suppression crews;
- development of sustainable forest conditions;
- restoration of natural ecological systems.

The purpose of the North Washoe Valley project is to reduce the risk of wildfire to the homes and ecosystems of the North Washoe Valley area. The North Washoe Valley area is located in the urban wildland interface zone where homes and county parks are mixed with flammable wildland grass, brush, and trees. Trees in the area are currently under attack by the IPS pine beetle due in part to the recent years of drought. Pockets of trees killed by the beetles are particularly flammable. These pockets are increasing in size. Trees in the area are particularly susceptible to the beetles and to wildfire because they are relatively even aged and spaced close together. These conditions are the result of two major human interventions in the natural ecosystem. First was the clear cutting that occurred in the Comstock mining era. Most of the trees in the area were harvested in the late 1800s to provide mine timbers in the Virginia City area. The trees that have grown back are mostly the same age and size and are spaced much closer together than under natural conditions. Second has been the effects of aggressive wildland fire fighting. Under natural conditions, small low intensity fires caused by lightning were common in the North Washoe Valley country. They took out the smaller weaker trees and brush, naturally thinning the forest. In the absence of fire, the forest is thicker and brush is common – creating ideal conditions for large, high intensity fires of the type that can threaten adjacent homes and do long term damage to the ecosystem.

In the event of a wildfire, the primary concern of fire agencies like the Forest Service is the safety of their firefighters. Fire agencies will not put firefighters on the ground in unsafe conditions that are thick with trees, where there are lots of dead trees, there is a lot of brushy ladder fuels, and where access/escape routes are poor.

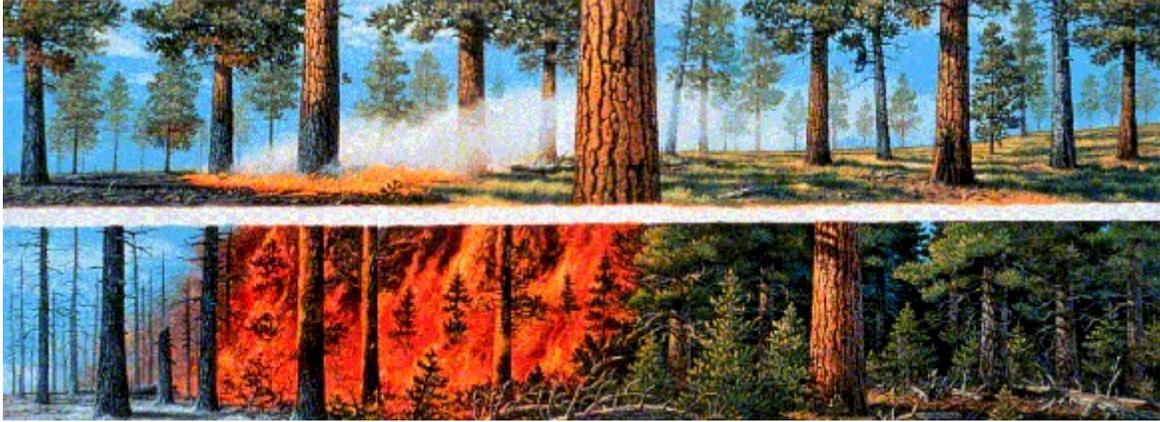


Figure 1: The top panel illustrates desired conditions where fires stay on the ground and can be fought safely with hand crews. The bottom panel illustrates current conditions with heavy fuel loading and unsafe firefighting conditions.

THE PROPOSED ACTION

The main action needed is to reduce fuel loading within the 5,000 acre project area. Within this area, treatment units totaling 2,100 acres have been identified for fuels reduction. In each unit the trees and brushfields would be thinned. This would be done through mechanical treatments, prescribed fire, or a combination (See maps for location of treatment units). Mechanical treatments include:

Brush removal. This includes sage brush, bitterbrush, and mountain mahogany. This would be accomplished with either tracked machines or rubber-tired machines equipped with a cutting head that chips/shreds the vegetation. Where the ground is too steep to safely operate equipment, work would be accomplished by hand crews. This treatment is proposed for 300 acres.

