

Scoping Document – March 2009

Westside Fire Restoration

Trinity River Management Unit, South Fork Management Unit, Shasta Unit of the
Shasta-Trinity National Recreation Area
Shasta-Trinity National Forest
Trinity and Shasta Counties, CA

Project Area

The 17,654-acre Westside Fire Restoration Project area is located primarily on the west side of the Shasta-Trinity National Forest. The forest types are ponderosa pine and mixed conifer.

The legal description for the project area includes parts of township (T) 33 north (N), range (R) 5 west (W), T 27N-T33N, R11W- R12W Mount Diablo Base Meridian, T1N-T5N, R6E-R8E Humboldt Base Meridian. West of Interstate 5 on the Shasta Trinity National Forest

I. Background

Numerous wildfires were initiated by lightning during the summer of 2007 and 2008 on the Shasta-Trinity National Forest (Forest). Many of these fires burned together forming large wildfire complexes ultimately affecting more than 200,000 acres on the Forest, predominately on National Forest administered lands within Trinity County. Enormous public resources were expended during fire suppression efforts to protect life, property and natural resources over a period of months. In the aftermath of the fires, numerous restoration projects and hazard mitigation activities have been implemented or are in the planning stages to address specific resource concerns. The Westside Fire Reforestation project will focus on replanting areas burned into deforested condition where reforestation is consistent with the Shasta-Trinity National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) standards and guidelines.

The Forest proposes to reforest approximately 17,654 acres deforested by 2007 and 2008 wildfires. In some areas dead trees and shrubs are so concentrated that reforestation is not feasible unless the concentrations are reduced by site preparation. In those areas identified for preparation prior to planting, site preparation would provide for better access for tree planting, improve seedling survival and reduce fuel loadings that would threaten maturing trees in the future. Commercial salvage in these areas is not feasible due to both economic considerations and resource limitations. These include the following factors: long timeframes required for the planning process, likely deterioration of the dead trees based on size and species during the planning period, access and topography limitations, and operating and logging system limitations for sensitive resources.

Actions will be proposed in wildfire affected areas located in the following land allocations: the Hayfork Adaptive Management Area, Matrix, Riparian Reserves, and Late-Successional Reserves.

An environmental analysis will be prepared for this project in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and other relevant federal and state laws and regulations.

II. Purpose and Need for Action

The overall need for this project is to establish appropriate forest cover on wildfire affected areas. Approximately 8,982 acres of reforestation need have been identified within existing plantations established following past regeneration harvests. The remainders of the areas, approximately 8,672 acres, have been identified as moderate to high fire severity areas that are deforested. With no action, the establishment of appropriate forest cover will be delayed.

The project will be designed to be consistent with standards and guidelines in the Forest Plan in order to ensure that silvicultural objectives will be achieved in the context of sustainable ecosystem management including compliance with the National Forest Management Act (NFMA) of 1976. Section 4 of the NFMA states: "(d)(1) It is the policy of the Congress that all forested lands in the National Forest System shall be maintained in appropriate forest cover with species of trees, degree of stocking, rate of growth, and conditions of stand designed to secure the maximum benefits of multiple use sustained yield management in accordance with land management plans."

The specific purpose of this project is to rapidly establish forest cover in fire affected areas. The existing conditions vary from the desired conditions (Table 1).

Table 1. Comparison of the existing and desired conditions associated with the Westside Fire Reforestation on the Shasta-Trinity National Forest.

Existing Condition	Within the fire perimeters approximately 17,654 acres of forested lands has been deforested. If no action is taken the establishment of appropriate forest cover will be delayed.
Desired Condition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rapid establishment of appropriate forest cover in fire affected areas. • Establishment of a minimum of 75 to 150 trees per acre within five years depending on the site and forest type. • Tree species diversity will mimic that which occurs naturally in the area. • Natural regeneration will take place in those places where conditions allow.

Specific stand management objectives associated with the Purpose and Need for this proposal include:

- Establish a minimum of between 75 – 150 trees per acre within five years depending on the site and forest type.
- Plant an appropriate mix of coniferous tree species that occur naturally.
- Encourage establishment of natural coniferous and deciduous regeneration where possible.

Treatments proposed to attain these objectives should:

- Minimize adverse soil impacts; and,
- Minimize adverse effects on all other resources

III. Proposed Action

The Forest proposes to reforest areas affected by 2007 and 2008 wildfires, covering a potential of 17,654 acres through hand tree planting. Site preparation for planting is also proposed in order to reduce dead fuels, provide for better access for tree planting, and to improve seedling survival. Site preparation would consist primarily of machine mastication and hand cutting of burned vegetation. Fuel structure would be

changed to reduce fire severity and modify behavior. No commercial products would be removed through implementation of this project.

No new road construction or reconstruction is required to implement the proposal. The existing transportation system is sufficient to implement the activities; however, minor road maintenance may be required to improve access to some areas.

See attached vicinity map showing Westside Fire Reforestation treatment areas.

Approximately 110 acres of reforestation is proposed in the Shasta Unit of the Shasta-Trinity National Recreation Area. That area is shown on attached Map 2.

