

Decision Notice and Finding of No Significant Impact

Big Flat Vegetation and Fuels Management Project

September 22, 2008

USDA Forest Service

Six Rivers National Forest

Smith River National Recreation Area Ranger District

Del Norte County, California

Decision and Reasons for the Decision

Background

The Big Flat Community Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) was designated as a Community at Risk from wildfire by the US Department of Interior in the Federal Register on August 17, 2001. In 2005, the Del Norte County Fire Safe Council completed the Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP). The CWPP identified that one of the higher fire threat areas in Del Norte County sits northeast of Big Flat, in the headwaters areas of Jones and Hurdygurdy Creeks. The CWPP states that a first priority for defensibility of this community is to create a shaded fuelbreak around the valley. The CWPP identified designated shaded fuelbreak areas along major travel routes recognized as important evacuation routes in the event of wildfires. In addition to the shaded fuelbreaks, District fuels specialists identified other strategic fuel treatments that would further enhance the defensibility of the community of Big Flat against wildfires. The strategic shaded fuelbreaks and other treatment areas are intended to reduce hazardous fuel loading to retard the spread of fire and provide fire suppression personnel a higher probability of successfully attacking a wildfire. All vegetation management activities within the WUI should be designed to reduce the amount of fuels around the community.

The majority of the project area also occurs within a Late-Successional Reserve (LSR), specifically LSR 303 (Haines LSR). The Smith River National Recreation Area Late-Successional Reserve Assessment (LSRA; 1995) determined that the LSR was deficient in late-successional habitat. Portions of the LSR were previously privately owned and previously harvested. Extensive stands of plantations exist that do not provide suitable habitat for late-successional species such as the Northern spotted owl. Plantations and young natural stands are even-aged and lack the horizontal and vertical diversity components associated with late-mature stands. Young stands have the potential to achieve rapid diameter and height growth with thinning treatments.

Given the environmental conditions of the project area and the information and recommendations from the above documents, the Purpose and Need for the proposed action is to:

- Reduce hazardous fuel loading in strategically located high-risk areas to enhance the defensibility of the community of Big Flat, and to protect existing late-successional habitat within the LSR.
- Accelerate development of late-successional habitat characteristics in plantations and young natural stands, and restore ecological conditions in special habitats (meadow).

In addition to accomplishing the project's Purpose and Need, the proposed action offers opportunities to provide commodities in the form of sawlogs, fuelwood, and biomass.

The planning of Big Flat Vegetation and Fuels Management Project was conducted under the authority of the Healthy Forest Restoration Act of 2003 (HFRA). This act was created to reduce administrative delays and expedite implementation of community protection projects developed through a collaborative process. The environmental assessment (EA) documents the environmental analysis of two alternatives, one of which meets this purpose and need.

A correction was made to the EA on page 74, paragraph 1, sentence 3 to read as follows: "The project area occurs within a Tier 1 key watershed."

Decision

Based on my review of the Big Flat EA, dated July of 2008, the supporting documentation and public comment, I am selecting Alternative 2, the Proposed Action, as described on pages 9-26 of the EA. No modifications to this decision were identified or warranted during the 30-day objection period under HFRA (36 CFR part 218, subpart A).

Implementation of the Selected Alternative will result in the treatment of vegetation and hazardous fuels on approximately 1,824 acres of conifer/hardwood stands and a meadow through commercial timber harvesting, timber stand improvement, and fuel reduction treatments. This alternative involves the following actions:

- 503 acres of commercial thinning to 40% or greater crown closure and activity fuel treatment in 40 to 45-year old plantations and natural stands. Commercial thinning will occur both within and outside of strategic fuelbreak areas. Of these acres, 356 acres will be ground skidded and 147 acres will be cable yarded.
- 45 existing landings will be re-utilized.
- 4.26 miles of existing temporary roads will be reutilized and subsequently decommissioned after harvest is completed.
- 581 acres of pre-commercial thinning to a 12-14 foot average spacing and activity fuel treatment in 20 to 30-year old plantations and natural stands. Pre-commercial thinning will occur both within and outside of strategic fuelbreak areas.

