United States Department of Agriculture Forest Service

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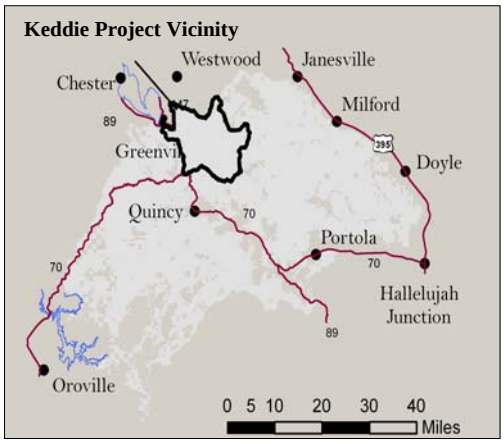
File Code: 1950
Date: December 1, 2006

Dear Friend of the Plumas National Forest & Indian Valley Property Owners,



The Mount Hough Ranger District of the Plumas National Forest and the Plumas County Fire Safe Council (PCFSC) are collaborating to reduce hazardous fuel in the Indian Valley community. This collaboration would result in a landscape-scale project with opportunities to conduct fuels management on national forest and private lands with willing property owners.

The Mount Hough Ranger District of the Plumas is beginning the environmental analysis process for the proposed Keddie Hazardous Fuel Reduction Project (referred to Keddie Project hereafter). The Forest Service is planning the Keddie Project under authorization of the Herger-Feinstein Quincy Library Group Forest Recovery Act and the Healthy Forest Restoration Act.

Concurrently, the PCFSC is initiating outreach for a project intended to assist private property owners to reduce hazardous fuel through its Community Fuel Reduction Program.

The participation of interested persons, state and local governments, and tribes is encouraged at this time and throughout the process to develop and prepare the project.

PUBLIC OPEN HOUSE

WHEN: December 14, 2006

TIME: 6 pm to 8 pm

WHERE: Greenville Town Hall

WHAT: Presentations and discussion about proposed projects

A public open house is scheduled for December 14, 2006 at the Greenville Town Hall from 6 pm to 8 pm. At this open house, staff from the Mount Hough Ranger District and members of the PCFSC Board of Directors will present additional information on the Keddie Project and solicit comments from the members of the public. The Forest Service environmental assessment will be completed and mailed to those who have submitted comments, and to those who have requested to be included on the project mailing list. The Forest Service is planning to release the final environmental analysis August 2007.

PROJECT OBJECTIVES

The Forest Service has designed the proposal to move the landscape from current conditions to desired conditions. The current condition of the landscape is a result of several decades of aggressive fire suppression, as well as past management. This has led to the buildup of fuels and the overcrowded stand conditions found today. Also, noxious weeds have been found primarily along roads and adjacent to private land. The desired condition includes relatively open forest stands dominated by fire resilient trees such as Jeffrey pine, sugar pine, and black oak. Historically, fires of low to moderate intensity maintained this open forest condition.

Recent high-intensity wildfires fueled by over-crowded stand conditions have caused concern in local communities due to the potential for loss of life and property, timber values, water quality, and wildlife habitat. To address these concerns, the January 2004 Record of Decision for the Sierra Nevada Forest Plan Amendment allowed for full implementation of the Herger-Feinstein Quincy Library Group (HFQLG) Forest Recovery Act Pilot Project. The HFQLG Act established certain vegetation management activities to be implemented in order to test their effectiveness in: reducing the potential size of wildfires, reducing risk to firefighters, and supplying timber for the economic stability of rural communities, while promoting ecological health of a forest through uneven-aged timber management.

The Forest Service has identified the following project objectives:

- Protect rural communities and forest ecosystems from high-intensity wildfire
- Promote a healthy uneven-aged, multistoried, fire-resilient forest
- Contribute to the stability and economic health of rural communities
- Control the spread and introduction of noxious weeds
- Provide access to integrated resource treatment areas and improve the road system.

PLUMAS COUNTY FIRE SAFE COUNCIL PROJECT

Since 2001 the PCFSC has provided voluntary educational firewise consultations at no cost to the homeowner and fuel reduction assistance to more than 100 property owners in the communities of Indian Falls, Cromberg and Sloat, C-Road, Delleker, Red Clover Estates and others. These projects have modified fuel on over 1,300 acres.

As a collaborative partner to the Keddie Project the PCFSC has established a goal of providing assistance to Indian Valley private property owners to reduce fuel on a minimum of 200 acres. Treatment methods will likely include mastication, handthin, pile, chip and/or burn as well as commercial thinning.

