

# ELDORADO NATIONAL FOREST PLACERVILLE RANGER DISTRICT

## BIOLOGICAL EVALUATION FOR SENSITIVE PLANTS FOR THE PROPOSED LAST CHANCE FUELS REDUCTION PROJECT

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### I. INTRODUCTION

This biological evaluation (BE) analyzes the potential effects of the proposed Last Chance Fuels Reduction Project on the 15 sensitive plant species currently listed by the Regional Forester for the Eldorado National Forest.

No federally listed species are known from the Placerville Ranger District. One species, *Senecio layneae*, federally listed as threatened occurs at two locations on the Georgetown Ranger District. Neither *S. layneae* nor its habitat occurs in the vicinity of the proposed project.

**TABLE 1. Status of the sensitive plants known or suspected to occur on the Eldorado National Forest (California Dept. of Fish and Game 2000; Federal Register 1996)**

SPECIES	E	T	P	S	SC	R
<i>Arctostaphylos nissenana</i>				X	X	
<i>Botrychium</i> spp.				X	X	
<i>Calochortus clavatus</i> var. <i>avius</i>				X	X	
<i>Cypripedium montanum</i>				X		
<i>Draba asterophora</i> var. <i>asterophora</i>				X		
<i>Draba asterophora</i> var. <i>macrocarpa</i>				X	X	
<i>Eriogonum tripodium</i>				X		
<i>Epilobium howellii</i>				X		
<i>Horkelia parryi</i>				X	X	
<i>Lewisia longipetala</i>				X	X	
<i>Lewisia serrata</i>				X	X	
<i>Lomatium stebbinsii</i>				X	X	
<i>Navarretia prolifera</i> ssp. <i>lutea</i>				X		
<i>Phacelia stebbinsii</i>				X	X	
<i>Senecio layneae</i>		X		X		X

State & Federal Status: E = Federal Endangered; T = Federal Threatened; P = Federal Proposed; S = Region 5/Sensitive; C = Candidate; SC = Species of Concern; R = State/Rare.

The Last Chance Fuels Reduction Project lies entirely within portions of Clear Creek (260 acres), Dogtown Creek (95 acres) and Lower Steely Fork Cosumnes River (44 acres) watersheds.

There are two species of concern for this project. Three occurrences of Pleasant Valley mariposa lily (*Calochortus clavatus* var. *avius* (or CACLA) are either within or adjacent to project units. Potential habitat for Mountain lady slipper orchid (*Cypripedium montanum*) is scattered throughout the project area.

**TABLE 2. Habitat potential of the Last Chance Fuels Reduction Project analysis area for the TES plant species known or suspected to occur on the Eldorado National Forest**

SPECIES	POTENTIAL YES/NO	RATIONALE FOR DETERMINATION OF NO EFFECT
<i>Arctostaphylos nissenana</i>	No	This species grows on shallow shale soils often associated with closed-cone conifer forest. This project will not affect this habitat.
<i>Botrychium</i> spp.	No	This complex of species is found in wet meadows and marshes, and also along the edges of lakes and streams. The proposed project will not affect this habitat.
<i>Calochortus clavatus</i> var. <i>avius</i>	No	
<i>Cypripedium montanum</i>	Yes	
<i>Draba asterophora</i> var. <i>asterophora</i>	No	This subspecies is restricted to subalpine and alpine habitats above 8,600 feet. Implementation of this project will not affect its habitat
<i>Draba asterophora</i> var. <i>macrocarpa</i>	No	This taxon is restricted to subalpine and alpine habitats above 8,400 feet in elevation. The proposed project will not affect this habitat
<i>Eriogonum tripodum</i>	No	This shrubby buckwheat is a serpentine endemic. No habitat has been identified in the project area.
<i>Epilobium howellii</i>	No	Subalpine fireweed occurs in wet meadows and seeps in subalpine coniferous forest at elevations above 6,500 feet. No project units occur in this habitat.
<i>Horkelia parryi</i>	No	This species is found in open chaparral and cismontane woodland on lone formation soils, none of which are found in the project area.
<i>Lewisia longipetala</i>	No	This species is restricted to subalpine and alpine habitats above 8,600 feet in elevation.
<i>Lewisia serrata</i>	No	This plants habitat -- steep nearly vertical cliffs -- will not be affected by the proposed action.
<i>Lomatium stebbinsii</i>	No	This perennial herb is known only from the Stanislaus N.F. and has yet to be detected on the Eldorado. Its habitat, rocky, barren ridges and spurs, will not be affected by the proposed action.
<i>Meesia triquetra</i> <i>M. uliginosa</i>	No	These mosses seem to prefer acidic meadows at elevations between 4,200 to 8,200 feet. Cold, spring-fed fens in permanently saturated meadows seen essential. No habitat occurs in the project area.
<i>Navarretia prolifera</i> ssp. <i>lutea</i>	No	This portion of the Placerville Ranger District is outside of the known and predicted range for this taxon. Previous surveys of suitable habitat in the vicinity of the project area have been negative.

