



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

Shasta-Trinity
National
Forest

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Down River Community Protection Project Scoping Letter

Dear Interested Party,

The Shasta-Trinity National Forest is proposing an Environmental Assessment (EA) project for hazardous fuels reduction in the vicinity of Junction City, Big Flat, Big Bar, Del Loma, Burnt Ranch, and Denny communities (collectively referred to as the Down River Communities). These communities occur along the main stem of the Trinity River and State Highway 299 (except Denny), in Trinity County, and contain about 36,000 acres of Wildland Urban Interface (WUI). This project is being developed in response to the 2006 Bar Complex and 2008 Iron Complex fires.

The proposed action is designed to break up the landscape in strategic areas to slow and/or stop large wildfires, provide safe access and egress for firefighters and the public, and to reduce hazardous fuels adjacent to private property within the WUI to reduce the risk to life, property, and health. The project is part of a collaborative effort among federal, state, and county agencies and the public. The proposed action is consistent with the 2005 Trinity County Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP). Input from local residents was used to locate and specify values at risk and areas that need pre-fire treatments such as shaded fuel breaks, defensible space around residences, and plantations.¹

The proposed action is intended to initiate a long-term process for incrementally reducing the risk of high intensity² wildfire to the Down River Communities.

The majority of the project is located within the Trinity River Management Unit of the Shasta-Trinity National Forest. Legal locations for proposed activities are sections 13, 14, 23, 24, 26, 27, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35 of T 34N, R 12W; and sections 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, of T 33N, R 12W; and sections 19, 20 33, 34 of T 34N, R 11W; and sections 2, 3, 10, 11, 14, 15, 16, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 27, 28, of T 33N, R 11W (Mount Diablo Meridian). In addition, sections 27, 28, 33, 34, 5 T 7N, R 7E and sections 2, 3, 4, 5, 11, 12, 13, 36 of T 6N, R 7E, and sections 18, 19, , 30, 31of T 6N, R 8E, and sections 1, 12, 13, 14, 25 of T 5N, R 7E; and sections 6, 7, 18, 19, 30 of T 5N, R 8E; and sections 9, 21 of T 4N, R 8E; and sections 8, 9, 10, 11, 15, 21, 22, 23, 28 of T 5N R 6E (Humboldt Meridian). A small portion of the project area falls within the South Fork Management Unit of the Shasta-Trinity National Forest and is located in sections 21, 22, 27, 28 of T 33N, R 11W (Mount Diablo Meridian).

¹ *Trinity County Community Wildfire Protection Plan with Recommendations on Trinity County Values at Risk from Fire and Pre-Fire Fuels Treatment Opportunities*. Report to the Trinity County Fire Safe Council from TCRCD & WRTC.

² High intensity wildfire is fire that burns at moderate to high severity that generally kills all of the trees in a given stand of trees and is also known as stand replacing fire.



WUI boundaries have been identified around communities at risk.³ The proposed project area is partially within and directly adjacent to the WUI boundaries for Junction City, Big Bar/Big Flat, Hayden/Del Loma, Burnt Ranch, and Denny (See map). As part of the August 2000 National Fire Plan, Federal agencies conduct fuels reduction in and around a WUI to reduce the risk of high intensity wildfire to people, communities, and natural resources.⁴

Please see the enclosed map for a general location of the proposed project area (internet users may view a more detailed map on the Shasta-Trinity website).

Your Involvement

The purpose of this letter is to invite you to participate in the NEPA analysis by providing your comments about this proposal during what is referred to as the public scoping process. If you have information you feel the Forest Service may not be aware of, or feel you have issues (points of dispute, debate, or disagreement) regarding potential effects of this proposed action, please send those issues in writing to the project leader (Sam Frink, c/o Weaverville Ranger District Office, P.O. Box 1190, Weaverville, CA 96093) on or before April 24, 2009. We will use any significant issues that are identified to develop alternatives to the Proposed Action.

Proposed Action

Objectives

The proposed action was designed to address the following management objectives and is consistent with the Trinity County CWPP.

1. Reduce the threat to life, property and health from future catastrophic wildfire by reducing hazardous fuels adjacent to or within the Down River Communities.
2. Protect natural resources, reduce plantation fire hazard, and preserve plantation investments.
3. Create fuel management zones, reduce fuel continuity, and create roadside fuel buffers along strategic ridge tops and roads to provide firefighters safe access where effective suppression tactics can be employed; and to provide safe access and egress for the public.