- 735 acres of fuel reduction treatments employing manual, mechanical and prescribed burning methods in conifer stands in various seral stages within strategic fuelbreak areas.
- 5 acres of prescribed burning in a meadow.
- 24.9 miles of road maintenance on nine already open system roads and one non-system road.
- 2.4 miles of road upgrade and subsequent re-closure after harvest is completed on five currently closed system roads.

Reason for the Decision

I have chosen Alternative 2, the proposed action, as the Selected Alternative because:

1. It achieves the Purpose and Need for the project, as described on pages 2-3 of the EA. The treatments prescribed in high-risk forest stands within strategic locations will result in protection of life, property, and natural resources in and around the community of Big Flat in the event of wildfire. In addition, the project will aid in accelerating the development of late-successional habitat characteristics in young overstocked plantations and natural stands in the LSR, and restore the ecological condition of a meadow. As summarized on pages 27-29 of the EA, implementation of the Selected Alternative will serve to meet the following project objectives:

- 735 acres of shaded fuelbreak will be constructed along 19.75 miles of major travel routes within the vicinity of the Big Flat community.
- Create conditions within the strategic locations that will result in reduced fuel loading, reduced fire intensity and severity, and reduced risk of ignition.
- Create conditions within the strategic locations that will reduce potentially stand-replacing active crown fire spread across the landscape and improve fire suppression effectiveness.
- Improve vigor and resilience to disturbances (such as wildfire) on 1,084 acres of young stands by developing bigger trees sooner.
- Restore the natural species diversity of a meadow.
- Capture opportunities for providing wood products.

2. Internal issues raised by the interdisciplinary team during development of the Proposed Action were addressed and abated through project design features and resource protection measures (EA pages 11-14). Public scoping comments were analyzed to identify issues; the analysis of scoping comments is summarized in Appendix B of the EA. Although considered important, concerns and issues raised were not considered significant to the action in question because they were determined to be outside the scope of the project or because the issue would be abated through design of the Proposed Action.

3. The Selected Alternative is consistent with the Six Rivers National Forest Land and Resources Management Plan (Forest Plan), including the incorporated guidance from the

Northwest Forest Plan. It is consistent with management recommendations and activity design criteria described in the Smith River NRA Watershed Analysis and LSR Assessment, 1995. The Selected Alternative is also consistent with the Record of Decision for Amendments to the Survey and Manage, Protection Buffer, and other Mitigation Measures Standard and Guidelines, January 12, 2001.

4. The Selected Alternative is consistent with the National Forest Management Act of 1976, the Clean Water Act, the Clean Air Act, the Endangered Species Act and other Federal, State, or local laws or requirements (EA pages 47-105).

Other Alternatives Considered

Alternative 1, the No Action alternative, was studied in detail relative to the Purpose and Need for the project (EA pages 9, 26-29, 32-47). I am not selecting Alternative 1 because it would not achieve the Purpose and Need for the project; under this alternative life, property, and natural resources would not be protected, and habitat ecosystems would not be restored. Opportunities for the utilization of sawtimber, fuelwood, and biomass would not be provided.

Tribal Consultation

The Six Rivers National Forest initiated formal governmental consultation with two Native American tribes on October 15, 2007 regarding the preliminary design of the Big Flat Vegetation and Fuels Management Project. The tribes contacted were the Smith River Rancheria and the Elk Valley Rancheria. No concerns with the project were expressed.

Public Involvement

Collaboration

Collaboration was initiated by the Del Norte Fire Safe Council who volunteered for the task of coordinating the local effort with various stakeholders to develop a fire safe plan. The Council received a grant from the US Forest Service Economic Action program in 2003 to fund the creation of a fire safe plan. The first phase of collaboration culminated in the completion of the Del Norte Fire Safe Plan and CWPP in September of 2005, which identified areas of concern and potential project opportunities across multiple land ownerships within Del Norte County.

