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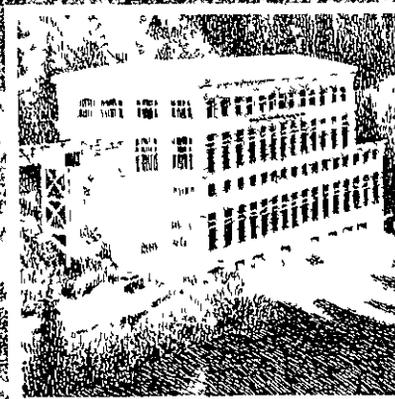
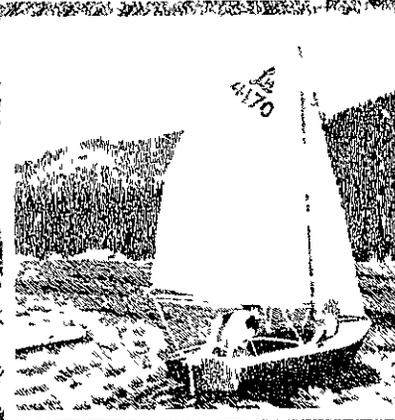
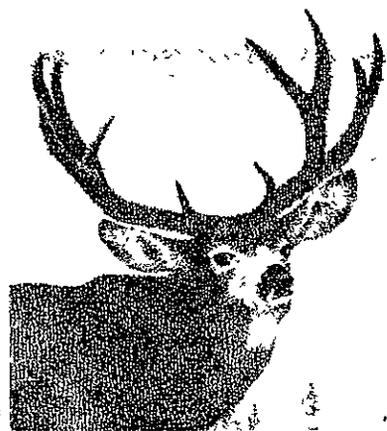


Forest Service

Pacific
Southwest
Region

Record of Decision

Land and Resource Management Plan Sierra National Forest



RECORD OF DECISION

**FINAL ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT
LAND AND RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLAN**

**SIERRA NATIONAL FOREST
U.S.D.A. FOREST SERVICE**

Fresno, Madera and Mariposa Counties, California

This document presents my decision regarding the selection of a land and resource management plan for the Sierra National Forest. It summarizes my reasons for choosing Alternative A as the basis for the Forest Plan which will be followed for the next 10 to 15 years. Estimates of the long-term environmental and economic consequences contained in the Environmental Impact Statement were considered in my decision.

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**RECORD OF DECISION
U.S.D.A.-FOREST SERVICE**

**Final Environmental Impact Statement
Sierra National Forest
Land and Resource Management Plan**

Fresno, Madera, and Mariposa Counties, California

I. THE DECISION

A. Introduction

This Record of Decision (ROD) summarizes the basis and need for the decision, presents a comparison of alternatives considered in the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) and establishes rationale for approving the Sierra National Forest Final Plan (Alternative A in the FEIS).

Since 1979, the Sierra National Forest has been engaged in land and resource management planning under provisions of the National Forest Management Act. The Final Plan and FEIS were released on April 6, 1992. To ensure that we did not overlook any critical information I delayed the Record of Decision to allow for a 60 day informal public comment period. The public comment period ended June 4, 1992.

Public comments resulted in changes, clarifications and additions to the Final Forest Plan. They include:

- * Recognition of ongoing studies and analyses of the California spotted owl and sensitive furbearers. As these studies and analyses are completed, amendments may be made to this plan.
- Provision for complete field verification of all riparian acreage within the next five years.
- Completion of a non-NRI (National Rivers Inventory) rivers assessment for eligibility within the next three years. (Forest Plan S&G #32 has been clarified.)
- * Additional specificity and clarity of a goshawk standard and guideline. (See S&G #56 in Forest Plan.)
- * Clarification that harvesting salvage in sensitive furbearer habitat areas may be permitted when accompanied by a biological evaluation and environmental analysis. (Forest Plan S&G #60 has been clarified.)
- * Cooperation with the University of California in developing definitions and methodologies with regard to "trampling and chiseling". (See S&G #76 in the Forest Plan)
- * An additional range standard and guideline that limits livestock herbaceous vegetation utilization in accordance with allowable use factor tables. (See S&G #85b in Forest Plan.)
- Recognition of the potential historical value of the Billy Creek Administrative Site. (See S&G #270 in Forest Plan.)

A more detailed discussion of these changes can be found in Section III of this document and accompanying Errata pages.

B. FEIS Alternative A as the Basis for the Forest Plan

Based on a thorough study of the resources of the Sierra National Forest (the Forest), detailed analysis of six alternatives, and review of public comments on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS), Draft Plan, Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) and Final Plan, I have selected Alternative A to provide direction for management activities in the Forest for the next 10 to 15 years. Alternative A is described in the FEIS and Final Plan. This record of decision summarizes the principal management objectives of the Forest Plan and the rationale for my decision.

It is important for the general good of the Forest to proceed with the Plan which has been long delayed. The Plan includes provisions for the protection of sensitive species, such as the California spotted owl, fisher, marten and Sierra Nevada red fox. I realize, however, that there is new information on the California spotted owl that has not yet been fully analyzed, incomplete information about the habitat needs of the other species, and that continuing efforts must be made to develop better scientific data to assure viability. The Region will cooperate with other Regions and scientists in the development of Inter-Regional Habitat Conservation Assessments, which are envisioned as comprehensive, state of knowledge documents that will describe habitat requirements and management considerations for species throughout their range on the National Forests. I will use the finished products along with information developed through implementation and monitoring of the Sierra National Forest Plan to determine whether changes to the Plan are necessary. I will make appropriate amendments to the Plan as needed. A new technical assessment of California spotted owl habitat needs was completed in May 1992. Analysis of that technical assessment is currently underway and could lead to an amendment of the Regional Guide and the Sierra National Forest Plan.

C. Overview

After nearly a century of multiple-use management by the USDA Forest Service (FS), the Sierra National Forest is an environmentally sound and highly productive forest contributing to the environmental, social, and economic needs of society. The Forest Plan continues the implementation of the multiple-use management concept. The Forest Plan will also maintain and improve quality and, where possible, productivity of Forest resources.

Over time, the appearance of the Forest as seen from local communities, major highways, and high use recreation areas will remain essentially the same as today. Productive timberlands will contain uneven-aged and even-aged stands, scattered among more natural-appearing areas. Wildlife habitat will generally be more diverse. Viable populations of existing native and desired non-native vertebrate species will be maintained. Recreational opportunities will increase. The Plan is a balance between commodity output and protection of environmental values (e.g. visual quality, wildlife, fisheries, riparian, recreation, etc.)

D. Summary of the Major Provisions of the Forest Plan

The Plan represents a balanced management program that decreases utilization of some market resources, maintains or enhances amenity values, and minimizes or avoids adverse environmental impacts. The major provisions of this Forest Plan are summarized below.

Recreation

Dispersed and developed recreation opportunities (hiking, fishing, camping, etc.) increase because of investments in new sites, trailheads, improvements to existing campgrounds, demographics and user

preferences. Dispersed recreation and wilderness use are given priority and opportunities for quality wilderness experiences enhanced. Forest trails, visitor information systems and interpretive services are improved and expanded. Access to the Forest is encouraged for all members of the public.

Expansion of overnight facilities at Huntington Lake is limited to those having approved environmental assessments until completion of the Huntington Lake Composite Plan. Decisions concerning proposed expansion that exceed approved master development plans will be included in the Huntington Lake Composite Plan.

The Forest Plan includes guidance to prepare new Forest Off Highway Vehicle (OHV) management direction that designates a road and trail system. The new OHV management direction will be completed and contribute to Plan implementation following appropriate NFMA/NEPA procedures within 18 months of the signing of this Record of Decision. Until then, the Forest's current OHV Plan is in effect

Visual Resources

Natural appearing, unmodified landscapes continue to exist in Wilderness, Management Area 11, (Dispersed Recreation with no scheduled timber harvest), Wild and Scenic Rivers corridors, Research Natural Areas, most Special Areas, SOHAs, and riparian areas. Foreground zones seen from major travel routes, reservoirs, developed recreation sites, and most major dispersed recreation areas appear natural with little evidence of human changes. Views from other areas in the Forest include various degrees of land alterations. Visual quality objectives are established for each management area and projects are designed to meet or exceed these objectives to the extent possible.

Wilderness

There are 527,938 acres designated as Wilderness. Trail rehabilitation will be completed by the year 2010 with emphasis on high-use trails and those that disperse use. The 1984 California Wilderness Act identified the Kings River B Roadless Area as the only Further Planning Area in the Forest. In 1987, this area was designated the Kings River Special Management Area. Management emphasis is for recreation; protection of the area's natural, archeological, scenic resources; and for fish and wildlife resources.

Wild and Scenic Rivers

The Forest coordinated a joint agency (Bureau of Land Management, Forest Service and National Park Service) analysis of 7 inventoried rivers for potential inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic River System. The rivers were the Middle Fork Kings, San Joaquin, Middle Fork San Joaquin and North Fork San Joaquin from their sources to Mammoth Pool, South Fork San Joaquin above Florence Lake, and Merced and South Fork Merced. In November 1987, Congress designated Segments 1-8 of the Merced, all segments of the South Fork Merced and the Middle Fork Kings as Wild and Scenic Rivers. The BLM, as a cooperating agency, will use our analysis to make their final Wild and Scenic recommendation as to river on Segments 9 and 10 of the Merced.