<i>Phacelia stebbinsii</i>	No	This species has not been found south of Hwy 50. Its habitat- rocky sites on steep slopes and cliffs—protects it from impacts associated with timber/plantation activities.
<i>Senecio layneae</i>	No	This Federally listed plant and its habitat - oak/foothill woodlands with serpentine soils – will not be affected.

## II. MANAGEMENT DIRECTION

Current policy as stated in the Forest Service Manual (FSM 2670.32) includes the following:

1. Avoid or minimize impacts to species whose viability has been identified as a concern.
2. If impacts cannot be avoided, analyze the significance of the potential adverse effects on the population, or its habitat within the area of concern, and on the species as a whole.

The goal of the Forest Sensitive Plant Program is to maintain viable populations of sensitive plant species, and under Management Practice 49, the General Direction is to "(p)rovide for protection and habitat needs of sensitive plants so that Forest activities will not jeopardize the continued existence of such species" (Land and Resource Management Plan 1989).

### **Pleasant Valley mariposa lily (*Calochortus clavatus* var. *avius*)**

A species management guide has not yet been prepared for Pleasant Valley mariposa lily, nor have specific management objectives been identified for this USFWS Species of Concern. Management of this species is constrained by inherent biological factors. Due to environmental conditions, individual plants within a population may or may not produce leaves or a flowering stalk in successive years. Occurrences can then appear to fluctuate in numbers from year to year. It is conceivable that small occurrences may be undetectable in certain years.

The current condition of sensitive plant species on the Eldorado National Forest reflects the effects of past and present management activities as well as climatic change and variation. Presently there is not enough evidence to suggest whether Pleasant Valley mariposa lily populations and/or ranges are increasing, decreasing, or stable. Monitoring of occurrences which detect decreases or increases from year to year may merely reflect normal variation in individual numbers as a response to annual climatic changes. Recent increases in the number of known occurrences may be the result of increasing survey efforts rather than population expansion. This latter supposition is supported by the fact that the recent discoveries of new Pleasant Valley mariposa lily occurrences have not increased the known historical range for this species. Given the lack of data needed to take a proactive management approach to these sensitive plant species, the best available interim management approach would be to minimize impacts to known occurrences of sensitive plant species while allowing expansion into suitable unoccupied habitat.

### **Mountain lady's slipper (*Cypripedium montanum*)**

A species management guide has not been prepared for mountain lady's slipper nor have specific management objectives been identified for this Forest Service (R5) sensitive

species. The absence of specific management objectives is largely due to a lack of data concerning the viability of this species.

Mountain lady's slipper is known from a single occurrence on Sierra Pacific Industries (SPI) land within the boundary of the Amador Ranger District on the Eldorado National Forest. It is suspected to occur in other locations on the Forest based on the existence of habitat similar to that which occurs there and on the Stanislaus and the Plumas National Forests.

The absence of data concerning trends in population numbers, plant vigor, and reproductive success for this plant species necessitates a conservative approach to the determination of effects in regards to these activities.

### **III. PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

The Placerville Ranger District proposes to establish a system of fuel reduction zones along primary ridges in the Henry's Diggins and Leoni Meadow areas. Treatments are designed to tie in with fuel reduction work accomplished along Caldor Railroad Grade and Plummer Ridge and past treatments in the Clear Creek area. The areas proposed for treatment form the base for establishing contiguous fuel treatments along ridges from the community of Grizzly Flat southeast to Leoni Meadow.