Commercial thinning. This includes live (green) conifer trees larger than 8 inches in diameter and less than 30 inches in diameter. This would involve thinning from below by removing smaller understory trees that are most susceptible to wildfire and leaving the dominant tallest trees that are less susceptible to fire. Within those thinned areas canopy cover would be reduced to forty percent with an average spacing between crowns of fifteen feet. This treatment is proposed for 1300 acres.



Figure 2: Sample Pre Thinning Stand Profile



Figure 3: Sample Post Thinning Stand Profile

Prescribed fire. This includes both pile and broadcast burning. Pile burning involves placing cut trees and brush into piles and burning them when weather conditions are safe. Pile burning was done last year in the Lakeview area where it helped firefighters save homes during the Waterfall Fire of 2004. Broadcast burning involves construction of fire lines around the areas to be treated, mechanical treatment first to remove ladder fuels, and then burning an area under the appropriate weather conditions. This treatment would occur following mechanical treatment on 500 acres.

Riparian treatment. Special consideration will be given to treatment of riparian areas. This will include reducing the expansion of conifers into aspen stands through mechanical removal of conifer trees. This treatment is proposed for 300 acres.

The project would include the use of 16 miles of existing roads. Most would need only light maintenance, but four miles would need reconstruction. In addition, six miles of new roads would be proposed for construction. Following completion of the project, these roads would be rehabilitated or gated for administrative use only, primarily for firefighting and law enforcement purposes.

This proposal has been coordinated with the Nevada Division of Forestry which has been conducting similar treatments on private lands in the area. This proposal has been specifically designed to dovetail with the Division's project. It has also been designed to complement fuels treatments on adjacent Washoe County Park lands.

COMMENT PROCESS

The Forest Service encourages your comments on this proposal. They will help us prepare an environmental assessment on the proposed action. The assessment will be used to determine whether to prepare an environmental impact statement or a finding of no significant impact. If there is no potential for significant impacts, that finding along with the environmental assessment and a proposed decision will be sent to those who commented. If the environmental assessment concludes that there is the potential for significant impacts then an environmental impact statement would be prepared.

This hazardous fuel reduction project is being prepared under the provisions of the Healthy Forests Restoration Act. It will be subject to the objection process pursuant to 36 CFR part 218, subpart A. In order to be eligible to file an objection to the proposed project, specific written comments related to the project must be submitted before the end of the comment period.

For more information contact the Carson Ranger District or you may read the regulations under 36 CFR 218 on the national Forest Service web site at www.fs.fwd.us/emc/applit/36cfr218a.htm.