The Plan makes a recommendation for wild and scenic river designation for all segments of the San Joaquin on the National Rivers Inventory (NRI) except for two miles of river above high water level of Mammoth Pool Reservoir. *This segment of the river from Hells Half Acre to Mammoth Pool Reservoir is not presently recommended because of possible raising of the dam and flooding of the segment. If flooded, this segment of the river would no longer be eligible for wild and scenic river consideration. If no flooding occurs after the dam is raised or if Southern California Edison Company or the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission decides not to raise the dam, this segment will receive further consideration as a potential wild and scenic river.*

The Forest will conduct a comprehensive assessment of non-National Rivers Inventory (NRI) rivers within the next three years to determine what rivers might be eligible for wild and scenic river designation. Language has been added to forestwide Standards and Guidelines #32 to provide interim protection of the outstandingly remarkable values for rivers identified in the comprehensive assessment until a Wild and Scenic suitability decision is made.

Fishery Resources

Forest fish habitat includes about 1,800 miles of streams and rivers (1,580 miles contain fish) and 480 inventoried lakes. Demand for coldwater angling is expected to increase one to two percent annually over the next 5 decades. Generally, habitat for trout is rated medium to high quality throughout the Forest.

The Plan includes provisions to protect and maintain the fishery resource. This includes standards and guidelines for fish, watershed, riparian and Streamside Management Zones (SMZ) protection, and other provisions that reduce conflict between the maintenance and improvement of fisheries habitat and management of other resources. Fish habitat improvement projects will be implemented to improve the fishery resource.

There are two species of cutthroat trout (Lahontan and Paiute) in the Forest that are federally-listed as threatened species. These two species are managed according to their respective Federal Recovery and/or State management plans to assist in the complete recovery and delisting of the species and avoid endangered status.

Wildlife Resources

Opportunities to protect and enhance wildlife habitat are recognized in the Plan. The Forest contributes toward recovery of the American peregrine falcon in accordance with the Pacific Coast Recovery Plan Goals of protecting 6 superior nesting sites and establishing 3 nesting pairs are in the Forest Plan through a reintroduction program. Habitat is maintained for the current population of 5-10 wintering bald eagles. There are 29 designated California spotted owl habitat areas (SOHAs) of 1,650 acres each. The SOHA network complies with the Regional guidelines developed in 1984. An analysis is currently underway which could lead to an amendment of the standards and guidelines for the California spotted owl in the Regional Guide and in the Sierra National Forest Plan (see ROD pp. 15-16).

The Plan contributes toward maintaining sensitive furbearer populations by providing about 66,000 acres in 7 designated sensitive furbearer habitat management areas for fisher, marten and Sierra Nevada red fox and habitat linkage between habitat areas, adjacent forests and National Parks.

There are numerous other sensitive species on the Forest, including the goshawk and willow flycatcher. A goshawk survey is to be conducted during the next five years and a network with an average of one occupied nest site per 18 square miles of suitable habitat established, which complies with the Regional standard. The Plan directs the Forest to monitor willow flycatchers. Habitat improvements and management constraints will be implemented if declines in the species are detected through monitoring.

New information is continuing to be developed on wildlife habitat requirements. The Plan includes monitoring new information and provides for making amendments as appropriate. Harvest species including deer are emphasized by implementing habitat improvement projects. Key wildlife habitats are protected through implementation of standards and guideline for riparian areas and streamside management zones, hardwoods, snags, and retention of down logs. Timber harvest strategies are modified to improve deer habitat in 75% of the identified population centers and holding areas within the commercial forest.

Sensitive Plants

There are about 2,000 species of plants in the Forest of which 19 are listed as "sensitive" by the Regional Forester. Sensitive plants are protected to ensure they will not become federally-listed as threatened or endangered because of Forest Service activities.

Field surveys will be conducted to improve our sensitive plant data base (See Appendix B of the Plan). A monitoring program will evaluate the effects management has on these plants. Species management guides will be prepared for each sensitive plant species as ecological and management information is developed or becomes available.

Riparian Areas

The Forest Plan emphasizes protection and improvement of riparian areas. These areas are managed for wildlife and fish habitat, vegetative diversity, water quality, stream channel stability, and scenic quality. The Draft Plan identified 3,000 acres of riparian area. Field observations indicated potential inventory errors, so the Forest contracted with California State University at Fresno for a new inventory. The Final Plan is based on this new inventory, which includes 33,000 acres of riparian area. Public comments to the final plan identified potential mapping errors, therefore the inventory will be field verified over the next five years. Activities permitted in riparian areas include:

- vegetation treatments for the benefit of riparian-dependent resources, and removal of trees for public safety.
- livestock grazing compatible with protecting riparian-dependent resources.
- incidental tree removal in aerial logging system corridors (skyline or helicopter) and road and trail crossings.

The annual timber yield from 33,000 acres of riparian area on CAS land is approximately 1.5 million board feet (MMBF).

Range

Range management emphasis focuses on improving ecological conditions in riparian areas. This will primarily be accomplished by fencing riparian areas, moving livestock, improved placement of salt blocks, etc.

Grazing increases from 37,000 animal unit months (AUMs) per year to 40,000 AUMs per year by the year 2020. The increase occurs at lower elevations in annual grasslands. The purpose of the increase is to take advantage of additional forage produced through brush crushing, fuelbreak construction and maintenance, prescribed fire, construction of drift fences and water developments.

Timber

The Plan includes 328,900 acres of forested land with scheduled timber harvest. The planned annual allowable sale quantity (ASQ) is 88 MMBF. The ASQ results from a combination of both even-aged and uneven-aged harvest systems. The Plan includes an annual program of 2,970 acres of reforestation, 2,000 acres of precommercial thinning and 1,740 acres release and weeding.

The final decision on silvicultural methods is made only after a project level analysis of vegetation type, topography, other specific site conditions, and public input. However, the conventional type of clearcutting,

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where all trees are removed, will only be used under specific circumstances (see ROD, pp. 17-18). Clearcutting will only be used where this method meets management objectives better than shelterwood or selection harvest and is the optimum harvest method. This management option may be used on 1,550 acres of Forest annually (a reduction from 2,340 acres which was identified in the Draft Plan). When used, timber harvest in most clearcuts will result in a "regeneration mosaic" that leaves significant amounts of young conifers, hardwoods, snags, and down logs to meet diversity, wildlife, and soil protection objectives. Group and individual tree selection will annually be practiced on approximately 3,000 acres. These uneven-aged management practices will be carefully monitored and evaluated.

Forest Diversity

The Forest Plan provides for a wide variety of plants and animals by retaining at least five percent of each seral stage of each major vegetation type by the end of the fifth decade. The Plan also provides for a pattern of early and late seral stage habitats produced by the interspersing of less intensively managed timber stands with more intensively managed stands. This mosaic reduces the possibility of large contiguous homogenous timber stands subject to intensive timber management and helps provide wildlife travel corridors and islands of habitat within and between larger stands of vegetation. Riparian areas and sensitive furbearer corridors also create mosaic patterns and provide movement corridors. In nearly one half of the Forest, including about 528,000 acres of wilderness, 33,000 acres of riparian, 8,200 acres of research natural areas, etc., diversity will be provided and maintained by natural events such as fire, insect infestation, etc.

Timber management intensity has a major effect on diversity. The Plan includes a distribution of management intensity prescriptions that slightly favors late successional stage habitat on tentatively suitable timber land (56 percent extensive management [221,500 acres] and 44 percent intensive management [172,200 acres]). If intensively managed areas are compared to the total forested land base instead of CAS land, 69 percent (390,700 acres) is extensively managed and 31 percent intensively managed (172,200 acres). (Intensive management occurs where timber is the primary emphasis of the area being managed. Extensive management occurs in those areas that are managed to emphasize other resources where timber is a by-product).

By the end of the fifth decade, the planned timber harvest will result in 54,000 acres (10 percent) of the forested areas being in early succession stage, 76,000 acres (14 percent) in mid-succession stage and 433,000 acres (76 percent) late succession stage. Typical oldgrowth stands with multi-layered large trees, obvious signs of decadence and a tree canopy cover of over 70 percent will increase from 47,000 acres (8 percent of the forested land base) to 119,000 acres (21 percent) by the end of the fifth decade.

The Plan includes treatment of 2,000 acres of chaparral habitat per year. This treatment, in conjunction with wildfires, produces a mosaic of brush (mainly chaparral stands) including 30,000 acres of early succession stage, and 50,000 acres of late succession stage.

None of the 5,000 acres of black oak stands on CAS land are to be harvested for conversion to conifers.

Soils

Maintenance of long-term soil productivity is given a high priority through Plan standards and guidelines that leave more protective ground cover, reduce soil disturbance and erosion, and develops special soil prescriptions for sensitive areas. Minimizing reduction in long-term productivity from erosion, nutrient loss, displacement, and compaction is emphasized. Provisions are made for rehabilitation and improvement measures where needed.

Water

The Forest Plan emphasizes the protection of water quality through implementation of Best Management Practices and streamside management zone standards. Remedial action is to be taken during the first two decades to eliminate a backlog of disturbed or damaged watersheds at a rate of approximately 226 acres per year. The quantity of water produced in the forest is increased by 60,000 acre/feet per year during the first decade through fuel break construction and maintenance, wildlife burns, and timber harvesting. The Forest Plan contains a monitoring and evaluation program to ensure water quality objectives are met.

Minerals

The Forest Plan contains direction for responding to mining proposals in a manner that facilitates development while minimizing adverse impacts to the surface resources.

Lands

The Forest's administrative boundary encloses 1,395,553 acres of which 109,493 acres are private. Approximately 1,000 miles of property lines require marking and posting to acceptable standards and about 3,500 property corners need to be monumented.

The Real Estate Management Program is to be increased moderately. Land acquisition includes property that enhances management efficiency and reduces costs.

