

Black Rock Aspen Restoration Project

PURPOSE AND NEED

The Klamath National Forest (KNF) is proposing a project to restore aspen and meadow communities and reduce fire risk in habitat within the Goosenest Late-Successional Reserve (LSR). The proposed action also includes thinning in conifer plantations to release young native trees and to remove planted, off-site species. The proposed Black Rock Restoration Project is located on the Goosenest Ranger District northwest of Macdoel, California. The legal locations are section 36 in T47N R4W; section 32 in T47N R3W; sections 1, 12-14, 23, and 24 in T46N R4W; and sections 4, 5, 8, 16, 17, 20–24, 28, and 29 in T46N R3W (Mt. Diablo Meridian).

Plant communities throughout the 8,690-acre project area have changed significantly from their historic condition due to fire suppression, historic logging, and planting of off-site pines in forest openings and historic harvest units. Historic vegetation components of quaking aspen and meadows have declined across the landscape because of fire suppression and conifer encroachment. Loss of meadows and aspen stands due to conifer encroachment has increased the probability of widespread, high severity wildfire and habitat loss within the LSR. The regeneration of aspen in the project area is poor due to dense forest conditions and browsing pressure on aspen saplings

The KNF Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP) provides direction for the restoration, maintenance and recovery of ecosystems and desirable native plant species within a range of natural variability. Without restoration treatment, aspen populations and meadow communities will likely continue to decline and be replaced by coniferous forests.

Uniform pine plantations within the LSR are a result of early logging and planting operations. These plantations are overstocked with off-site pine species that are suppressing the growth of native trees. Reduction in density of non-native trees would help to hasten the development of desirable, native, large trees.

Proposed Action

The proposed action would meet the stated purpose and need by creating openings around existing live and dead aspen., thinning encroaching conifers in historic meadows, creating fuel management zones (FMZs) along main road corridors, promoting growth of young native conifers in pine plantations originally planted with off-site species, and reducing fuels in high-risk areas. Fuels reduction treatments within the FMZs would reduce fire risk and hazard and provide for improved fire fighter safety. The Proposed Action consists of the following four components.

1. Aspen and Meadow Restoration

The Proposed Action includes 890 acres of aspen and meadow restoration to facilitate aspen regeneration and re-establish meadow vegetation. Competing conifers will be removed within and adjacent to existing live and dead aspen. This treatment is expected to stimulate sprouting from

underground roots. Conifers less than 26 inches diameter at breast height (dbh) and within a distance of 100 to 150 feet of existing aspen will be thinned to 13 trees per acre, retaining the largest trees where possible. Meadow sizes and spatial distribution would be restored by removing encroaching conifers. Grazing management strategies will be implemented to minimize aspen regeneration damage.

2. FMZ Treatments

Thinning and fuel removal is proposed in strategic areas on 300 acres in order to reduce susceptibility of crown fire, reduce surface fuels to minimize potential fireline intensity, and create areas where fire suppression efforts can be conducted more safely. Linear FMZs will be approximately 300 feet wide with 150 feet on either side of the road. Small diameter trees (<10" dbh) will be removed to reduced ladder fuels. All activity generated slash will be piled and burned and all downed logs >16" dbh will be left intact for wildlife purposes.

3. Off-Site Conifer Removal and Young Native Tree Growth

Thinning will occur on overstocked 20 to 50-year old lodgepole and Jeffrey pine plantations to release young native Shasta red fir, promote growth of large diameter trees, and vary stem spacing to mimic a clumpy horizontal structure more characteristic of a natural stand. Thinning and mowing is proposed on 1,200 acres of plantation within the project area. Small diameter lodgepole and Jeffrey pine (<10" dbh) will be harvested for biomass in overstocked plantations and lodgepole pine, <20" dbh, showing signs of a current mountain pine beetle, *Dendroctonus frontalis*, will be removed. Post-treatment assessments will determine whether additional mowing would be necessary to achieve the proposed action.

4. Road Management

System roads will be maintained as needed. The proposed action does not call for the development of new roads. Temporary spurs will be located on old spur road locations and obliterated after the management activities in the proposed action are completed.