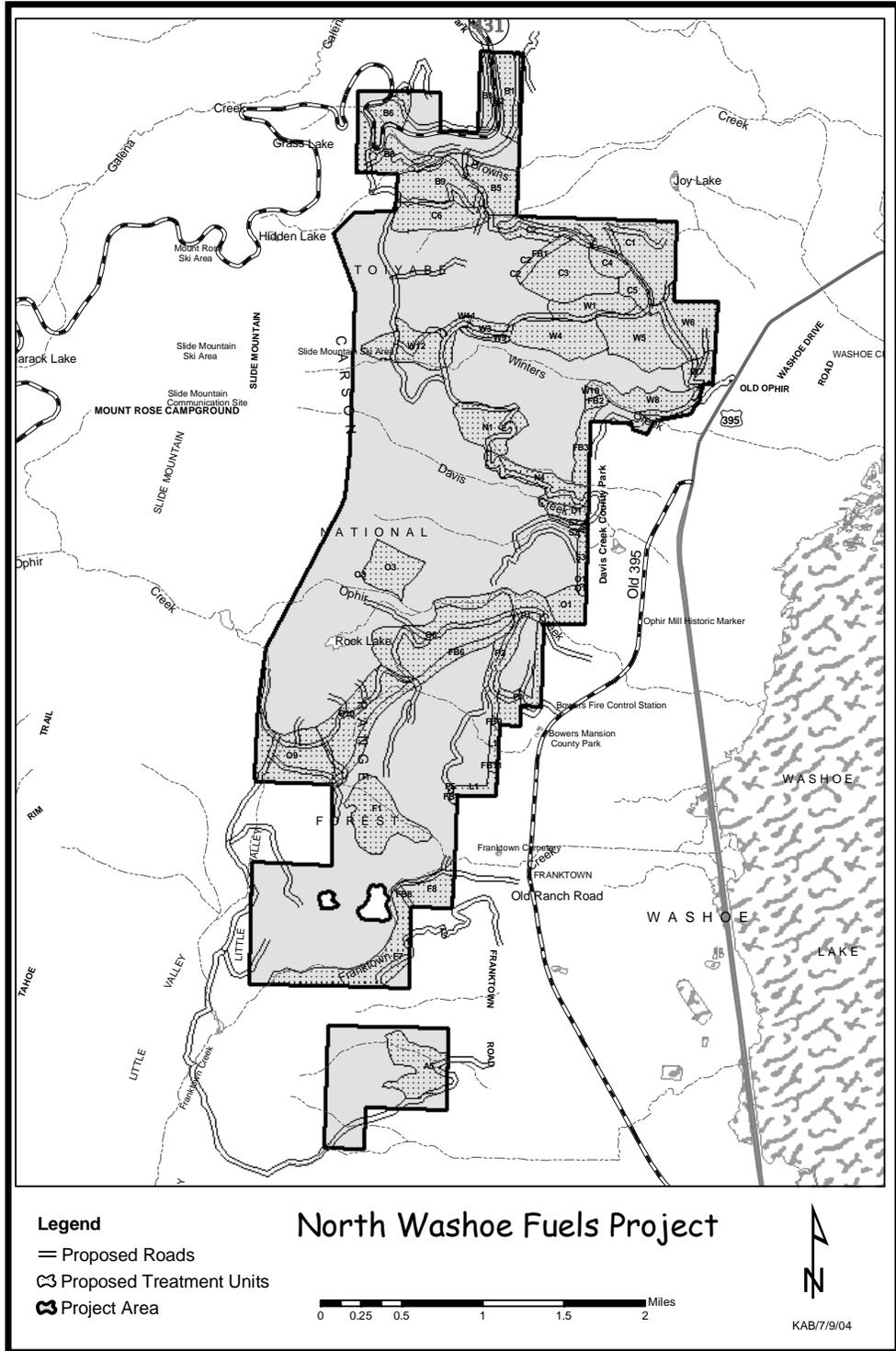
Please send your comments to the Responsible Official for this project, who is Gary Schiff, Carson District Ranger, 1536 South Carson Street, Carson City, NV 89703; phone (775) 882-2766 fax (775) 884-8199; or you may hand-deliver your comments to the above address during normal business hours from 8:00 am to 4:30 pm, Monday through Friday, excluding federal holidays. Email comments may be sent to comments-intermtn-humboldt-toiyabe-carson@fs.fed.us. Comments need to be sent by August 23.