Vegetation treatments in all stands would be based on stand specific information and designed to meet SNFPA land allocation guidelines for the amount of the stand treated, residual live crown base height, and diameter limits. Generally, silvicultural goals for this area are to protect large trees, increase growth of medium sized trees, and remove smaller trees to reduce fuel ladders.

Post mechanical/hand treatment evaluations of site-specific fuel conditions would be done to determine the need for follow-up prescribed burning.

If project activities result in disturbances that require mulching, all material used for soil stabilization will be certified weed-free. A certificate from the county of origin stating the material was inspected is required. Weed-free rice straw is readily available and is the preferred mulch for this project. Any seed used for restoration or erosion control will be from a locally collected source (ENF Seed, Mulch and Fertilizer Prescription, March 21, 2000).

### **IV. RANGE, DISTRIBUTION, AND DESIRED FUTURE CONDITION**

#### **Pleasant Valley mariposa lily (*Calochortus clavatus* var. *avius*)**

Acquiring an understanding of this plant's population biology is constrained by the fact that within an occurrence, the number of plants that produce leaves and flowering stalks varies greatly from year to year. An individual plant may flower in consecutive years or may remain rather inconspicuous in the vegetative state for one or more years. In drought years, some plants may remain dormant and not even produce the single leaf characteristic of non-flowering individuals. These features make it difficult to accurately estimate the true population size in any one year, and areas apparently devoid of plants may actually support numerous individuals.

## **Range and Distribution**

Pleasant Valley mariposa lily is endemic to the Eldorado National Forest and adjoining private lands in the area between Union Valley Reservoir and the North Fork of the Mokelumne River and is currently known to occur at 124 locations within this roughly 420 square-mile area (Forest maps/Sensitive Plant files 1994). Of these 124 occurrences, 12 are located on private lands, 4 are located on both private and Forest Service lands and the remaining 109 occur entirely on federal lands.

Discoveries in recent years have not substantially increased the known range of Pleasant Valley mariposa lily. Historical accounts include a report of Pleasant Valley mariposa lily from Mariposa County, but no collections survive and the precise identity of the plants at this location have never been independently confirmed (Farwig 1991). This site (White Rock) has been subsequently altered by the development of the White Rock Mine, and Pleasant Valley mariposa lily has yet to be (re-)discovered outside of the range described above.

## **Suitable Habitat**

The following description of suitable habitat is based on an analysis of the data compiled from the occurrence records for all 124 known occurrences of Pleasant Valley mariposa lily (Forest/District maps/Sensitive Plant files 1994).

Suitable habitat for Pleasant Valley mariposa lily consists of openings in mixed conifer and ponderosa pine forests, on canyon slopes, spurs, and ridges with southerly aspects, at elevations of 2,800 to 5,800 feet. These openings typically have rocky soils with surface rocks and cobbles readily apparent. No positive correlation with individual soil types has been demonstrated though a negative correlation with high timber site is apparent.

Common plant associates include ponderosa pine, incense cedar, California black oak, canyon live oak, manzanita and bear clover. The canopy cover provided by these trees and shrubs is usually under fifty percent. The presence of Pleasant Valley mariposa lily in open stands of conifers may indicate an intolerance of dense shade. Fire appears to be a key process in this plant's habitat, as evidence of fire in the form of fire scarred trees and logs is apparent at the majority of occurrences.

The habitat described above is patchy in distribution and occurs in discrete units of 1 to 40 acres separated by gaps of unsuitable habitat that vary in width from 1/8 mile to 4 or more miles. Aggregates of occurrences are found along east-west trending ridges that possess numerous south-facing spurs. Dense stands of ponderosa pine or mixed-conifer forest are usually present on the deeper soils located between islands of suitable Pleasant Valley mariposa lily habitat. Disturbances such as fire and wind throw may provide openings in the forest that are suitable for at least temporary occupancy by Pleasant Valley mariposa lily. These temporary openings in areas otherwise unsuitable for the species may provide dispersal corridors by providing opportunities for short-lived colonies of plants to produce viable seed; seed that may then be disseminated to suitable habitats that were otherwise too distant from other long-lived occurrences.

## **Desired Future Condition**

The following description of desired future condition is based on analysis of vegetation data collected from known occurrences.