Hydroelectric Development

Hydroelectric energy is an important resource in the Forest. The Sierra National Forest is uniquely suited to hydroelectric development by virtue of its combination of geophysical occurrences - elevation drop, abundant water, and proximity to transmission grids.

The Forest presently has one licensed and one exempt project, both unconstructed run-of-the-river projects under 5 megawatts (mw); and 7 projects ranging from 5 to 590 mw, in various stages of applications for license. The existing installed capacity of approximately 2,800 mw (19 projects) could increase by 1,000 mw within the next 10 years.

The existing 19 projects encompass 59,810 acres of National Forest System Land (withdrawn) and have a great effect on Forest resources such as: fisheries, wildlife habitat, visual resources, cultural resources, *recreation development and use, etc.*

The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) has regulatory jurisdiction over the administration and licensing of hydroelectric power projects and the Forest Service is a cooperating (not lead) agency. However, when a power project is proposed for construction on National Forest System land, Section 4 (e) of the Federal Power Act specifies that the FERC make a finding that the license will not be inconsistent with the purpose for which the reservation was established. The Forest Service (in its capacity as the resource agency) can at that time recommend to FERC that the proposed project is, or is not, in the public interest.

The Forest Service is charged under Section 4 (e) with making conditions to hydroelectric licenses which are deemed "necessary for the adequate protection and utilization of Federal reservations." (16 U.S.C. 797(e)) Under this mandate, the Forest Service is responsible for assuring that the impacts of the project are mitigated adequately to protect forest resources. While not appropriate for the Forest Service to impose

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less than adequate environmental conditions to ensure or enhance the economic viability of a project, the agency will not impose conditions that go beyond those reasonably required for adequate protection.

Cultural Resources

Cultural resource management emphasizes site identification, evaluation, and management. A data recovery program is initiated on significant areas affected by land-disturbing activities. Significant sites, including areas of importance to local Native American groups, are protected where mitigation is not viable and/or acceptable.

Special Areas

The two designated Research Natural Areas (RNAs) in the Forest include Backbone Creek (430 acres) and San Joaquin Range/Blue Oak-Digger Pine (80 acres). Bishop Creek Pacific Ponderosa Pine (1140 acres) and Home Camp Creek White Fir/Red Fir (1200 acres) are recommended for RNA status.

The three existing Special Interest Areas (SIAs) in the Forest include Courtright Intrusive Contact Zone Geological Area (11 acres), Kings Cavern Geological Area (388 acres), and Carpenteria Botanical Area (500 acres). The Plan recommends four additional SIAs under 36 CFR 294.1:

- Nelder Grove Historical Area (1434 acres) which contains 106 mature giant sequoias and rich history dating back to early mule team logging.
- McKinley Grove Botanical Area (520 acres) which includes an isolated grove of giant sequoias to be used for research and ecological study.

Nelder and McKinley Groves have been given additional protection by a Presidential Proclamation (July 14, 1992) and will be managed in a manner consistent with the Regional Foresters Giant Sequoia policy letter (June 19, 1992).

- Dinkey Creek Roof Pendant Geological Area (640 acres) which features a sequence of five sedimentary rock units metamorphosed by neighboring intruded granite. The rocks are folded and faulted showing evidence of the spectacular forces involved in mountain-building.
- Devils Peak Botanical Area (1,600 acres) which includes habitat for three sensitive plant species: Yosemite onion, Congdon's woolly sunflower, and Congdon's bitterroot. These three species are also listed by the state.

The 48,668 acre Kings River Special Management Area (KRSMA) was designated by Congress in 1987. Portions of two National Forests were included, and Congress designated the Sierra National Forest as the administrative unit. A management plan for the KRSMA was completed in 1990 and is incorporated into the Forest Plan. Management emphasis includes recreation; protection of the area's natural archeological and scenic resources; and management for fish and wildlife.

The 3,200-acre Teakettle Creek Experimental Forest was designated in 1955 to provide for watershed research. This area is administrated by the Pacific Southwest Forest and Range Experiment Station.

The 4,580-acre San Joaquin Experimental Range was designated in 1934 for range research. It is under the direction of the Pacific Southwest Forest and Range Experiment Station.

Protection

A balanced fire program exists in the Plan and provides opportunities to minimize wildfire losses. A program of prevention, detection, suppression, and fuels management provides for public safety and for meeting resource objectives. Increased emphasis is placed on natural and activity fuels management. Fire suppression includes a combination of confinement, containment, and control strategies to meet resource and safety objectives while minimizing costs. Planned and unplanned ignitions in wilderness are managed as prescribed fire where fire spread is checked by natural barriers and fire effects support wilderness objectives.

Budget

The annual budget to fully implement the Plan is 23.1 million dollars (in constant 1982 dollars). Assuming an inflation rate of 4 percent, this translates to a 1992 budget of \$34.2 million. The FY 1992 budget for the Forest was \$21 million. Objectives may not be achievable in the projected time frame if budgets differ significantly from plan implementation costs. However, while budgets may influence outputs, they do not affect land allocations or standards and guidelines. Lands allocated to a certain prescription or management are not changed because of budget.

Achievement of the output levels shown in the Plan is tied to budgets. All projects funded for implementation must comply with minimum management requirements, minimum implementation requirements, and standards and guidelines in the Plan. The Plan delineates which activities are appropriate for each area of the Forest.

The Forest receives money and services from other sources. For example volunteers, youth training programs, and the Older American Program (Senior Community Service Employment Program) amount to approximately 40 person years of work per year. Money is received from the State, Fresno and Madera Counties, public utilities, private groups and individuals. See Appendix P of the FEIS for a detailed description of the budget relationship to the Forest Plan.

II. ALTERNATIVES AND ISSUES CONSIDERED

A. Issues Considered

The scoping process to determine the issues, concerns and opportunities for the Forest Plans was conducted simultaneously for all Forests in the Pacific Southwest Region between October 1979 and January 1980. Public meetings were held throughout the State and comments were received from individuals, organizations, and governmental agencies. These public issues and management concerns helped define the scope of the EIS.

For the Sierra National Forest, eight issues were addressed as a result of the original scoping process. They include Recreation, Visual Resources, Further Planning, Wild and Scenic Rivers, Fish and Wildlife, Timber, Hydroelectric Development, and Budget.

During the public comment period for the re-release of the DEIS in September of 1986, five additional issues arose from public review concerning allowable sale quantity, clearcutting, economic effect on North Fork, spotted owls and budget. A more detailed discussion of these issues can be found in Chapter 2 of the Forest Plan and Appendix A of the FEIS.

The public comments on the final plan resulted in no new issues. The comments did result in changes, clarifications and additions to the Forest Plan. In Sections I and III of this Record of Decision the changes are discussed.

B. Alternatives

In response to planning issues, concerns, legislation, and regulations, a range of alternatives was developed and analyzed in the DEIS. Each alternative reflected a different resource management emphasis resulting in different levels of outputs and services. Forestwide standards and guidelines were developed to assure careful management of all resources. More information on this process can be found in Chapter 2 of the FEIS.

The public review of the DEIS and Draft Plan helped focus on the major issues. As a result, the Forest re-evaluated the eight alternatives in the DEIS, modified some, and combined others to come up with six alternatives considered in the FEIS. The FEIS alternatives clearly address the major issues and are within the spectrum of alternatives discussed in the DEIS.

Public review and comment also helped identify changes or additions to forestwide standards and guidelines and Management Area direction in the Forest Plan and FEIS. The Forest Plan has been revised in response to this public comment.

Preferred Alternative A (PRF)

The ASQ in this alternative is reduced 37.2 MMBF from the DEIS to 88 MMBF. This alternative provides for increased dispersed recreation and emphasizes quality experience for wilderness users. It increases the level of protection for soil, water, wildlife and visual quality over the current program while slightly increasing grazing outputs in annual grasslands. This alternative establishes a high level of maintenance and improvement for wildlife habitat, riparian areas, soil productivity, water quality, and visual quality. In former roadless areas, some highly productive land is managed for timber and loses its roadless character. Other productive land retains its roadless character and is managed for dispersed recreation and/or wildlife. The ASQ of 88 MMBF remains constant through the fifth decade.

Current Alternative B (CUR)

The No Action Alternative remains unchanged from the DEIS. This alternative continues current direction, policies, and practices as of 1982. Timber, grazing, and other goods and services are provided at existing levels. A mix of recreational opportunities is provided also. Standards implemented for this alternative provide basic protection for soil productivity and water quality. All issues are addressed to the extent allowed by current direction and budget. In former roadless areas, some highly productive land is managed for timber and loses its roadless character while other productive land retains its roadless character and is managed for dispersed recreation. The ASQ is 115.6 MMBF, increasing to 125.0 MMBF by the second decade and remaining constant through the fifth decade.

Resource Planning Act (1980) Alternative C (RPA)

The ASQ in this alternative is reduced 13.3 MMBF from the DEIS, due to an increase in the riparian acreage. Even with this reduction, the ASQ provides moderately high levels of timber harvest. Livestock production also increases as does campground facilities. Increased dispersed recreation opportunities are provided and emphasis is placed on providing a quality experience for wilderness users. All unroaded areas are available for timber management activities and lose their roadless character when entered. Standards implemented for RPA provide minimum protection for soil productivity and water quality. The ASQ is 138.0 MMBF, increasing to 150.3 MMBF in the fifth decade. This alternative uses the broadest possible area for timber production. The land allocations in this alternative are the same as the land allocations recommended by the timber industry in their comments on the draft and final EIS and Plan.