Property owners can request assistance by completing the Landowner Application that is available at http://plumasfiresafe.org/Documents/request.pdf. Information about the process used by the PCFSC is available at http://plumasfiresafe.org/Documents/hfrprocess.pdf. Property owners are also invited to participate in a web-based survey of perceptions about wildfire hazard and risk in Indian Valley being conducted by the University of California Cooperative Extension. The survey can be accessed at http://ucanr.org/firewisesurvey.htm. If you have any questions, please contact Mike De Lasaux at (530) 283-6125.

FOREST SERVICE PROPOSED ACTION (see map)

The Forest Service proposes the following actions (summarized in Tables 1 and 2) to achieve project objectives:

1) Construction of 5,706 acres of fuelbreaks known as Defensible Fuel Profile Zones (DFPZ).

A DFPZ is a strategically located strip of land approximately ¼ mile in width that is located primarily on ridges and along roads with tree crowns spaced at a distance that reduces the potential for crown fire spread (generally 40 percent canopy cover). DFPZs are designed to: 1) to modify fuels, both living and dead, to reduce the potential for sustained crown fire, 2) to provide a safer location to deploy fire suppression personnel to take action against a wildfire, and 3) decrease the potential effects of wildfire within aquatic and riparian ecosystems.

Fuels treatments in the Keddie Project would provide conditions for fire fighters to more safely contain and suppress wildfires within the vicinity of Keddie Ridge, Round Valley Reservoir, and Mt. Jura. Communities and assets at risk adjacent to or within the vicinities of these areas include Greenville, Crescent Mills, Taylorsville, Pecks Valley, Williams Valley, the Greenville Rancheria, and Round Valley Reservoir, which is the primary drinking water supply for the community of Greenville. Treatments used to construct DFPZs include:

Mechanized Thinning and Biomass Removal: Ladder and canopy fuels on approximately **2,772 acres** would be removed by thinning from below (removing small trees first). Conifers ranging from 10.0 to 29.9 inches in diameter would be removed and processed as sawlogs. Conifers ranging from 3.0 to 9.9 inches in diameter would be removed as biomass. All trees 30 inches in diameter or larger would be retained, unless removal is required for operability (e.g., new skid trails, landings, or temporary roads). Stumps in thinning units may be treated with the chemical borax to minimize spread of annosus root rot, a disease which causes decay of the roots and base of infected trees.

Mastication: Approximately **590 acres** of DFPZs would be treated through mastication using mechanical ground based equipment. Mastication would break up fuel continuity in these stands by grinding up woody shrubs and trees under 9 inches in diameter at breast height (dbh). The healthiest, largest, and tallest conifers would be left at a spacing of 18 to 25 feet, depending on size of the remaining trees.

Underburn and Hand Thin, Pile, Chip and/or Burn: An underburn is a prescribed burn under an existing canopy of trees designed to reduce excessive live and dead vegetation and is proposed on **1,604 acres**. Burning would be initiated based on carefully designed prescribed burn plans and in accordance with State Air Quality Control Board burn restrictions. Hand thinning, pile, chip, and/or burn treatments are proposed on about **469 acres**. Hand thinning and underburning is generally restricted to areas not feasible for mechanical treatment due to difficult access, excessive slope, or type/size of vegetation being removed, and firelines would be constructed around underburn units.

2) Thinning and Group Selection Timber Harvest In addition to mechanized thinning in DFPZ units described above, the Keddie project would implement mechanized thinning (**741 acres**) outside of DFPZs. Thinning overcrowded stands would improve forest health by reducing competition and favor fire resilient species. Aquatic and riparian ecosystems would benefit from thinning and would be less susceptible to crown fire. Group selection is proposed within DFPZs and outside of DFPZs (**330 acres**). Group selection involves harvest of trees less than 30 inches in diameter in small (0.5 to 2 acres) patches. Group selection harvest is not a fuels treatment, but a landscape transition to different stand structure (un-even aged), and species composition.