Fuel Management Zone (FMZ)

Fuel Management Zones are proposed for construction along ridge tops where firefighters have previously constructed fire lines or where fires have naturally stopped. Each FMZ would be a total of 1200 feet wide (600 feet located on each side of the ridge, excluding wilderness area entry). Thinning (prescription in Attachment A) would be done in 150-foot wide phases for the length of the FMZ. There are approximately 30 miles of FMZs totaling 3,189 acres.

³ Down River Communities at Risk are listed at Federal Register Vol. 66, No. 3, Thursday, January 4, 2001.

⁴ More information on the National Fire Plan is available online at <http://www.forestsandangelands.gov/NFP/overview.shtml>

Roadside Fuel Buffer (RFB)⁵

Roadside fuel buffers are proposed for construction along major access roads. Each RFB would be a total of 300 feet wide (150 feet located on each side of the road). Thinning⁶ would be done by cutting understory conifers 2-14 inches in diameter on a 20 foot spacing. Hardwood trees (greater than 6 feet tall) would also be thinned to two or three main stems on 15 foot spacing. Brush species would be cut and snags up to 28 inches in diameter would be removed (no snags would be removed from “Critical Northern Spotted Owl Habitat” areas unless the individual snag is a “roadside hazard”). Activity slash would be treated (chipped, masticated, piled, and/or burned). Trees (up to 14 in. diameter) would be cut and left on site for firewood gatherers in accessible areas. There are approximately 36 miles of RFBs totaling 904 acres.

Plantation Thin

Plantations selected for treatment are those that fall partially or wholly within FMZs and RFBs and are less than 21⁷ years old. On slopes 40% or less, thinning would consist of masticating trees on twenty foot spacing. Hardwood trees would be thinned down to two or three main stems on 15 foot spacing. Hardwoods less than six feet tall are considered brush and would be masticated. On slopes greater than 40% the thinning would be done by chainsaw. Tree boles would be lopped into smaller sections and scattered away from existing standing trees. Limbs and tree tops would be piled on natural flats or benches (if available) to be burned later; otherwise slash would be left on site for natural decomposition. Trees would be pruned up to six feet or up to 50% of total tree height (whichever is less). There are approximately 557 acres of plantation thin units.

Private Property Fuel Buffer

Private property fuel buffers would be approximately 150 feet wide and are located adjacent to private property. Thinning would be accomplished by cutting understory conifers 2-14 inches in diameter at a 20 foot spacing. Hardwood trees would also be thinned to two or three main stems on 15 foot spacing. Brush species (includes oaks less than six feet tall) would be cut and snags up to 28 inches in diameter would be removed (no snags would be removed from “Critical Northern Spotted Owl Habitat” areas unless the individual snag is a “hazard”). Limbs, tree tops, and natural fuels would be piled and burned. Sound tree boles (6-14 inches DBH) would be bucked into eight foot lengths and left on site for firewood gathers. All trees would be pruned up to six feet or up to 50% of total tree height (whichever is less). There are approximately 8 miles of private property fuel buffers totaling 132 acres.

Campground Thin

Thinning would be accomplished by cutting trees 2-14 inches in diameter at 20 foot spacing adjacent to campgrounds. Hardwood trees (greater than six feet tall) would be thinned to two or three main stems at 15 foot spacing. Limbs, tree tops, and natural fuels would be piled and burned. Tree boles would be cut into eight foot lengths and left for firewood gathering. Brush species (includes oaks less than six feet tall) would be cut and snags up to 28 inches in diameter

⁵ A roadside fuel buffer is an area, approximately 150 feet wide off both sides of a road, where surface fuels and vegetation are altered to reduce fire behavior. The main purpose is to allow for safe access/egress for firefighters to engage in suppression and for the public to safely evacuate an area.

⁶ Mastication would occur on slopes 40% or less and the prescription would vary slightly.

⁷ Plantations greater than 20 years old are being analyzed for thinning treatments under a separate environmental analysis and will be included as a future foreseeable action analyzed for cumulative effects.

within 150 feet of roads or campsites would be removed (no snags would be removed from “Critical Northern Spotted Owl Habitat” areas unless the individual snag is a “hazard”). Approximately 42 acres adjacent to campgrounds would be treated.