Where the combination of suitable soils, aspect, elevation, and topographic position occur as described under suitable habitat, the desired future condition for these sites consists of vegetation with the following characteristics: 1) mixed-conifer timber stands with 20-60 trees (with dbh > 8 inches) per acre with an understory consisting of clumps of shrubs or scattered individuals; 2) bear clover, where present, does not form a continuous and impenetrable layer; 3) open patches between trees and shrubs support a thin cover of grasses and forbs, including Pleasant Valley mariposa lily; 4) the frequency of understory fires varies from 10-20 years.

### **Mountain Lady's Slipper Orchid (*Cypripedium montanum*)**

In California, mountain lady's slipper is an uncommon orchid. Its one to two-foot stem usually has five or six ovate-lanceolate shaped leaves distributed alternately along it. The plant sometimes bears three flowers, but most often has one or two. Flowers can be four inches across, making it the largest orchid in the state.

Threats to mountain lady's slipper include collection and habitat destruction through logging. A particularly destructive case occurred in Siskiyou County. A pre-logging survey by the Forest Service found two populations, totaling 560 plants, in a planned clear-cut unit. A search of the area several years after it was harvested revealed only five plants had survived on the edge of the clear-cut.

## **Range and Distribution**

Mountain lady's slipper has a wider range, both inside and outside the state, than do the other lady slippers that occur in California. In addition to California it grows in Wyoming, Montana, Idaho, Oregon, Washington, Alaska, British Columbia, and Alberta.

Within California it occurs in 15 counties, reaching as far south as Santa Cruz County along the coast, and down into Madera County in the Sierra Nevada, although it is not continuous within this range. For instance, while mountain lady's slipper has known occurrences on the Stanislaus and Plumas National Forests, only one recently discovered occurrence is known from the Eldorado and the species has yet to be documented on the Tahoe National Forest.

It is suspected that the range of mountain lady's slipper has been diminished. For instance in Santa Cruz County, multiple searches for documented locations have been unsuccessful. It is suspected that the pressures of population growth are resulting in loss of plants and habitat in these mountains.

## **Suitable Habitat**

Mountain lady's slipper has adapted to multiple habitats, growing in both moist and dry conditions at elevations between 600 and 6,700 feet, although it is less common above 5,500 feet. The typical moist conditions favored by this plant are sites near a stream or sometimes near the edge of a small seep with generally a northerly aspect. Mountain

lady's slipper also grows in relatively dry conditions on partially shaded sites with deep, loamy soils on north-facing slopes in mixed conifer forests.

The Eldorado National Forest has only one documented occurrence. It is located on Sierra Pacific Industries land within the Amador Ranger district. This occurrence contains two sites containing 3 to 6 individual clumps. The aspects are northwest and northeast at an elevation of 5,200 feet.

**Desired Future Condition**

An analysis of vegetation data collected from known occurrences on the Stanislaus and Plumas National Forests has been used to determine the desired future condition for this sensitive plant species on the Eldorado National Forest (Placerville Ranger District). The maintenance of the existing habitat characteristics, as described above, in largely undisturbed conditions, would provide the necessary factors to achieve and sustain desired future conditions for mountain lady's slipper orchid.

**V. EXISTING SPECIES AND HABITAT CONDITION**

**Pleasant Valley mariposa lily**

Within the Last Chance Fuels Treatment Analysis Area there are three occurrences of Pleasant Valley mariposa lily (*Calochortus clavatus* var. *avius*) or CACLA. Two of these occurrences are adjacent to treatment units. CACLA 03-87 is adjacent to Unit 3300 and CACLA 03-127 is located downslope of Unit 3231. The third occurrence, CACLA 03-67, is located across a drainage, approximately 0.5 miles from proposed units.

**Table 3. Proximity of sensitive plant occurrences to project units**

UNIT	SENSITIVE PLANT OCCURRENCE	DISTANCE
3231	CACLA 03-67	Within 0.4 mile
3231	CACLA 03-127	Adjacent
3300	CACLA 03-87	Adjacent

CACLA = *Calochortus clavatus* var. *avius* (Pleasant Valley mariposa lily)

All three occurrences will be flagged prior to implementation to ensure that the sites are not accidentally disturbed by equipment.

