

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Forest Service
Pacific-Southwest Region

DECISION MEMO

Yreka Hazardous Fuels Reduction Project

Scott River Ranger District
Klamath National Forest
Siskiyou County, California

Decision

The Yreka Hazardous Fuels Reduction Project will implement a portion of the fuels reduction strategy designed to reduce the threat of fire to the City of Yreka and private lands with residences in the Yreka Community Threat Zone. The Threat Zone encompasses a buffered distance of 1 ½ miles around the incorporated city and private property with structures outside of the incorporated area. Within the Threat Zone is a Defense Zone that is the first ¼ mile of the buffered area.

The objectives are to reduce fuels within the Defense Zone to a condition that will not allow for flame lengths of greater than four feet to occur and within the remaining Threat Zone will not allow for flame lengths greater than eight feet to occur during 90th percentile weather conditions (hot, dry, late summer conditions). Also within the Defense Zone crown fires are not acceptable. Within the Threat Zone, crown fires may occur, but need to drop to the ground and become surface fires within the Defense Zone. Key ridges and roads within the Threat Zone are a priority for reducing flame lengths to less than four feet. These are areas where wildfires would be contained during suppression. Treatment objectives are to provide for firefighter safety during suppression.

I have decided to implement a proposal this year that will mechanically treat 300 acres of hazardous fuels along a key ridge within the Defense Zone by mastication. The project will masticate approximately 140 acres of brush and 160 acres of scrub oak and oak woodland. Within the 300 acres all the brush will be masticated on slopes <45%. Within the scrub oak and oak woodland scrub oak and conifers >8" dbh will be left in a variable spacing averaging 20' X 20'. This treatment will provide a defensible fuels condition and promote the development of larger oak woodland trees that provide important wildlife habitat and are resistant to fire. Project operations could begin as early as July 2003. Completion is anticipated by November 2003. The project is located in T45N, R7W, Sections 19 and 20; west of the City of Yreka.

Management direction for the Forest is provided by the Klamath Land and Resource Management Plan (1995) which incorporates the Record of Decision for Amendments to Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management Planning Documents within the range of the Northern Spotted Owl (ROD). The Klamath Land and Resource Management Plan (KLRMP) was developed utilizing the guidelines provided by the Forest and Rangelands Renewable Resource Planning Act of 1974, as amended by the National Forest Management Act (NFMA) of 1976 and the National Environmental Policy Act of 1976.

The KLRMP assumes that not all acres are suitable for prescribed burning. Administrative areas, progeny sites, recreation areas, and young plantations are not scheduled for burning. Wildfires are expected to burn approximately 12,000 acres per year. In addition the Forest expects to treat through mechanical means or prescribed fire approximately 27,000 acres per year.

In 2000, the National Fire Plan was implemented for all land and resource agencies including the U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, National Park Service, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The highest priorities hazardous fuels reduction were communities at risk, readily accessible municipal watersheds, threatened and endangered species habitat, and other important local features where conditions favor uncharacteristically intense fires. Fuel management activities would incorporate treatments necessary to change stand conditions from higher hazard to lower hazard. A priority focus is to protect communities within the wildland urban interface. Projects implementing the National Fire Plan began in Fiscal Year 2001 and are expected to continue for several years across the western United States.

In 2001, the 10-year Comprehensive Strategy was signed with reduction of hazardous fuels as a priority, and in 2002 the President's Healthy Forests Initiative was introduced to help implement hazardous fuels reduction projects.

I believe that the design of this project will achieve the objectives of reducing the fuel hazard, improving firefighter and public safety. It will initiate the Yreka Fuel Reduction Strategy with a low risk project that can be used as an example to interested individuals as to the benefits that these treatments can provide. The projects design includes the use of Best Management Practices, such as buffers on geologically sensitive areas and washing of equipment which will allow these treatments to be accomplished in an environmentally conscious manner and be consistent with the Aquatic Conservation Strategy.

Scoping and Public Involvement

The project was first listed in the Klamath National Forest's Winter 2003 Schedule of Proposed Actions. A scoping letter was mailed to 285 individuals, groups, tribes and agencies that had expressed interest in the project or might be affected by the project or strategy. Comments received have been favorable for the project. No comments have been received that indicate any extraordinary circumstances are present. Letters received and a phone log are in the project file.