Streamwood Mastication

In closed timber, thinning would be done by masticating trees ≤14 inches in diameter on 20 foot spacing. Hardwood trees would be thinned to two or three main stems on 15 foot spacing. In brush fields, mastication would be done on approximately 75% of the area leaving clumps of brush species for wildlife cover. On slopes greater than 40%, trees and brush would be cut with a chainsaw. Limbs, tree tops, and unused boles would be piled and burned. Sound tree boles would be bucked into eight foot lengths and left for firewood collection along existing roads. Spot burning of slash concentrations would be done on steep slopes where piling can not be achieved. There are approximately 214 acres of mastication.

Table 1. Proposed Activities and Estimated Acres.

Activity Name	Total Acres ⁸	Activity	Land Allocation		Management Situation		
			LSR	AMA	Riparian Reserve	Critical Habitat	Inventoried Roadless Area
Thin from below (chainsaw)	4,220	Thin from below trees 2-14 inches diameter.	1,583	2,637	493	1,896	1,518
Thin from below (mastication)	821	Thin from below trees 2-14 inches diameter on slopes less than 40%	821	0	170	361	0
Hand pile-burn, burn concentrations, and understory burn	5,196	Burn slash piles, and/or burn concentrations, and understory burn (maintenance phase)	2,404	2,637	663	2,257	1,518
Prune	2,467	Prune trees to 6 feet high or 50% of total height	1,341	1,126	366	1,083	635
Total Treated Acres	5,041		2,404	2,637	663	2,257	1,518
Hand Line Construction ⁹	163 mi.	Construct 3-foot wide handline	64	79	20	70	34
Road Decommission	0 mi.		0	0	0	0	0
Road Construction	0 mi.		0	0	0	0	0
Landings	0 ac.		0	0	0	0	0

Acres and miles are estimates based on GIS information.

From Table 1:

* 2,187 acres are within WUI

** 1,558 acres are within the Iron Complex 2008 burn and may contain dead trees

*** 485 acres are within the Bar Complex 2006 burn and may contain dead trees

Purpose and Need for Action

The overall purpose and need for action is to reduce the risk of high intensity wildfire to Down River communities. There is a need to reduce the existing fuels continuity on the landscape in order achieve the desired condition of stopping and/or slowing large high intensity wildfires,

⁸ Activity acres; includes riparian reserves.

⁹ Handline construction may occur during the initial action or during the maintenance phase or a combination of both.

providing safe access and egress for firefighters and the public, and protecting forest resources, private property, homes, and infrastructure from wildfire damage.

The need for action was identified collaboratively by the Forest Service, the Trinity County Fire Safe Council, the Trinity County Board of Supervisors, Concerned Citizens for Responsible Fire Management, and from inputs received in public meetings held since the 2008 wildfires. The need for action is supported by the Trinity County CWPP, Forest Service field reviews, analysis of post-fire vegetation conditions in the area of the Bar Complex since 2007, and more recently the 2008 Iron Complex fires “After Action review”.

The proposed action is designed to develop strategic defensible space, safe access/egress routes, and fuels reduction treatments around the greatest hazards and values at risk within the fireshed. There are currently no existing Fuel Management Zones¹⁰ (FMZ) that could be utilized to manage future large wildfires; however, there are strategic ridge tops firefighters have used several times in the past ten years to slow or stop large fires¹¹ that could be developed to meet this need. There are currently no existing roadside fuel buffers along Forest roads needed for safe access and egress for the public and firefighters. Lastly, there are a number of plantations and natural stands within and bordering the WUI that could be thinned of vegetation (live and dead) to effectively reduce fire behavior. Strategic fuels reduction in these areas is needed to reduce the likelihood of future high intensity fire.

The land allocations within this area include Commercial Wood Products, Roaded Recreation, and Late-Successional Reserves.

Decision to be Made

The decision to be made is whether to implement the project as proposed, to modify the project under an alternative that addresses significant issues and meets the purpose and need statement, or take no action at this time.

/s/ Lance Koch dated 3/26/2009

LANCE KOCH

Trinity River Management Unit District Ranger

¹⁰ An FMZ is an area where surface fuels and vegetation are altered to reduce fire behavior and fire severity effects providing defensible space. It is strategically located along a ridge top or road where effective fire suppression tactics can be employed. The width of an FMZ can range between 600 and 1200 feet and prescriptions vary with more intensive management at the ridge top or near the road.

¹¹ Big Bar Complex 1999, Bar Complex 2006 and Iron Complex 2008.