Numerous surveys of potential habitat for Pleasant Valley mariposa lily, which have included the project area, occurred over the last 8 to 10 years. These surveys were in support of the Clear, Tie Die, Henry's, and Lincoln Log Timber Sales as well as the Snaggletooth Roadside Salvage Sale.

Because of the number of former surveys that have occurred in the project area, undiscovered Pleasant Valley mariposa lily populations are not expected. Nevertheless, if additional plant occurrences are discovered prior to or during the implementation

phase, their habitat will be flagged, avoided and the locations reported to the sale administrator, the Forest botanist and Placerville District biologist.

No adverse effects to Pleasant Valley mariposa lily are expected to occur due to this project.

#### **Mountain lady's slipper orchid**

There are no known occurrences of mountain lady's slipper in the project area. Approximately 240 acres of potential habitat (north aspect and large old trees) within the proposed units will be surveyed in spring of 2003. Potential habitat will be flagged and avoided until the surveys are completed. Mountain lady slipper discoveries will be afforded total protection from project activities.

If during project implementation new occurrences of sensitive plants are discovered their habitat will be flagged and avoided during project activities, thereby avoiding effects from the project.

Mulch or straw used for vegetative soil stabilization will be certified weed free. If certified mulch is not available rice straw will be used. Any seed used for erosion control or restoration will be from a locally collected source (ENF Seed, Mulch and Fertilizer Prescription, March 21, 2000).

All three CACLA occurrences will be flagged for avoidance prior to implementation. The occurrences will be monitored in 2003 or 2004 when the project thinning has been completed.

- CACLA 03-87 is located near a proposed underburn unit. A road separating the occurrence and the unit will be used as a firebreak.. Flagging will protect it from accidental equipment damage during the thinning and underburn operations.
- CACLA 03-127 is just downslope from unit 3231 that is proposed for thinning and brush treatments. It will also be flagged so equipment will not accidentally damage habitat.
- CACLA 03-67 is not adjacent to any treatment units. But it will be flagged to ensure equipment or other vehicles do not accidentally damage habitat.

There are no sensitive plant occurrences located in areas proposed for underburning.

## **VI. EFFECTS**

No direct, indirect, nor cumulative effects are expected to occur to any ENF sensitive plant species due to management activities from the Last Chance Fuels Project.

## **VII. MANAGEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Lava Caps**

Lava caps are known to occur in the project area. Lava caps are recognized by the State Chapter of the California Native Plant Society as a special plant community as well as an ENF watchlist plant community. These areas provide habitat for ecologically unique plant communities. No motorized entry will be allowed. Where fuels reduction is

needed in these sensitive areas, hand treatment and/or prescribed fire will be used to protect ecologically unique plant communities.

If during project implementation new occurrences of sensitive plants are discovered their habitat will be flagged and avoided during project activities.

### **Noxious Weeds**

The project area has been surveyed for noxious weeds. One occurrence of skeletonweed (*Chondrilla juncea*) and a single scotch broom (*Cytisus scoparius*) site have been documented within the analysis area. A Noxious Weed Risk Assessment has been written (ENF 2002). This assessment looked at the current infestation sites and determined areas of potential invasion/spread from natural, non-project and project related activities. Known occurrences as well as these potential infestation areas will be analyzed for treatment in the EA. In order to prevent expansion, and eradicate existing infestations various treatment methods would be utilized.

The prevention and eradication strategy includes the following:

- 1) All off-road equipment would be cleaned to insure it is free of soil, seeds, vegetative matter or other debris before entering National Forest system land if it is known to have most recently operated in an area known to be infested with noxious weeds, or if the last operating location is unknown. The equipment would also be cleaned prior to moving from an infested treatment unit, to a unit that is free of such weeds (clause attached).
- 2) Any new infestations of noxious weeds that are discovered during implementation will be documented and locations marked. New sites would be treated by hand pulling or lopping. A list of invasive weeds that occur on this Forest is attached to this document.
- 3) Post-fuels treatment surveys would be conducted at the documented sites. Populations would be grubbed or hand-pulled prior to seed-set. Where appropriate, seeding of weed-treated areas with native grass species (ENF Seed, Mulch and Fertilizer Prescription, March 21, 2000) would be done to reduce, through competition, further weed establishment or expansion of existing infestations.