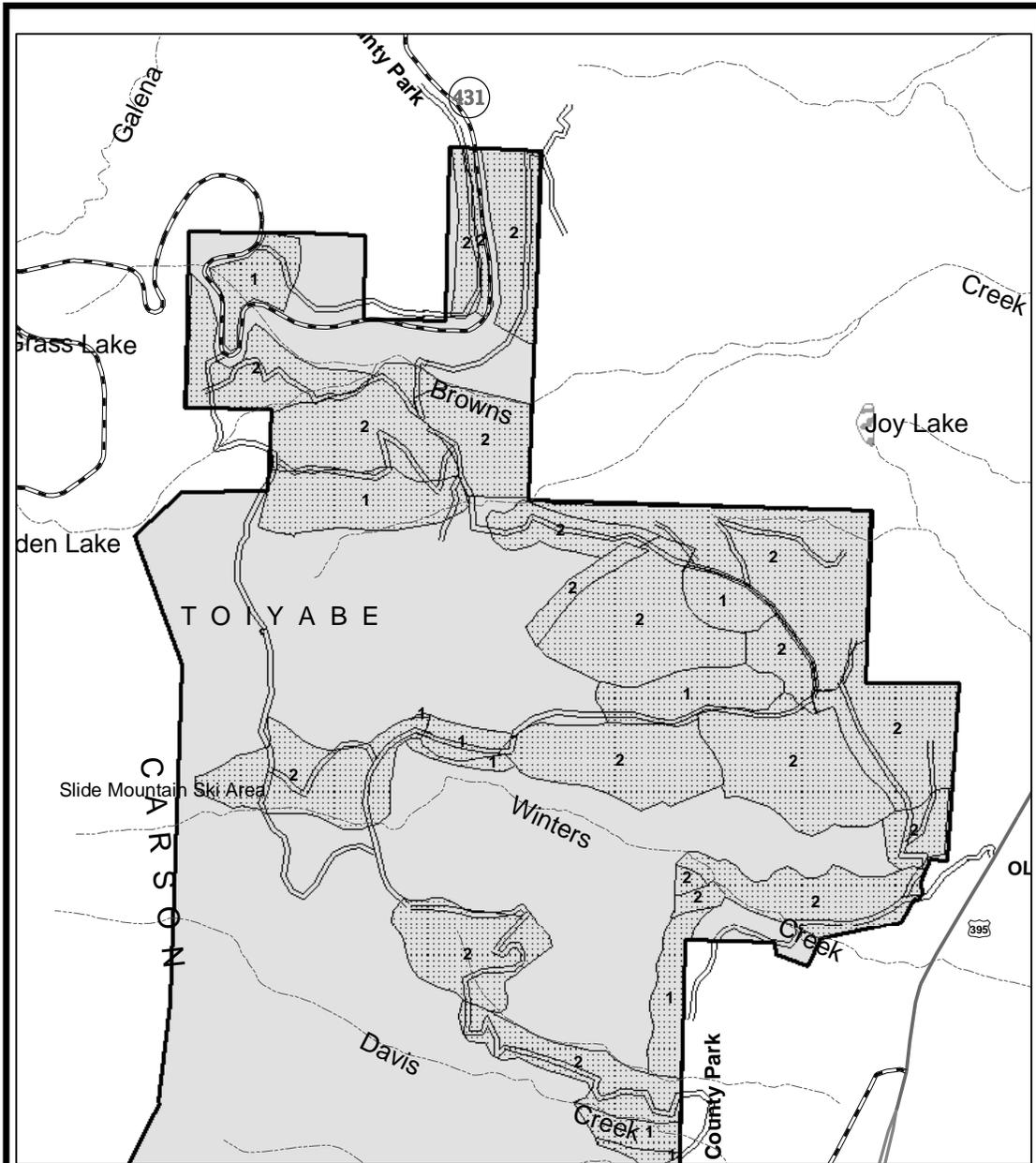
You are also welcome to attend a public meeting on August, 11, 2004 at 6:30 pm at the Pleasant Valley Elementary School, 405 Surrey Drive, Reno, NV 89511.

Comments received in response to this solicitation, including names and addresses of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record for this project and will be available for public inspection and will be released if requested under the Freedom of Information Act.

Additional information on the proposed action and the public meeting may be obtained by contacting David Loomis, North Washoe Valley Hazardous Fuels Reduction Project Manger, 1536 South Carson Street, Carson City, NV 89703; phone (775) 882-2766 fax (775) 884-8199.

NORTH WASHOE FUELS PROJECT OVERVIEW





North Washoe Fuels Project

- Legend**
- Proposed Roads
 - ⊔ Proposed Treatment Units
 - ▭ Project Area

North

- Treatments**
- 1 - Brush Removal, Pile & Burn
 - 2 - Thin trees, Pile & Burn Slash
 - 3 - Broadcast Burn

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