Low Budget Alternative D (LBU)

The Low Budget Alternative (LBU) remains unchanged from the DEIS. This alternative provides the minimum level of activities and production prescribed by laws, regulations and Forest Service management direction. It responds to basic responsibilities of control, protection, and use of the Forest's air, land, and water resources. Production is concentrated on the existing roaded land base. No inventoried roadless areas are available for timber production. The Kings River Special Management Area is recommended for wilderness designation. Grazing remains at existing levels and harvest volume is reduced 40.4 MMBF from Current (Alternative B). This alternative provides custodial levels of protection for wildlife, riparian areas, soil productivity, and water quality. The ASQ is 75.2 MMBF, increasing to 78.4 MMBF by the fifth decade.

Amenity Alternative E (AMN)

The Amenity or Environmentally Preferable Alternative (E) as described in the DEIS is modified and provides additional protection for California spotted owls, sensitive furbearers, and riparian areas. This alternative emphasizes protection and enhancement of nonmarket values such as dispersed recreation, wilderness, wildlife and fish habitat, and environmental quality. Timber is managed on an uneven-aged harvest system on all tractor ground. Timber outputs are 25.3 MMBF less than the DEIS. In former roadless areas, some highly productive land is managed for timber and loses its roadless character. Other productive land retains its roadless character and is managed for dispersed recreation. A total of 14,490 acres of the Kings River Special Management area is recommended for wilderness. The ASQ is 77 MMBF, with no increase by the fifth decade.

Market Alternative H (MKT)

The ASQ in this alternative is reduced 12.5 MMBF from the DEIS, due to an increase in the riparian acreage. This alternative emphasizes timber production, livestock grazing and recreational camping. All unroaded areas except Mt. Raymond are available for timber harvest. Standards implemented for this alternative provide for minimum protection of such resources as riparian and streamside zones, viable wildlife populations, water quality, soil productivity, and visual quality. The ASQ is 147.5 MMBF, with no increase by the fifth decade.

C. Public Involvement

The Forest Plan scoping process was formally initiated on March 25, 1979, when a Notice of Intent was published in the Federal Register. Other notices containing preliminary issues were mailed to 500 organizations, groups, and individuals for a 30-day public comment period. During the 30-day public comment period, public meetings were held in Fresno to determine the major public issues and concerns.

In December 1979, the Forest planning team reviewed the public comments and prepared the final issues, concerns and opportunities. The final issues and related planning questions were distributed to over 500 individuals and groups.

In May of 1980, the Forest distributed a set of five preliminary alternatives to the public. More than 1400 copies of the alternatives were distributed by mail and at 10 public meetings in Fresno and mountain communities. The Forest received 30 oral statements and 190 written comments on the five preliminary alternatives.

The Draft Forest Plan and accompanying DEIS were distributed to the public during December 1981 through March 1982. During this period 8 open houses were held at the 5 District offices and in Fresno and Madera. By the end of the review period, 470 comment letters were received. The Forest Planning

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Team used the analysis of the comments on the Draft Forest Plan and DEIS in developing a final Forest Plan and FEIS in October 1982.

Before the FEIS and Plan were released to the public, the United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth circuit upheld the State of California's 1979 challenge of the Forest Service's Roadless Area Review (RARE II) EIS. The Forest was subsequently directed to re-evaluate management options in seven unroaded areas that had been allocated to non-wilderness or wilderness by RARE II. The Forest received approximately 35 comment letters during the second scoping effort.

On September 5, 1986, Notice of Availability of the Draft Environmental Impact Statement and Plan was published in the Federal Register establishing a public comment period ending January 20, 1987.

During the 4 month review period, 8 public meetings and 2 formal public hearings were held. The distribution of the planning documents and the public involvement activities that followed led to 1870 responses. These responses included approximately 6000 comments. Details on the Sierra's efforts to seek public comment are included in FEIS Appendix A, and in the planning records available to the public at the Forest Supervisor's Office.

In April 1992, the FEIS and Final Plan were released to the public for a 60 day informal review and comment period. More than 1600 copies of the FEIS, Final Plan, and summary of the Plan were distributed. In addition, a total of 16 information meetings were held in 8 communities to explain the Plan and answer any questions with regard to the FEIS and Final Plan. About 400 written letters containing about 2500 comments were received and analyzed. While this informal review and comment of the FEIS and Final Plan is above and beyond the legal requirements of National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), it was done so that the public would have another opportunity to provide meaningful input to the FEIS and Final Plan.

III. RATIONALE FOR THE DECISION

In selecting the Preferred Alternative, I considered both monetary and non-monetary costs and benefits, the capability of the land and the need for protection of resources as evaluated in the FEIS, concerns expressed by people interested in the Forest, advice received from other agencies and resource professionals, and legislative mandates of the Forest Service. National, Regional, State, and local objectives were considered in making the decision.

The ASQ of 88 MMBF is 37.2 MMBF less than in the Draft Plan. This ASQ reduction affects economic benefits and may result in the closure of at least one National Forest timber dependent sawmill. Assuming no changes in prices paid, returns to the Treasury and County are reduced 32 percent from levels in the Draft. A loss of approximately 500 jobs is associated with the reduction.

At the same time positive benefits occur for wildlife requiring dense, closed canopy forests, such as sensitive furbearers and California spotted owls. Specifically with regard to sensitive furbearers, I fully recognize our existing data are limited. I also recognize the legal requirement to maintain sufficient habitat to support viable population of sensitive species. Preserving habitat to maintain the Forest's contribution toward a viable population of furbearers will have an effect on the timber supply. Although the exact impact on the ASQ can only be determined after a sensitive furbearer habitat inventory and management plan is completed, the most current information indicates a reduction of 14 MMBF in ASQ. This reduction represents my best judgement of the effects based on existing, current information and data. It will take approximately 3-5 years to complete the furbearer inventory and management plans. Because the furbearers are classified as "sensitive" species, I have decided to protect furbearer habitat now in order to preserve future options for maintaining viable populations. This is preferable to making irretrievable and/or irreversible commitments that may foreclose the opportunity to preserve these species, in this part of their ranges, prior to completion of the furbearer inventory on management plans.

Forest planning is a dynamic process that provides for incorporating changes as new issues develop and as new and better information is collected. A plan amendment to change the ASQ will be prepared if new information supports such an action. Sensitive furbearer habitat is only one of many issues and concerns. I believe it is important to implement the many decisions in this Forest Plan without any further delay. The management direction and standards and guidelines presented in the Preferred Alternative and the Forest Plan provide the basis to manage the Sierra National Forest.

Response to the Draft and Final Plan indicated public concern for protection of recreation and amenity resources including wildlife. I agree a need exists to provide increased protection to riparian and streamside areas; to provide for wildlife habitats by maintaining hardwoods, down logs and snags, and to provide for visual quality and a range of outdoor recreation experiences. This alternative increases grazing use in annual grasslands while protecting soil and water resources. It restores damaged watersheds, and maintains soil productivity. All of these resource values are important to the public. I conclude that benefits to the public in providing these amenity values, including our legal obligation to protect federally-listed threatened and endangered species and maintain viable populations of Forest Service listed sensitive species, justifies the reduction in ASQ.

Therefore, for all of the above reasons, I judge the Preferred Alternative has the greatest long-term net public benefit when compared to other alternatives and select it to be the management direction for the Forest.

Although the Amenity Alternative has a number of benefits, I did not select it because the Preferred Alternative provides additional timber volume at a lower cost and also protects and improves other resource values. Classical uneven-aged management designed to achieve high timber yields has not been implemented over large areas for long periods of time. Therefore, high yield uneven-aged management must be tried and tested before being implemented on a large scale. Major changes in operational and administrative record-keeping systems need to be developed to implement this alternative.

The Low Budget Alternative adversely affects local communities by reducing levels of timber supply while only providing custodial care for wildlife, riparian areas, soil productivity and water quality. Timber industry related employment is reduced in the first decade and at least one National forest timber dependent sawmill will cease to operate. This alternative is not as cost efficient to implement as is the Preferred Alternative.

The Current, 1980 RPA and Market Alternatives provide less habitat for wildlife requiring dense closed canopy forests, such as sensitive furbearers and California spotted owl, and do not maintain the level of visual quality enjoyed by the public. These three alternatives, although meeting Regional requirements for riparian areas, soil protection, and diversity for wildlife, do not provide for protection and enhancement of these resources as well as the Preferred Alternative. On balance, the higher timber outputs of these three alternatives do not outweigh the loss of amenity resources.

A. Response to Public Comments and Management Concerns

This Record of Decision reflects comments received from agencies, organizations, and the public on the Draft Forest Plan, DEIS, Final Forest Plan and FEIS. Discussed below are more specific responses to major public issues raised and further rationale for my decision.

Recreation

Issue: *What acreage should be designated for developed and dispersed recreation?*

Plan Response: The Draft Plan assigned 92,170 acres to Developed Recreation, 71,610 acres to Dispersed Recreation, and 40,755 acres to Dispersed Recreation with no scheduled timber harvest. This issue revolved

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around whether additional acres should have been assigned to Developed Recreation, Dispersed Recreation or Dispersed Recreation with no scheduled timber harvest. Some of the public argued that more areas should be in Dispersed Recreation with no scheduled timber harvest to provide more "wilderness-like" areas. Others preferred harvesting on all dispersed areas to gain a higher ASQ which would result in more jobs, community stability, and funds for roads and schools. The Final Plan assigns 75,631 acres to Developed Recreation, 33,609 acres to Dispersed Recreation, and 58,758 acres to Dispersed Recreation with no scheduled timber harvest. Dispersed Recreation with no scheduled timber harvest increased as a result of Ferguson Ridge and Devils Gulch being shifted from Dispersed Recreation with scheduled timber harvest. The reasons for the shift were recreational values, difficult access, wildlife and sensitive plant values, and Wild and Scenic River status.