3) Road improvements. Use of existing and temporary roads would be needed to access proposed treatment areas. An estimated 10 miles of existing road would be reconstructed and 5 miles of new temporary road would be constructed. Temporary roads would be decommissioned after use. An estimated 5 miles of roads no longer in use or needed, and that are causing excessive resource damage, would be decommissioned or closed by various methods, such as ripping and seeding, re-contouring, or installing barriers. Future use of all other roads and user-developed OHV routes in the Keddie Project area would be determined during the Plumas National Forest's travel management process. For more information about the travel management process, visit the Plumas National Forest website at: http://www.fs.fed.us/r5/plumas/projects/ohv/

4) Noxious weeds. Approximately **80 acres** of yellow star thistle, **75 acres** of medusa head, **1 acre** of hoary cress, **1 acre** of Canada thistle, and **½ acre** of scotch broom have been located during recent plant surveys in the project area. Proposed treatments for these noxious weeds include hand pulling of scotch broom, use of direct flaming or underburning on medusa head, use of the herbicides as follows: transline® on star thistle and upland Canada thistle infestations; telar® on hoary cress; and rodeo® on Canada thistle infestations near ephemeral, intermittent, or perennial water sources.

The Forest Service currently intends to use the Stewardship contracting authority to apply the value from timber harvest to offset costs of fuel treatments.

Table 1. Summary of proposed harvest treatments

Treatment	Acres within the DFPZ Treatment	Thinning and Group Selection treatments outside DFPZ	Total Acres
Mastication	590	0	**590**
Underburn	1,604	0	**1,604**
Hand Thin, Pile, Chip and/or Burn	469	0	**469**
Mechanized Thinning and Biomass Removal-Ground based	2,547	565	**3,112**
Mechanized Thinning and Biomass Removal-Skyline	225	176	**401**
Group Selection- Ground based	254	47	**301**
Group Selection- Skyline	17	12	**29**
Total Acres	**5,706**	**800**	**6,506**

Table 2. Summary of proposed road and noxious weed treatments

Treatment	Miles or acres
Road Reconstruction	10.0
New Road Construction	0
Temporary Road Construction	5.0
Road Decommissioning/Abandonment	5
Herbicide treatment of noxious weeds	82 acres
Non-herbicide noxious weed treatments	76 acres

RESPONSIBLE OFFICIAL

James M. Peña, Forest Supervisor, P.O. Box 11500, 159 Lawrence Street, Quincy, CA 95971, is the Responsible Official.

NATURE OF DECISIONS TO BE MADE

The Responsible Office will decide to implement this proposal, implement an alternative that moves the area towards the desired condition, or not to implement any project at this time.

COMMENTS REQUESTED

The Forest Service is currently seeking information, comments, and assistance from Federal, State, Tribal, and local agencies and other individuals or organizations that may be interested in, or affected by, the proposed vegetation management activities. The public is encouraged to take part in the environmental analysis process for the Keddie Project by submitting written or oral comments on the proposal or visiting with Forest Service officials.

Comments may be:

- **Mailed** to the attention of Ryan Tompkins, Project Leader, or Merri Carol Martens, District Planner, Mt. Hough Ranger District, 39696 Highway 70, Quincy, CA 95971
- **Hand delivered** weekdays between the hours of 8:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m. (PST) at the above address
- **Faxed** to (530) 283-1821
- **Electronically mailed** to: comments-pacificsouthwest-plumas@fs.fed.us Comments submitted electronically must be in Rich Text Format (.rtf)

While public participation in this analysis is welcome at any time prior to decision, comments received within 30 days of the legal notice will be especially useful in the preparation of the environmental analysis.

The Healthy Forest Restoration Act provides an objection process after the Forest Service releases the environmental analysis and before the Responsible Office makes a final decision (36 CFR 218). In order to be eligible to file an objection to the preferred alternative, specific written comments related to the project must be submitted during scoping or other public involvement opportunities . Individual members of organizations must have submitted their own comments to meet the requirements of eligibility as an individual and objections received on behalf of an organization are considered as those of the organization only.

For more information on how this objection process works and the requirements, contact Merri Carol Martens at the Mt. Hough District Office at (530) 283-0555, or you may read the regulations under 36 CFR 218 Subpart A on the national Forest Service website at http://www.fs.fed.us/emc/applit/36cfr218a.htm.

Comments received, including the names and addresses of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record on this proposal and will be available for public inspection. (Authority: 40 CFR 1501.7 and 1508.22; Forest Service Handbook 1909.15, Section 21).

If you have questions or need additional information about this proposal or the comment procedures, please contact Ryan Tompkins, Keddie Project Leader at (530) 283-0555.

Sincerely,

\/s\/ James M. Peña	*\/s\/ Ed Harrison*
JAMES M. PEÑA	ED HARRISON
Forest Supervisor	Chair, Plumas Fire Safe Council
Plumas National Forest	