Upon the completion of the CWPP, the Six Rivers National Forest identified National Forest System lands near the Big Flat community as a community protection project opportunity. A synopsis of a preliminary proposed action was prepared and sent to prospective stakeholders to initiate the collaboration process required under the Healthy Forest Restoration Act (HFRA). The feedback received from seven individuals and groups was primarily in the form of questions and project design recommendations.

As a result of the feedback received from the initial outreach effort, an informational public meeting and field trip were held on April 15 and April 17, 2008, respectively. These events were announced through a press release issued by the Six Rivers National

Forest on April 4, 2008 and announcement letters mailed to prospective stakeholders. Fourteen (14) participants attended the events.

Concerns raised included the economic viability of project design, environmental effects to various resource values, and road access by the public. Ideas and concerns raised by the participants were considered by the Forest and led to the finalization of the proposed action prior to the onset of public scoping.

Scoping

The Big Flat Vegetation and Fuels Management project has been listed on the quarterly Six Rivers National Forest Schedule of Proposed Actions (SOPA) since September of 2007.

On May 19, 2008, a scoping package providing information and seeking public comment on the proposed action was mailed to approximately 107 individuals and groups. This included federal and state agencies, Native American groups, local municipal offices, businesses, interest groups, adjacent landowners, and other individuals.

A total of eight responses to this mailing were received, with four parties that provided substantive comments, one state agency that provided procedural recommendations, two individuals that expressed support for the project, and one individual that requested a copy of this EA. Agency responses and dispositions to the comments received can be found in Appendix B of the EA.

There were no significant issues identified, as defined in 40 CFR 1502.2. As a result, no other action alternatives were developed for evaluation in the EA.

Objection Period

One objection was filed with the Regional Forester during the 30-day objection period (36 CFR part 218, subpart A) on August 25, 2008 by the American Forest Resource Council which raised two objection points with suggested remedies. The Objector and Six Rivers National Forest staff then participated in discussions and a field visit to the project area which lead to resolution of the objection points raised. The objection was subsequently withdrawn on September 16 2008. As a consequence, no modifications to the Selected Alternative, as described above, are warranted.

Finding of No Significant Impact

Based on the site-specific analysis summarized in the Big Flat Vegetation and Fuels Management EA and the associated Project File, I have determined that the Selected Alternative is not a major Federal Action and will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment; an Environmental Impact Statement EIS is not required. Under the 1978 regulations written by the Council on Environmental Quality (40 CFR Parts 1500-1508), significance is evaluated for both context and intensity. Evaluation of context and intensity is summarized below.

(a) CONTEXT: This means that the significance of an action must be analyzed in several contexts, such as society as a whole (human, national), the affected region, the affected interests, and the locality. Significance varies with the setting. In the case of a

site-specific action; significance usually depends upon the effects in the locale rather than in the world as a whole. Both short- and long-term effects are relevant.

The proposed action's context is limited to 1,824 acres within an area of potential influence that includes the Big Flat community and WUI, four 7th field watersheds, and the Haines LSR, which in combination total over 60,000 acres. The objectives are to reduce potential wildfire effects in order to protect life and property, maintain forest health, and restore fire to its natural role in the ecosystem.

The context of this action is of limited scope and duration. The potential effects will be confined to approximately 503 acres of commercial thinning with subsequent activity fuel treatment, 581 acres of pre-commercial thinning with subsequent activity fuel treatment, 735 acres of stand-alone fuel reduction treatment, and five acres of meadow restoration. Proposed activities will likely be completed by 2013. Any adverse effects will be limited and short-term, while benefits will be long lasting.

Even in a local context, the proposed action will not pose significant short- or long-term effects. Resource protection measures included in the proposed action minimize and avoid adverse impacts to the extent that all impacts are within accepted levels. Proposed activities are consistent with all Standards and Guidelines in the Forest Plan.