IV. Project Design Features

All activities associated with this proposed action will be in conformance with the following project design features:

A. Silviculture Prescriptions

Primary components of the prescription include:

- Site preparation for planting including hand cutting of dead shrubs and trees followed by lop and scatter or hand piling. Machine mastication would occur on slopes less than 40%.
- Plant a mixture of ponderosa pine and Douglas-fir depending on elevation, aspect and slope to a spacing of from 10 feet by 10 feet to 15 feet by 15 feet.
- Microsite planting: Plant on the north side of logs, stumps and other debris where possible.
- Conduct at least one release for growth treatment in the first three years following planting.

B. Environmental Compliance and other features

Treatments will meet the following guidelines:

- **Aquatic Conservation Strategy Objectives (ACS)** (as detailed in the Northwest Forest Plan pgs B-9 to B34);
- **Road construction** - No new road construction, vehicle access limited to existing roads, skid trails, landings;
- **Other legislative mandates** for the Forest Service to manage lands and resources such as the Clean Water Act, National Environmental Policy Act, Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA), and the Endangered Species Act;
- **Best Management Practices** for management of water quality;
- **Noxious Weed Prevention** - Requirement to clean vehicles and large equipment of soil by steam cleaning or use of a high-pressure hose. Cleaning shall be inspected and approved by the Forest Service;
- **Wet Weather Operations**;
- **Stream Protection** - Minimize disturbance of existing vegetation within the road clearing limits, at stream crossings, and approved disposal sites to the extent necessary to restore/maintain the hydrologic function of the subject road;

- **T E & S species conservation** - All Limited Operating Periods designated in Biological Assessments for the protection of listed wildlife and fish species. Wildlife operating periods for spotted owl will allow for up to two hours of noise disturbing work on roads during the breeding season where the activity is within ¼ mile of suitable habitat. Activities exceeding this time frame will have a seasonal restriction (February 1 through July 15) unless otherwise indicated in the Biological Assessment. For Southern Oregon/Northern California Coasts (SONCC) coho salmon, there will be no operation between October 15 and April 15, unless agreed upon by the district fisheries biologist. Examples of conditions that may warrant an extension are 1) an extended dry weather forecast or 2) a greater risk of environmental harm by leaving a site to over winter in its current condition versus finishing the work;
- **Archaeological Resources** - Historic Properties will be recorded, flagged, and avoided.
- **Public safety** during felling and/or removal operations will be afforded by warning signs, traffic control, and/or temporary closure to public travel.
- **Soil Protection Measures** - Protect soil stability on steeper slopes; protect soils productivity by using mechanical systems and equipment appropriate to fuel reduction prescriptions, and matching such systems to the conditions in the project area.

V. Management Direction

The Forest Plan issued in 1995 provides programmatic management direction for site-specific projects. Directions from the Forest Plan along with results of data collection/analysis and field review in the assessment area were used to develop the proposed action.

Designing the project to be consistent with standards and guidelines in the Forest Plan ensures that objectives are achieved in the context of sustainable ecosystem management including compliance with the National Forest Management Act (NFMA). No plan amendments will be required. Best management practices and all water quality guidelines will be followed. No new roads will be constructed.

Proposed activities would occur within Hayfork Adaptive Management Areas, Matrix, Late-Successional Reserves, and Riparian Reserves land allocations (see table 2).

Table 2. Project Acres Treated by Land Allocation

Ranger District	Late-Successional Reserves Acres	Matrix Acres	Adaptive Management Acres	Riparian Reserve Acres*	Admin. Withdrawn
Hayfork	3620	1092	2234	1148	593
Big Bar	4670	1	2229	1334	98
Yolla Bolla	311	1090	1428	571	178
Shasta NRA		40			70
Total Acres	8601	2223	5891	3053	939

* Riparian Reserve acres included within other land allocation acres

Forest Plan Record of Decision

Governing Regulations

(ROD – page 2) - The FEIS and Forest Plan were developed according to the implementing regulations of the National Forest Management Act (NFMA), Title 36, Code of Federal Regulations, Part 219 (36 CFR 219) published in 47 FR 43026 on September 30, 1982.

Timber

(ROD – page 7) - The ASQ results from a combination of even-aged and uneven-aged systems consistent with the desired future condition of the landscape. The Plan includes 3,500 acres annually of reforestation, and 5,300 acres annually of timber stand improvement including precommercial thinning, release and weeding.