Visual Resources

Issue: *What priority should be given to scenic values in the Forest?*

Plan Response: The Draft Plan included protection of visual quality along major recreation roads and trails and around all major recreation areas. This issue involved the degree of visual change considered acceptable by the public and the effect visual quality protection had on the ASQ. Public response varied between visual protection only along state highways and full visual protection along main travel routes. This Plan retains direction from the Draft Plan. The Forest is a major recreation Forest. Visual quality is an important attribute which directly relates to the experience enjoyed by the visiting public.

Further Planning

Issue: *How should the Forest manage former Further Planning Areas?*

Plan Response: The Draft Plan provided for timber management on capable, available and suitable (CAS) timberlands in the Ferguson Ridge, Devils Gulch, San Joaquin B, Shuteye, Sycamore Springs and Rancheria areas. Mt. Raymond, and Dinkey Lakes were to be managed for Dispersed Recreation with no scheduled timber harvest.

Many respondents supported alternatives that harvested timber on all CAS land within unroaded areas including Dinkey Lakes and Mt. Raymond. Other respondents letters included support for protection of unroaded areas from road construction and timber harvest.

Additional analysis of unroaded areas for the final Plan resulted in Ferguson Ridge and Devils Gulch being added to Dispersed Recreation with no scheduled timber harvest. The reasons these areas were removed from the timber base was low timber volumes, high costs, access problems and conflicts with California spotted owl habitat. Dinkey Lakes and Mt. Raymond were retained for dispersed recreation because they had high recreational values, costly, difficult access, shallow soils and regeneration problems.

Wild and Scenic Rivers

Issue: *How should the Forest manage rivers inventoried for possible inclusion into the Wild and Scenic River system?*

Plan response: The Draft Plan recommended Wild and Scenic River classification for all National Rivers Inventory (NRI) rivers on the Forest with the exception of two miles above Mammoth Pool on the San Joaquin River. The Wild and Scenic River issue received the greatest amount of public comment and support. In response to public comment and Congressional action on the Merced between the DEIS and FEIS, the forest prepared a separate EIS and plan (Merced Wild & Scenic River Plan) that contains all of the river classifications for the Merced and South Fork Merced rivers. On the San Joaquin River, the plan

recommends eight segments as wild, two segments as recreational and two segments as scenic. The Forest will conduct a comprehensive assessment of non-NRI Rivers within the next three years

Fish and Wildlife

Issue: *What kinds and amounts of fish and wildlife habitat would be provided and what were the effects of management on habitats?*

Plan response: The Draft Plan included standards for hardwoods, riparian areas, snags and down logs as well as a Regional standard requiring the retention of five percent of each seral stage/vegetative type. Public comments were divided. Some respondents identified conflicts between commodity uses and riparian area protection. The concern expressed was that timber production and livestock grazing were being conducted in a way that was adversely impacting riparian-dependent resources. Other respondents felt protection for fish and wildlife was excessive and should be lessened to increase the ASQ and help provide jobs, community stability, and receipts to counties for roads and schools

The Final Plan is unchanged from the Draft in regard to hardwoods, snags, down logs and retention of five percent of each seral stage/major vegetative type. However, to better meet National policy, the Final Plan places more emphasis on riparian and streamside management. Re-assessment of the riparian acreage on CAS land was made because new and more accurate data became available. This resulted in an acreage increase from 13,000 acres to 33,000 acres. Seven additional standards and guidelines were added to the Final Plan providing additional riparian area protection. In riparian areas, commodity production will be limited and secondary to protection of riparian dependent resources. The anticipated harvest is 1.5 MMBF per year on 33,000 acres compared to 2.5 MMBF per year from 13,000 acres in the Draft Plan.

Sensitive furbearer habitat requirements for marten, fisher and Sierra Nevada red fox are discussed in another section. (See Sensitive Furbearers at the end of this section.)

Issue: *How many spotted owl habitat areas (SOHAs) should be established in the Forest?*

Plan Response: The Draft Plan included provisions for 24 SOHAs and scheduled timber harvest within each SOHA on CAS land. A large majority of the public comments opposed the number and size of SOHAs preferring to limit or even eliminate them. A few respondents showed a preference for maximizing California spotted owl habitat. In considering the needs of the California spotted owl, the Forest re-evaluated the SOHA network. The re-evaluation resulted in an increase in SOHAs to 29 and no scheduled timber harvest. These measures are adopted because: 1) additional surveys showed a larger geographic range on the Forest than originally expected, 2) on CAS land the distance between SOHAs was too great to meet their intended purpose, and 3) there was less than 1000 acres of suitable habitat per SOHA. Five SOHAs are located in wilderness, three in Dispersed Recreation Areas with no scheduled timber harvest and one in a Special Interest Area. These locations will help to reduce the impact on ASQ, while meeting the needs of the California spotted owl.

The Forest Plan and EIS were prepared using the Spotted Owl Standards and Guidelines in the Pacific Southwest Regional Guide. Since the Regional Guide was published in 1984, field observations and a number of scientific studies indicated that California spotted owls utilize more acres and a broader variety of habitats than provided for by the Regional Guide. As a result, a technical assessment of California spotted owl habitat needs was initiated in 1991 and was completed in May 1992. The report is titled "The California Spotted Owl: A Technical Assessment of its Current Status" and is referred to as the "CASPO Report."

Analysis of the CASPO Report is currently underway which could lead to an amendment of the Standards and Guidelines in the Regional Guide and the Sierra National Forest Plan for the California spotted owl. For the past year, the Forest has been using a cumulative effects analysis process for timber sales,

substituting dead timber for green timber volume and deferring timber harvests in suitable spotted owl habitat whenever possible. Use of this process will continue until analysis of the CASPO Report is completed by a team reviewing the need for interim guidelines.

Timber

Issue: *How intensive and widespread should timber management activities be in the Forest? What should the allowable sale quantity be? What were the socio-economic consequences of changes in allowable sale quantity (ASQ) on the community of North Fork and the surrounding area?*

Plan response: The Draft Plan ASQ was 125.2 MMBF. In response to the Draft Plan many respondents said the ASQ was too low. They wanted more land committed to timber production and less protection for California spotted owls, visual quality, deer, riparian, etc. Many stated that if the Market or RPA Alternatives were not selected their economic livelihood would be jeopardized. The concern was not only for those directly involved with logging or milling but for families, secondary businesses, and service businesses as well.

Other respondents gave diverse reasons why the ASQ in the Draft Plan was too high. They claimed the budget needed to produce this level of harvest was unrealistically high, and gave an undesirable subsidy to the timber industry because revenues would not cover costs to government. There were a few strong objections to using pesticides to maintain long-term sustained yield; harvesting timber on land only marginally capable of intensive management; not giving enough protection to resources such as visuals, soils, watershed, wildlife and riparian areas; and giving timber products too much emphasis.

Comments on the Draft Plan resulted in additional analysis of probable effects. It became apparent that if the ASQ was not raised to at least 135 MMBF, operations at one or more sawmills would reduce production leading eventually to one mill ceasing operations during the planning period. The general pattern of mill closures in California indicates that mills in mountain locations are at a competitive disadvantage to those located in the Central Valley. The highway network allows mills located in the valley to haul logs from a broader supply area than those located in the mountains. Hauling logs from a larger supply area also allows mills to expand and take advantage of economies of scale. As competition increases and the supply of timber decreases, mills in the mountain and foothill areas near the Forest are most likely to reduce operations. This is a consequence of its mountain location, exclusion from small business set-aside sales available to mills in Madera and Sacramento, and reduced supply of raw material.

A loss of timber-related employment opportunities in the foothill area is possible over the next 15-25 years even if the Forest could sustain annual harvests of 150 MMBF. This decline occurs as a consequence of more efficient capacity added to mills in more favorable locations and increased competition from mills outside the traditional market area.

Parallel to the heightened public awareness of the economic effects of timber harvest has been an increasing awareness nationally and locally over the quality of forest environment that needs to be maintained. Nationally and locally, there is a debate over what that quality needs to be. The general direction of the controversy has been to move the Forest Service away from emphasis on commodity outputs, such as timber, toward conservation of natural biological diversity.

Timber management affects every other issue. While some uses are compatible with timber production, others such as non-motorized dispersed recreation are not. In many places it is necessary to reduce timber harvest to maintain other values such as fish and wildlife habitat or scenery. Land allocations that preclude or reduce timber management were carefully evaluated to minimize the effects on ASQ.

The Forest Plan provides a combination of even-aged, uneven-aged, and special harvest methods to address concerns for sensitive furbearers and other wildlife habitats, visual resources, and resolution of conflicts where harvesting adjacent to private land.

The ASQ in the Final Plan is 37.2 MMBF less than the Preferred Alternative in the Draft Plan. The reduction results from:

- an increase in the number of SOHA's and no scheduled timber harvest in SOHAs.
- an increase in acres of riparian area from 13,000 acres to 33,000 acres.
- establishment of 7 sensitive furbearer habitat management areas with limited-timber yield. Fifty-eight percent of the 66,000 acres in the habitat management areas is not overlapped with other land allocations.
- removal of the following areas from suitable timber land:
 - Devils Gulch, Ferguson Ridge, portions of the developed recreation area adjacent to Courtright and Wishon reservoirs, and the area between Ansel Adams and Dinkey Lakes Wildernesses leading to Edison and Florence Lakes.