Will Arcand of the North Coast Water Quality Control Board discussed the project with Jeff Keiser of the Scott River District by telephone and had no concerns about this project as it is planned. Will gave instructions on submitting a waiver for timber operations that will be required by his office.

Reasons for Categorically Excluding the Proposed Action

This project is covered under the provisions of FSH 1909.15, 31.2 category 6. "Thinning or brush control to improve growth or to reduce fire hazard." The environmental impact of the proposed action is minimal, and consists of mastication of decadent brush and scrub oak on slopes less than 45%. No threatened, endangered or sensitive species are known to exist within the project area. No treatments will be done on flood plains, wetlands, or municipal watersheds. There are no Congressionally designated areas, such as wilderness, wilderness study areas, or National Recreation Areas. There are no Inventoried roadless areas, or Research Natural Areas.

An Archaeologist Reconnaissance Report has been completed for the project area (May 22, 2003 by David Vann, Archaeologist) and it has been cleared for work. No cultural resources are known to exist within the project area, with a formal clearance report having been completed. All practicable means to avoid or minimize environmental harm have been adopted.

Past experience and environmental analysis reveal that no extraordinary circumstances exist that might cause the action to have significant effects upon the human environment. This proposed action is therefore excluded from further documentation in either an environmental assessment or environmental impact statement.

Findings Required by Other Laws

The following analyses have been completed for this project; some are required by law or regulation, others are not:

- As stated above an Archaeologist Reconnaissance Report was completed for this project.
- The Tier and Compliance Form has been completed by a District Wildlife Biologist for the Prescribed Fire and Fuels Hazard Reduction on the Klamath National Forest Biological Assessment (dated March 11, 2002) for project design and standard compliance documentation for wildlife species and their critical habitat listed under the Endangered Species Act and listed as Region 5 Sensitive Species.
- The District Wildlife Biologist also completed an analysis for migratory birds. The project will have no measurable negative effect to migratory bird populations and should benefit some species of migratory birds.
- The District Wildlife Biologist also completed a Survey and Manage Wildlife Report. There are no known sites or habitats for these species, surveys were not required.
- The District Wildlife Biologist completed an analysis for Management Indicator Species (MIS). The project will not remove MIS habitats. Oak habitat with larger size trees will be beneficial to Acorn Woodpecker and Western Grey Squirrel.
- A Forest Fisheries Biologist completed the Biological Assessment and Evaluation Tier and Compliance Form for the Fuel Hazard Reduction Actions Biological Assessment and Evaluation on the Klamath National Forest (dated August 23, 2001). There will be no effects on fish from this project.
- The District Hydrologist/Geologist did an Assessment of Potential Watershed Effects. There is essentially no risk of an adverse effect on water quality or beneficial uses. BMPs for mastication will be followed.
- The District Botanist completed a Biological Assessment for Threatened, Endangered, and Proposed Plant Species and a Survey and Manage (S&M) Report and a Noxious Weed Assessment for this project. No habitats exist for listed Threatened, Endangered, Sensitive (TES) or S&M plant species, and no surveys are required to determine presence. No Federally listed or proposed plant species will be affected by this project. There are no impacts to Sensitive plant species. There will be no impacts to S&M plant species. There is a low risk of noxious weed spread within the project area. Mitigation measures recommended by the District Botanist will be incorporated into the project.
- A Forest Landscape Architect completed a Scenery Evaluation for this project. Mitigation measures recommended by the Landscape Architect will be incorporated into the project.

➤ All vegetation manipulation complies with the requirements of 36 CFR 219.27 (b).

Administrative Review or Appeal Opportunity

My decision is not subject to administrative appeal pursuant to 36 CFR 215.8 (a) "The following decisions are not subject to appeal under this part: (4) Decisions for actions that have been categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental assessment or environmental impact statement in FSH 1909.15, Section 31.1 and 31.2, except as noted in 215.7(b)."

Implementation

Implementation of this proposal may take place immediately upon my issuance of this decision.

Contact

For further information contact: Jeff Keiser, 11263 N. Hwy 3, Fort Jones, California 96032; (530) 468-1270.

RAY A. HAUPT
Scott River District Ranger

Date

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, or marital or family status. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (Braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TDD).

To file a complaint of discrimination, write USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, Room 326-W, Whitten Building, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, D.C. 20250-9410 or call (202) 720-5964 (voice and TDD). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.