## **VIII. Mitigations and Monitoring**

### **Sensitive Plants**

Pleasant Valley mariposa lily (CACLA) occurrences will be noted on maps used by FS personnel and contractors. These areas will be avoided by equipment and not used as landings.

If other (new) sensitive plant sites are located during project implementation the areas will be avoided by equipment, mapped, flagged and reported to the Forest botanist as soon as practical.

## IX. DETERMINATION

### For Sensitive Species

It is my determination that the Last Chance Fuels Reduction Project will have no effect on *Arctostaphylos nissenana*, *Calochortus clavatus* var. *avius*, *Botrychium* spp., *Cypripedium montanum*, *Draba asterophora* var. *asterophora*, *Draba asterophora* var. *macrocarpa*, *Epilobium howellii*, *Eriogonum tripodium*, *Horkelia parryi*, *Lewisia longipetala*, *Lewisia serrata*, *Lomatium stebbinsii*, *Meesia* spp., *Navarretia prolifera* ssp. *lutea*, and *Phacelia stebbinsii*.

### For Listed Species

It is my determination that the Last Chance Fuels Reduction Project will not affect *Senecio layneae*.

## X. REFERENCES

- California Department of Fish and Game, Natural Diversity Database. January, 2002. Special Vascular Plants, Bryophytes, and Lichens List. Biannual publication, Mimeo. 150 pp.
- Eldorado National Forest. Sensitive plant habitat and occurrence maps, and unpublished occurrence records. 2002.
- Eldorado National Forest. Seed, Fertilizer and Mulch Prescriptions. March 2000.
- Eldorado National Forest. Noxious Weed GIS database. 2002.
- Eldorado National Forest. Noxious Weed Risk Assessment for the Last Chance Fuels Reduction Project. 2002.
- Eldorado National Forest Land and Resources Management Plan. 1989.
- Federal Register. Volume 58, Number 188. 1993.
- USDA Forest Service. Forest Service Manual: Wildlife, Fish, and Sensitive Plant Habitat Management (section 2670), WO Amendment 2600-90-1. Effective 6/1/90.
- USDA Forest Service. Forest Service Manual: Noxious Weed Management (section 2080). Effective 11/29/95
- USDA Forest Service. Contract Clause WO-C6-36. Equipment Cleaning (Noxious Weeds). Effective 7/00.
- USDA Forest Service. Threatened and Endangered Plants Program Handbook (R-5 FSH 2609.25) Amendment 1, Exhibit 1: R-5 Sensitive Plant Species. 1990.
- USDI Fish and Wildlife Service. Species list. May 23, 2002.

## ATTACHMENT A

*C xx.x Equipment Cleaning:* The Contractor shall ensure that prior to moving on to the project area, all off-road equipment, is free of soil, seeds, vegetative material, or other debris that could contain or hold seeds of noxious weeds. “Off Road Equipment” includes all logging, excavators, other construction machinery and brushing equipment (brush hogs, masticators, chippers) except log trucks, chip vans, service vehicles, water trucks, pickup trucks, and similar vehicles not intended for off-road use.

The Contractor shall thoroughly clean all off-road equipment before entering project areas. The Contractor shall employ whatever cleaning methods are necessary to ensure that off-road equipment is free of noxious weed seeds. Equipment shall be considered clean when a visual inspection does not disclose soil, seed, plant material, and other such debris. Disassembly of equipment components or specialized inspection tools is not required.

The Contractor shall notify the Forest Service at least 5 working days prior to moving each piece of equipment on to National Forest Land, unless otherwise agreed. Notification will include identifying the location of the equipment’s most recent operations. Unless the prior location of operation is known to be free of noxious weeds as documented in a Weed Risk Assessment, Forest Service may assume that the equipment is contaminated with noxious weed seeds. In general, because of the magnitude of the yellow starthistle infestation in northern California, equipment coming from off-forest sites will be considered contaminated and cleaning/washing will be required. Upon request of Forest Service, arrangements will be made for Forest Service to inspect each piece of equipment prior to it being placed in service.

If the Contractor is working in a Forest Service project area that is known to be infested by noxious weeds, the contractor must clean off-road equipment prior to moving equipment into another Forest Service unit that is not infested with noxious weeds.

A current list of noxious weeds of concern to the Eldorado National Forest is attached. This list is available at the Ranger District Offices or from the Forest Botanist located at the Supervisors Office.