An increase in ASQ can only be made by changing land allocations, prescriptions, mitigation measures, or by choosing a different alternative that places less emphasis on threatened, endangered and sensitive species, wildlife and visual quality. Some factors that prevented the Forest from meeting the demand for a higher ASQ are:

- All SOHAs on CAS land have no scheduled timber harvest.
- All sensitive furbearer management areas on CAS land are scheduled for Limited-timber yield.
- Until planting survival of red fir is consistently greater than 80 percent, no more than 200 acres per year may be scheduled for clearcutting.
- No scheduled timber harvest is planned in areas designated for non-roaded dispersed recreation use, including portions of the Developed Recreation areas around Courtright and Wishon Reservoirs, and the area between the Ansel Adams and Dinkey Lakes Wildernesses along the road leading to Edison and Florence Lakes.
- The rate of timber harvest is limited to achieve visual quality objectives within and adjacent to major developed recreation areas and along major travel routes to these areas.
- In the ponderosa pine and mixed conifer types about 4.5 percent of future softwood production potential is foregone to grow and maintain a desired amount of mast producing hardwoods for wildlife.
- In the second decade, replacement snags will be created on high production timber land (Regulation Class 1) where clearcutting is the primary harvest method. Snag recruitment includes killing and topping 1.5 green trees per acre averaging 20 inches in diameter and 0.5 green trees per acre averaging 26 inches in diameter. This amounts to a reduction in ASQ of about 3.0 MMBF.
- In riparian areas, scheduled timber harvest will be minor and limited to aerial logging corridors, new roads and timber removed to benefit riparian dependent resources such as fish, wildlife, water quality, and vegetation diversity.

Issue: *Is clearcutting necessary to meet the Forest's long-term timber resource management goals?*

Plan response: Comments expressed concern about the amount of clearcutting proposed in the Forest and its effect on visual quality and the environment. Some support was received for properly managed clearcutting to produce higher sustained yields of timber, increase water yield, and reduce costs.

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Clearcutting will only be used where this method is necessary to meet Forest Plan objectives under one or more of the following circumstances:

- To establish, enhance, or maintain habitat for threatened, endangered, or sensitive species.
- To enhance wildlife habitat or water yield values, or to provide for recreation, scenic vistas, utility lines, road corridors, facility sites, reservoirs, or similar development.
- To rehabilitate lands adversely impacted by events such as fires, windstorms, or insect or disease infestations.
- To preclude or minimize the occurrence of potentially adverse impacts or insect or disease infestations, windthrow, logging damage, or other factors affecting forest health.
- To provide for the establishment and growth of desired trees or other vegetative species that are shade intolerant.
- To rehabilitate poorly stocked stands due to past management practices or natural events.
- To meet research needs.

Specific practices will be adopted to reduce the potential adverse environmental effects of clearcutting. These practices include:

- protecting residual trees (including advanced reproduction and hardwoods),
- developing alternatives to clearcutting in sensitive watersheds, such as areas with shallow soils and steep slopes,
- implementing streamside management zone practices for riparian-dependent resources, and
- carefully designing clearcuts to provide for visual quality, wildlife habitat needs and to protect soil productivity.

Silvicultural methods selected are based on a site-specific analysis of vegetation type, topography, other specific site conditions, and public input through the environmental analysis process. Clearcutting is used when it is determined to be the only method that can meet resource management objectives as described above.

Because of the concern over clearcutting, the Forest reduced clearcutting acres from 2,340 in the Draft to 1,550 in the Final Plan. The Forest examined uneven-aged management in the Amenity Alternative as an alternative to clearcutting. The evaluation identified benefits and concerns. The primary benefit of uneven-aged management is improved visual quality. The major concerns were possible impacts on long-term timber yields or growth; decreased ability to control insect and disease outbreaks; increased costs, the need to develop new logging methods and approaches and the resulting effects on the local timber industry; the need to develop and manage new administrative systems to monitor and control stand conditions; and increased soil compaction and disturbance to wildlife.

Uneven-aged management, including both group selection and individual tree selection, was increased from 23,400 acres in the Draft to 35,000 acres in the Final Plan. This silvicultural system is to be used on gentler slopes where logs can be removed with tractors. Steeper areas, needing cable systems to remove logs, are primarily to be considered for even-aged management. The information obtained from this program enables the Forest to evaluate the feasibility of increasing uneven-aged management during the next 10-15 years.

Hydroelectric Development

Issue: *How should the Forest respond to hydroelectric proposals relative to management of other Forest resources?*

Plan Response: The Draft Plan encouraged hydroelectric production when compatible with National Forest purposes. It recommended ensuring that planning, construction and operation of hydroelectric projects are performed in such a manner to protect or effectively utilize National Forest system lands and resources. A majority of responses to the Draft Plan concerning hydroelectric projects were opposed to any new development. Respondents were particularly concerned about proposals on small free-flowing streams.

The Forest does not have the authority to eliminate from consideration, proposals for hydroelectric development as was suggested in most of the letters, only FERC has this legal authority. The Forest makes recommendations to FERC, but it does not have the authority to approve or deny approval of a hydroelectric project. However, the Standards and Guidelines (S&Gs) in the Final Plan are strengthened to reflect concerns voiced by the public (see S&Gs 175 to 192). In addition, criteria were developed to determine whether or not a project can be mitigated adequately to protect forest resources. If resources cannot be protected, FERC will be informed that the project is not in the public interest.

Budget

Issue: *How should the Forest implement the Forest Plan given the discrepancy between the budget needed to implement the Plan and current budgets?*

Plan Response: The Forest Plan is primarily a land allocation document. It tells how each area will be managed if funds are available. The Forest Plan describes specific funding levels to achieve plan objectives. Most plan objectives are based on programs where funding is allocated by Congress. Examples of these are the timber sales program, outputs associated with construction of recreational developments and wildlife and range improvement projects. Other forest uses, such as recreation use, fishing and hunting, and wilderness use is expected to continue regardless of funding levels, but at a lower level of quality. The Final Plan annual budget to fully implement the Plan is 23.1 million (in constant 1982 dollars) A budget appendix (Appendix P of the FEIS) has been added to the Plan to better explain the relationship between the Plan and budget. No matter what budget is received the Standards and Guidelines will be implemented.

Sensitive Furbearers (marten, fisher and Sierra Nevada red fox)

Evolving management concern over the potential for management activities to adversely affect sensitive furbearer (marten, fisher, and Sierra Nevada red fox) habitat emerged since the DEIS was reviewed by the public. The basic question is, "What is the best interim strategy or approach to insure viability of the sensitive furbearer species populations over their habitat range as legally required by the National Forest Management Act (NFMA)."

Plan Response: The Forest Plan establishes 7 habitat management areas and habitat linkage between habitat management areas and adjacent National Forests and Parks. Of this total area, (66,000 acres) about 27,400 acres or 42% is overlapped with other resource allocation such as wilderness, SOHAs, SMZs, Geological Areas, etc. Furbearer management areas are based on "A Literature Review for Management of the Marten and Fisher on National Forests in California" (Maeton Freel 1990), sighting records, and habitat analysis for the Sierra National Forest. Most of the available information is for the marten and fisher. Less information is available on the Sierra Nevada red fox. The Plan includes habitat monitoring and adjustments when information is developed.

Presently, these areas are scheduled for Limited-timber yield. Through monitoring and research, modification of the standards in the Plan may occur. Modifications may include some type of change in the silvicultural techniques to be used in these habitat management areas. Providing for the habitat needs of the marten, fisher and Sierra Nevada red fox is a primary objective of the management direction in the Plan. Presently, the reduction in ASQ for the protection of the sensitive furbearer habitat areas amounts to about 14.0 MMBF per year. However, as new data becomes available from monitoring and research there is a possibility that the ASQ may change.

B. Economic Efficiency of Alternatives

The Market and RPA Alternatives have the highest present net value (PNV) (they produce more timber), followed by the Current, Preferred, Amenity, and Low Budget. However, the alternatives with the highest PNV do not reflect values for some amenity resources as well as the preferred alternative, including visual quality, water quality, and plant and animal diversity.

The PNV in Alternative A is approximately 14 percent below RPA. I judge this reduction in PNV to be less important in terms of net public benefit than benefits associated with the Preferred Alternative, such as providing additional protection for California spotted owls, sensitive furbearers, visual quality and late seral stage habitat.

C. Contribution to the Regional Production of Goods and Services

The Preferred Alternative manages and protects all resources while providing opportunities for recreation, wildlife, forage, timber, and fuelwood needed for the local economy. While some alternatives provide higher commodity outputs, they also have the higher impacts on visual quality and dispersed recreation and present the greater potential impact to soil, water, fish and wildlife. While the recreation opportunities, minerals, range, wildlife, and timber outputs benefit the entire State of California, the timber supply is being reduced and regional demands will not be met. A description of the Regional and subregional timber supply-demand situation has been added in the FEIS Appendix L.

D. Social and Economic Stability

Effects on jobs, revenues and recreational opportunities, impacts upon life-styles in the area, benefits to the local economy, protection of resources for future generations, and social and economic stability for people living in Madera, Fresno and Mariposa counties were considered in choosing the Preferred Alternative.

The average timber harvest for the last 10 years has been 124 MMBF. The average harvest for the past three years has been 133 MMBF. The allowable sale quantity in the Preferred Alternative results in significant reductions in earnings, employment, and income to the three county governments when compared to the last few years.

The economic characteristics and impacts described above have social implications as well. The analysis suggests the reduced ASQ may result in the closure of at least one sawmill. This will be disruptive to the lifestyle, attitudes and beliefs of some long-term residents including some Native Americans from at least one tribe. For further information, see the Timber Issues discussed previously in this Record of Decision. Opportunities to mitigate adverse socioeconomic effects include unemployment compensation, the dislocated worker program (under the 1982 Job Training Partnership Act), and Federal and State rural development assistance.