(ROD – page 7) - Selection of site-specific silvicultural prescriptions at the project level will be based on analysis of current condition, requirements and regulation, and desired future conditions. (ROD – 7)

Forest Plan

Chapter 1, Purpose of the Forest Plan, item A (2) establishes Forest-wide standards and guidelines to fulfill National Forest Management Act (NFMA) requirements relating to future management activities (page 1-1)

Chapter 3 – Summary of the Analysis of the Mgt. Situation Suitable Timber land Base. The National Forest Management Act (NFMA) of 1976 required Forest personnel to do an assessment of lands which are capable, available, and tentatively suitable for timber production. Based on this assessment, completed in 1990, 622,870 acres on the Shasta Forest and 454,905 on the Trinity Forest, for a total of 1,077,775 acres, have been identified as tentatively suitable for timber production. Of this amount, 924,230 acres are suitable for all silvicultural systems (including clearcutting); 37,945 acres are suitable for all systems except clearcutting (primarily high elevation red fir); and 115,600 acres are suitable for stand maintenance or salvage only (due to site limitations such as low soil productivity, high rock content, and soils with poor water-holding capacity.) (page 3-20)

Reforestation. Artificial regeneration by planting is the most commonly used method to assure adequate and prompt regeneration. Over 130,000 acres of plantations have been artificially regenerated. Many of these plantations are less than 20-25 years of age. Over the previous decade an average of about 9,500 acres was regenerated by planting annually. The seedling survival rate after one growing season has consistently been about 85-90 percent for the pines and 70-75 percent for Douglas-fir. The success of planted seedlings, along with the natural regeneration that occurs, has resulted in a high percentage (95 percent +) of the Forests plantations meeting minimum stocking standards within five years after harvest. Natural regeneration is not normally relied on due primarily to the unreliability of natural seed sources. Past experience with natural regeneration in shelterwood and selection cuttings has resulted in failures. (page 3-20 – 21)

Chapter 4

6. Adaptive Manage Areas Legal - All activities must comply with existing laws such as Endangered Species Act, National Environmental Policy Act, National Forest Management Act, Forest Land Policy and Management Act, Federal Advisory Committee Act, National Historic Preservation Act, Clean Water Act, Clean Air Act, and treaty rights. Management and regulatory agencies should work together to

determine ways to expedite management while ensuring compliance, to improve cooperation through planning and on-the ground consultation, and to avoid confrontation. (page 4-69)

Appendix L - Descriptions of Management Practices

Timber

Intensive Management: This management practice includes the use of even-aged silvicultural systems to achieve a high timber volume output from that part of the Forest land base classified as fully suitable for timber management. Occasional use of uneven- aged silvicultural systems may be warranted. The goal is to capture a large percentage of the potential yield. Cutting units are generally greater than 5 acres and less than 40 acres in size, averaging between 10-20 acres. Timber yields are chargeable towards the Allowable Sale Quantity (ASQ).

This timber management regime assumes a wide range of cultural and silvicultural treatments including: (1) precommercial thinning to maintain optimal growth rates; (2) brush control (release) to reduce competition; (3) appropriate intermediate harvest methods including commercial thinnings and sanitation salvage; (4) appropriate final harvest methods under a variety of even-aged silviculture including regeneration cutting systems such as clearcutting, green tree retention, and shelterwood cutting and occasional uneven-aged systems such as selection cutting; (5) site preparation; (6) artificial reforestation by planting; and (7) the inclusion of genetic improvement and fertilization, as feasible. (page L 6-7)

Modified Management: This management practice includes timber and silvicultural related activities which will be implemented primarily to meet other special resource management objectives, such as recreation, visual, wildlife, or watershed objectives. Timber is managed with the goal of yielding about 70-80 percent of the biological potential from suitable timber lands. Reduced yields are the result of extended rotations and/or less area harvested. Timber yields are chargeable towards the ASQ. Silvicultural and cultural practices are similar to the intensive management practice and may include site preparation, reforestation, release, stocking control by thinning, sanitation/salvage cutting, and regeneration cutting. However, the intensity and scope of these treatments is often less than under the intensive management practice. Regeneration cutting is normally done by a mix of even aged and uneven-aged systems. (page L – 7)

Uneven-Aged Management: This management practice includes the use of uneven aged silvicultural systems to achieve resource objectives. There are two options available: single tree selection or group selection. Normally, group selection cutting methods will be used with stands typically ranging from about a tenth of an acre to two acres in size.

Under the uneven-aged option, practices will be employed in special management situations where the land is suitable for timber management, but where it is more appropriately allocated to purposes which make it desirable to maintain a continuous forest cover over time. Three or more distinct size/age classes will be present in a stand at all times. Cultural practices will normally include site preparation for reforestation. Both artificial and natural regeneration methods will be employed. Timber stand improvement, including release and thinning, will be used as necessary. (page L – 8)

VI. Decision Documentation

A determination as to whether this proposal may be categorically excluded (CE) from the requirement to prepare in an Environmental Assessment (EA) or Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) as provided by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) (40 Code of Federal Regulation (CFR) 1508.4) is

underway. The category of action being considered is identified in Forest Service Environmental Policy and Procedures Handbook (FSH) 1909.15, Section 31.2 (5), “Regeneration of an area to native tree species, including site preparation that does not involve the use of herbicides or result in vegetation type conversion. Examples include but are not limited to: (ii) Planting trees or mechanical seed dispersal of native tree species following a fire, flood, or landslide. A proposed action may be categorically excluded from further analysis and documentation in an EIS or EA only if there are no extraordinary circumstances (FSH 1909.15, section 30.3). If the analysis confirms no extraordinary circumstances exist a supporting record will be developed and the decision to proceed will be documented in a decision memo.