E. Environmental Effects of Alternatives

This section summarizes some effects that are expected to occur under each alternative. The magnitude, timing, and location of key environmental effects will differ under each alternative. These factors were all considered during the analysis and in choosing Alternative A as the Forest Plan.

In all alternatives, visual quality will be maintained around local communities. The Preferred, Current, and Amenity Alternatives will protect visual quality along more roads and trails than Low Budget, RPA, and Market Alternatives. All alternatives except the Market Alternative will provide visual quality protection around major recreation areas.

In all alternatives, visual quality other than views seen from local communities, major roads and trails and major recreation areas will decline over the next five decades as actual conditions approach Visual Quality Objectives of the alternative. This reduction will result primarily from timber harvest activities. The Amenity Alternative will result in the least visual impact because of uneven-aged management on tractor ground. The Preferred Alternative will have the least impact of alternatives having reliance on even-aged silviculture systems.

All alternatives will maintain traditional winter roost habitat near major reservoirs for the current 5-10 wintering bald eagles. All alternatives will protect identified superior nest sites, which assist in meeting population recovery goals, for peregrine falcons. All alternatives will protect willow flycatcher habitat. All alternatives will provide suitable habitat for Lahontan and Paiute cutthroat trout.

Alternatives vary in number of SOHAs from the minimum management requirement (MMR) of 26 established in 1984 to 34 in Alternative E. Alternatives B,C,D and H have an even-aged timber management prescription while Alternatives A and E do not schedule timber harvest from SOHAs.

The Forest will manage a network of 50 goshawk nest territories in all alternatives. The reduction of potential goshawk habitat may occur as a result of resource activities such as timber management and recreation. No new management activities will be approved in goshawk nest site areas until a Forest goshawk network is approved.

Alternatives A and E establish 7 and 8 sensitive furbearer habitat management areas respectively, which will be well distributed throughout the Forest. Alternatives B,C, D and H will not implement prescriptions specifically for sensitive furbearers but will use the following prescriptions to maintain suitable habitat: wilderness, wild and scenic rivers, minimum level management, limited timber yield, special interest areas, Kings River Special Management Area and research natural areas.

All alternatives protect riparian areas through the use of Riparian Management Areas (RMAs) and Streamside Management Zones (SMZs). The Amenity alternative gives RMA protection to all perennial and intermittent streams. The Preferred Alternative includes RMA protection measures to all perennial streams and lakes and about half of the Forest's intermittent streams. All other alternatives give RMA protection to fewer of the intermittent streams. The potential for impacts is the least in the Amenity and Preferred Alternatives. Market and RPA have the greatest potential for impact

Under Alternative A (Preferred) the prescribed fire program averages about 7,000 acres annually. Fire is used to prepare timber harvest areas for reforestation, reduce concentrations of hazardous forest fuels, and improve wildlife habitat and range forage. The long-term benefits include less damage to soil productivity and water quality through reduction in wildfire acres. Short-term losses include temporary deterioration of air quality and temporary impacts on visual resources. Prescribed fire acres range from 1800 acres in the Low Budget Alternative to 7000 acres in the Preferred.

I recognize that Alternative A, or any of the alternatives, could produce some short-term adverse environmental consequences such as a slight reduction in air quality; visual quality reduction due to clearcutting and road construction; and increased sediment yields due to vegetation management activities

These consequences will be monitored as discussed in Chapter 5 of the Plan, to ensure compliance with Forest management direction and applicable laws and regulations.

F. Environmentally Preferable Alternative

I judge the Amenity Alternative to be the environmentally preferable alternative because it emphasizes protection of water, soil, riparian areas, air, visual quality, enhancement of wildlife habitat, and diversity. The main reason for not selecting this alternative is that I believe the additional timber opportunities included in the Preferred Alternative can be utilized while protecting other environmental values. The reliance on uneven-aged management in the Amenity Alternative reduces growth and yield, increases costs, reduces the ability to manage some diseases and insect pests, creates the need to develop and manage new administration systems to monitor and control stand conditions, and increases soil compaction and disturbance to wildlife. The Preferred Alternative provides the greatest net public benefits of all the alternatives.

G. Compatibility with Other Agency Goals and Plans

The goals and plans of other agencies were considered throughout the planning process. The FEIS and Plan reflect this consideration along with the comments received from public agencies during the public review periods. The Plan is compatible with other agency goals and plans.

Federal agencies commenting on the Plan included the Department of Interior (Environmental Project Review, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Sequoia/Kings Canyon National Parks, and Bureau of Land Management), Environmental Protection Agency, Department of Commerce (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration), and the Department of Agriculture (Pacific Southwest Experiment Station). State agencies commenting included State of California Resources Agencies (Department of Fish and Game, Forestry, and Water Resources) and the Board of Forestry. Local governments, Native Americans (tribes, groups or organizations) and elected officials also were contacted and provided comment on the DEIS, Draft Forest Plan, FEIS and Final Forest Plan.

Public input to the Plan provided much worthwhile information. Dialogue with other Federal agencies, States, local governments, Native Americans and interested publics will continue during Plan implementation. Ongoing involvement by interested parties is critical to successful implementation. The Forest will continue to involve the public as more site-specific planning is accomplished.

H. Reasons for Selecting the Plan

Alternative A provides the best mix of resource management activities considered appropriate for existing conditions or those that are predicted to be needed during this ten to fifteen year planning period. It allows harvesting on lands suitable for timber management while protecting the basic soil and water resources and maintaining or enhancing amenity values. It provides for a moderate increase in recreation opportunities including additional campgrounds and trail construction. Vegetation diversity is enhanced, which also benefits a wide spectrum of wildlife. It protects riparian areas, restores disturbed watersheds, and maintains water quality and soil productivity.

Alternative A best meets the forest needs as identified by the entire public involvement process, including responses to the DEIS, Final Plan and FEIS; resource needs as identified by resource professionals; and National Forest management mandates as identified in the Multiple Use Sustained Yield Act of 1960, the National Forest Management Act of 1976, and their accompanying regulations.

Alternative A provides a balance between the Amenity Alternative and the most economically efficient alternatives. Forestwide Standards and Guidelines and Management Prescriptions will ensure that the natural environment is protected.

I judge Alternative A to have the greatest long-term public benefit when compared to other alternatives and select it to be the Plan for management of the Sierra National Forest.

V. IMPLEMENTATION, MITIGATION, AND MONITORING

The Plan will not be implemented sooner than 30 days after the legal Notice of the Record of Decision appears in the Sacramento Bee newspaper. The time needed to bring all activities into compliance with the Plan will vary depending on the type of project.

As soon as practicable after approval of the Plan, the Forest Supervisor shall ensure that, subject to valid existing rights, all outstanding and future permits, contracts, cooperative agreements and other instruments for occupancy and use of affected lands are consistent with the Plan. The Forest Supervisor will also assure that (1) Forest proposed annual programs and projects, objectives, and budget requests are consistent with the Forest Plan; and (2) implementation is in compliance with the Regional Guide and applicable regulations.

As a long-range management guide for the Forest, this Forest Plan is a programmatic document. During Forest Plan implementation, when various projects are designed, site-specific analysis will be performed in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969. These analyses may result in environmental assessments, environmental impact statements, or categorical exclusions and, possibly, an amendment or revision of the Forest Plan. Many of these documents will be tiered to the Final Environmental Impact Statement for this Forest Plan pursuant to 40 CFR 1508.28.

Implementation will be guided by individual Management Area direction and by the management requirements contained in the goals, objectives, standards and guidelines, practices, and prescriptions found in Chapter V of the Forest Plan. These management requirements were developed through an interdisciplinary effort and contain measures necessary to mitigate or eliminate any long-term adverse effects. To the best of my knowledge, all practical mitigation measures have been adopted.

Outputs associated with Forest Plan implementation may be adjusted as a result of inventory and research efforts that produce new information and technologies. A new timber inventory was obtained as the final Plan was being prepared. The inventory used for the Plan was confirmed by cross checking with the new inventory. Additional checks will be made during implementation and Plan adjustments made as necessary. Air quality, prescribed fire, riparian trend studies, wildlife habitat studies, and other data will enhance and affect Forest Plan implementation. Management direction contained in the Forest Plan will be used to analyze any proposal involving use of National Forest system land.

The purpose of the monitoring program is to evaluate whether the Forest Plan goals and objectives are being met, to determine how closely management requirements are being followed, and to assist in assessing achievement of the environmental standards. The results of monitoring and evaluation will be used to measure the progress of Forest Plan implementation. These results will also help determine when Forest Plan amendments or revisions are needed.

VI. PLANNING RECORDS, REVISIONS AND AMENDMENTS AND ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW

A. Planning Records

Planning records contain detailed information and document decisions used in developing the Plan and FEIS as required in 36 CFR 219.12. All of the documentation detailing the Forest planning process is available for inspection during regular business hours at:

Forest Supervisors Office
Sierra National Forest
1600 Tollhouse Road
Clovis, California 93611-0532

These records are incorporated by reference into the FEIS and Forest Plan.

B. Revisions and Amendments

The National Forest Management Act requires revision of the Forest Plan at least every 15 years. The Plan may be revised sooner whenever the Forest Supervisor determines that conditions or demands in the area covered by the Plan have changed significantly, or when changes in national policies, goals, or objectives have a significant effect on programs of the Forest. All procedures set forth in 36 CFR 219.12 will be followed. This includes scoping and analysis of the management situation, formulation of alternatives, an estimation of effects, an evaluation of alternatives, identification of a preferred alternative, documentation in a Draft EIS and Draft Forest Plan, and formal public comment before approval and implementation of the revised plan.

The Regional Forester approves any significant amendments to this Plan while the Forest Supervisor has the authority to approve non-significant amendments. The determination of significance or non-significance will be documented in a decision notice. No changes will be implemented prior to appropriate public notice. Determinations of significance or non-significance are appealable under 36 CFR Part 217.

C. Right To Administrative Review

This decision is subject to appeal in accordance with the provisions of 36 CFR Part 217. Any written notice of appeal of this decision must be fully consistent with 36 CFR 217.9, "Content of a Notice of Appeal", including the reasons for appeal. Notice of appeal must be filed within 90 days of the date of the published legal notice (Sacramento Bee, Sacramento, California) of this decision and filed with:

Dale Robertson, Chief
Forest Service - Appeals
U.S. Department of Agriculture/Auditors Bldg.
201 14th Street SW/
Washington, DC 20250

Appellants must submit two copies of a Notice of Appeal.

My recommendation for Wild and Scenic Rivers is not appealable. My recommendations for Wild and Scenic Rivers are reviewed by the Chief of the Forest Service, the Secretary of Agriculture, and the President of the United States. The final decision on designation has been reserved by Congress. Specific decisions regarding interim management of these areas pending a final decision or action by Congress are appealable.

My recommendations for Research Natural Area (RNA) designation is not appealable. The Chief authorizes RNA establishment. Specific decisions regarding interim management of RNAs pending a final decision by the Chief are appealable.

An appeal of my decision does not halt Forest Plan implementation. Requests to stay the approval of this Plan, prepared pursuant to 36 CFR Part 219, shall not be granted. However, where a project or activity would be implemented before an appeal decision could be issued, the Chief of the Forest Service will consider written requests to stay implementation of that project pending completion of the review of the Forest Plan appeal



RONALD E. STEWART
Regional Forester

SEP 24 1992

Date: _____

September 1992

ERRATA/ADDITIONS

Reference: Land and Resource Management Plan

Upon further review of the document, it was discovered additional clarification needed to be made.

PLAN

Summary of Analysis of Management Situation

Page 3-3, Fishery Resources, 2nd paragraph

Remove "loggers are harvesting timber" and replace with "timber harvesting has taken place"

Page 4-45, Column 1, #8. Minimum Level Management, Resource Situation

Add "Analysis Areas 4, 6, 9, 15, 22, 24, 27, 35, 37, 38, 49, 50, 51, 56, 60 and 61."

Management Standard and Guidelines

Page 4-14, S&G #32

Add the following text to existing paragraph "Rivers identified as eligible for wild and scenic river designation will be managed to protect their values and free-flowing condition until a final decision is made. Interim management, extending to one-quarter mile on each side of the rivers, will be in accordance with the Land Management Planning Handbook, Chapter 8. Interim management is for that period of time after a river is found to be eligible and before a final decision on suitability as a wild and scenic river is made."

Page 4-16, S&G #56

Change to read "No new management activities will be approved within goshawk nest site areas until a Forest Goshawk Network is approved. The network will contain an average of at least one occupied or potential nest site per 18 square miles within the area containing active or potential goshawk nesting habitat. Manage for a 50 acre primary zone of older mature forest surrounding the occupied or potential nest site. A secondary zone of 75 acres around the primary zone will have a limited operating season between March 15 and August 15, or a limited operating season based on site specific information. Occupied nest sites found within areas where management activities have already been authorized shall be protected as described in S&G #53."

Page 4-16, S&G #60

Change to read "Permit salvage harvest related activities and non-vegetative manipulating activities in marten and fisher habitat management areas when supported by a biological evaluation and a site specific project environmental analysis. All other activities require an implementation schedule, for future activities in the management area, in addition to a biological evaluation and a site-specific environmental analysis."

Page 4-18, Range

Change number of S&G #85 to #85a

Add the following S&G, (85b) to the text: "Limit herbaceous vegetation utilization by livestock in accordance with allowable use factor tables developed for R5 FSH 2209.21, Range Environmental Analysis Handbook. Develop and implement utilization standards to fit desired site specific range conditions in riparian areas. Give priority to Allotment Management Plan development for allotments that have riparian areas in less than satisfactory condition."

Page 4-18, S&G #96

Add the following text to the existing paragraph "The selection will be made after considering the goal of reducing clearcutting and the specific circumstances and practices shown in the Record of Decision."

Page 4-27, S&G #270

Change to read "Evaluate for disposition the structures at Billy Creek Administrative Site and the guest cabin on Lot 89 of the Huckleberry Tract

Page 6C-7, Table C.05, Present Forest, Suitable Land column

Change 47.8 Growing Stock, Hardwood to 289.5

Change 6.3 Annual Mortality, Conifer to 4.6

Change 37.3 Annual Mortality, Conifer to 28.7

Page 6C-7, Table C.05, Present Forest, Unsuitable Land column

Change 1160.0 Growing Stock to 7220.3

Change 17.6 Annual Mortality to 3.0

Change 103.7 Annual Mortality to 15.8

Page 6C-7, Table C.05, Future Forest, Suitable Land column

Change 1494.0 Growing Stock, Conifer to 1408.7

Change 19.6 Annual Net Growth, Conifer to 17.6

FEIS

Individual Alternative Descriptions

Page 2-37, Wild and Scenic Rivers, column 1, third paragraph, second sentence

Should read "Of the 73 miles, 37 miles will be administered by the Sierra National Forest, 15 miles by the Inyo National Forest, 8 miles of Segments 9 and 10 of Merced by BLM, approximately 3 miles of Segments 2 and 3 of Middle Fork San Joaquin and 10 miles of Segment 1 of South Fork San Joaquin by National Park Service."

Wild and Scenic Rivers

Page 4-22, column 1, Table 4.10, Title

Change to read "DISTRIBUTION AND JURISDICTION OF ELIGIBLE WILD AND SCENIC RIVER SEGMENTS AMONG VARIOUS LAND OWNERS"

Page 4-22, column 1, Table 4.10, JURISDICTION column

Change Devils Postpile NM to Devils Postpile NP

Page 4-22, column 2, Table 4.10, Miles column

Change 2.0 State of California to 1.0 and 1.0 Private to 2.0

All Resource Maps:

Change China Peak Ski Area name to Sierra Summit Ski Area

FEIS APPENDICES

Appendix E (Wild and Scenic Rivers)

Page 7E-23, Table E.01B, Length column

Change 12.0 in Segment 2 to 2.0

Page 7E-27, Table E.01C, Boundary Points Column

Change Segment 1 to read "Headwaters at Twin Island Lake to Hemlock Crossing"

Page 7E-31, Table E.01D, Boundary Points column

Change Segment 1 to read "Headwaters at Thousand Island Lake to Agnew Meadows"

Page 7E-35, Table E.01E, Boundary Points column

Change Segment 1 to read "Headwaters at Martha Lake and Goddard Canyon to boundary Sierra National Forest"

Page 7E-38, Table E.05E, Alternative A

Change the letter "S" in Segment 4 to the letter "W"

Appendix N (Special Areas)

Page 7N-1, Column 1, add after last paragraph

July 14, 1992, George Bush, President of the United States, proclaimed naturally occurring groves of giant Sequoia in the Sierra National Forest will be managed and protected to assure perpetuation of groves for the benefit and enjoyment of present and future generations.

Page 7N-4, Column 1, McKinley Grove, statement regarding Timber

Should read "Develop a detailed long-term implementation strategy for the Grove. This implementation strategy will be consistent with the best scientific information available and assure any proposed development will provide for aesthetic, recreational, ecological, and scientific values. Until the long-term implementation strategy is approved, only human hazard trees will be removed "

Page 7N-4, Column 1, McKinley Grove, statement regarding Lands

Add "The administrative boundary of the McKinley Grove giant Sequoia trees will be mapped and posted. In addition, an ecological buffer will be identified."

Page 7N-4, Column 1, McKinley Grove, statement regarding Protection and Pest Management

Add "Perform large tree and fuels inventory."

Page 7N-4, Column 2, Nelder Grove Historic Area, statement regarding Timber

Should read "Develop a detailed long-term implementable strategy for the Grove This implementation strategy will be consistent with the best scientific information available and assure any proposed development will provide for aesthetic, recreational, ecological and scientific values. Until the long-term implementation strategy is approved, only human hazard trees will be removed."

Page 7N-4, Column 2, Nelder Grove Historic Area, statement regarding Lands

Add "The administrative boundary of the Nelder Grove giant Sequoia trees will be mapped and posted. In addition, an ecological buffer will be identified."

Page 7N-4, Column 2, Nelder Grove Historic Area, statement regarding Protection and Pest Management

Add "Perform large tree and fuels inventory."

MAP PACKET

All Alternative and Element Maps

Change China Peak Ski Area name to Sierra Summit Ski Area.

Recreation Opportunities Class Objectives Map

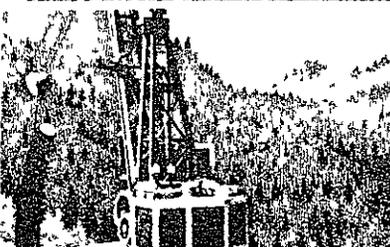
Semi-Primitive Motorized Class, T8S, R27E, Semi-Primitive Motorized corridor should be extended to Kaiser Pass Road in T7S, R26E.

Recreation Opportunity Class Objective Map

T9S, R26E, due to the scale of the map, the planned trail from Brewer Lake to Tocher Lake to Red Lake is difficult to locate. However, the trail is located outside the Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized Class Zone so as not to preclude its location.

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OF
PHYSICAL
FILE**