(b) INTENSITY: This refers to the severity of impact, which is evaluated on the basis of ten factors. The following summarizes the findings of intensity relative to those factors:

(1) Impacts may be both beneficial and adverse. A significant effect may exist even if, on balance, effects are believed to be beneficial.

The proposed action has both beneficial and adverse effects, as discussed in Chapter 3 of the EA. Beneficial and adverse effects are summarized in the EA and fully addressed in specialist reports. Adverse effects are not significant and are discussed below.

Beneficial effects are also not significant and have not been used to offset or compensate for adverse effects in making this determination of “no significant effects”.

(2) The degree of effects on public health or safety.

Public health and safety were considered in the design of the project. The proposed activities are governed by standard public health and safety guidelines, Forest Service direction and other applicable laws and guidelines. Specifications designed to protect public health and safety will be included in the project implementation contract. Actions such as abating dust, temporary road closures during operations and signing for public safety, and maintaining roads used during the project are standard measures that will be used. Best Management Practices for the protection of water quality will be used (EA, Appendix C). Project activities will produce short-term localized dust (primarily operation of heavy equipment) and smoke (from pile or prescribed burning). Design standards will be implemented to reduce emissions and impacts to air quality (EA, page 24). They include abating dust by applying water to roads and burning during conditions that will allow smoke to rise and dissipate. Local residents will likely notice impaired visibility from smoke. The project will meet state and federal guidelines.

Felling hazard trees will provide for public and worker safety on Forest Service roads maintained for this project, consistent with the requirement of the Forest Plan, Federal Highway Safety Act, and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration.

In the long term the project will improve public health and safety by reducing fuel loading, reducing fire intensity and severity, and reducing risk of ignition around the community of Big Flat.

(3) Unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas.

No parklands, prime farmlands, wetlands, or ecologically critical areas are known to exist in the vicinity of the project area.

Within the project area, surveys indicated the presence of, six recorded archeological sites: two prehistoric sites and four historic sites. All of these sites would be protected through site avoidance, a Standard Resource Protection Measure. Cultural Resource Inventory Report # 05-10-1020 is on file in the Six Rivers National Forest Supervisor's Office.

Hurdygurdy, Blackhawk, and Jones Creeks, as well as the lower portion of the South Fork of the Smith River, are congressionally designated Recreational Rivers under the Wild and Scenic River Act. The Act also designated the upper portion (above the confluence of Blackhawk Creek) of the South Fork of the Smith River as a Wild River. The proposed action does not occur within any Wild River corridor and will not impede the free-flowing conditions or cause direct or adverse impacts on the outstandingly remarkable values of those rivers.

(4) The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial.

Legitimate controversy must be based on credible scientific evidence. Public involvement efforts (refer to EA, Chapter 1, Collaboration and Public Involvement) have not revealed any significant controversies regarding the environmental effects of the proposed action. Non-significant issues are thoroughly discussed in the EA, Appendix B. Thinning (commercial and pre-commercial), underburning, tractor and cable yarding, and hand piling/burning are standard practices on the Forest.

Through continued involvement and discussion with stakeholder groups controversy over environmental effects was minimized.

(5) The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.

The proposed action was designed to achieve objectives identified in the Forest Plan. Project design features and resource protection measures will minimize adverse resource effects. Years of local experience with these types of projects minimize the chance of highly uncertain effects or effects which involve unique or unknown risks. The proposed action is routine in nature, employing standard practices and protection measures, and their effects are well known. Sire and Taylor (2003) documented Federal agencies' evaluation of these effects:

“..The agencies also synthesized 153 peer-reviewed scientific publications analyzing the influence of forest structure on wildfire behavior and the severity of its effects. This synthesis found that forest thinning and prescribed burning are two land-management

techniques long employed by foresters and others to maintain forest health and reduce wildfire risk and that the benefits of these practices are supported by hundreds of scientific investigations and years of professional field experience. The synthesis also found that thinning and prescribed burning, when conducted properly with safeguards, effectively reduce wildfire risk and have a net beneficial effect on the environment by protecting and sustaining air and water quality, soil stability and productivity, desirable vegetation composition and structure, wildlife habitat, and human communities.” (See <http://www.fs.fed.us/projects/hfi/2003/november/documents/forest-structure-wildfire.pdf>)

As stated in the EA (pages 32-46), the Forest Vegetation Simulator (FVS) and the Fire and Fuels Extension (FFE) were used to project changes in stand characteristics that affect fire behavior and habitat development. The model uses growth, development, and mortality measurements collected by forest researchers in this region of the United States. The fire behavior model BehavePlus was then used to predict fire behavior in stands before and after the proposed treatments. Using these models reduces the uncertainty of anticipated fire effects for both project underburning and for potential wildfire in the project area.

The Six Rivers National Forest has had an active fuels treatment program for many years. Prescribed fires are implemented using measures that will ensure good air quality for local residents. Effects on the human environment from smoke and prescribed burns are predictable; past experience shows impacts to humans are negligible when management measures are in place.

(6) The degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration.

Due to the routine nature of the proposed action, no precedent will be set for future decisions with significant effects. A decision to proceed does not represent a decision in principle about a future consideration.

(7) Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts. Significance exists if it is reasonable to anticipate a cumulatively significant impact on the environment. Significance cannot be avoided by terming an action temporary or by breaking it down into small component parts.

The proposed action will not result in significant cumulative adverse impacts when considered in combination with other past, current, or reasonably foreseeable actions.

Cumulative effects to sensitive resources were discussed in the EA (pages 46-68, 56, and 89-91). Based on the effects to soil productivity, water quality, riparian areas, wildlife, fish, botany, and fuels contained in this EA, and the biological assessments/evaluations addressing this project, there would be no significant cumulative adverse effects that could result from implementation of the proposed action.

Due to the scope, size, and intent of this project, there are no concerns of further exacerbation of negative cumulative effects on sensitive resources. This project is designed to attain LSR objectives and reduce fuel loadings, and contains implicit measures to reverse negative cumulative effects over the long term in the treated areas.

Reasonably foreseeable future actions such as the Coast to Crest Trail project and the Smith River Road Management and Route Designation project were also considered in this analysis. Due to the scope, size, and intent of these projects there are no concerns of further exacerbation of negative cumulative effects on sensitive resources when combined with the Big Flat Vegetation Management and Fuels Reduction Project

(8) The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources.

Within the project area, surveys indicated the presence of, six recorded archeological sites: two prehistoric sites and four historic sites. All of these sites would be protected through site avoidance, a Standard Resource Protection Measure.

Heritage resources will be protected by following 36 CFR 800 regulations of the National Historic Preservation Act. Standard timber sale contract provision B6.24 (Protection of Cultural Resources) will protect any sites discovered during the project implementation. Consultation requirements under Section 106 of the Act have been fulfilled as outlined in the First Amended Regional Programmatic Agreement among the USDA Forest Service, Pacific Southwest Region, California State Historic Preservation Officer, and Advisory Council on Historic Preservation.

Consultation has taken place with the Elk Valley and Smith River Rancherías, and no issues were identified.

(9) The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species Act of 1973.

Biological Assessments were completed which analyzed the effects of this action on proposed, threatened, and endangered species of fish, wildlife, plants, and their critical habitat. The proposed project will not adversely affect any federally listed fish, wildlife, or plant species protected under the Endangered Species Act.

Wildlife: Informal consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) was completed in accordance with the Endangered Species Act through the development of the programmatic document *Biological Assessment/Evaluation for Threatened, Endangered, and Forest Service Sensitive Species: Forest-wide Thinning and Fuels Hazard Reduction Projects (August 2006 ,updated February 2008)*. This programmatic document identified project design standards and specific criteria for project development to ensure no adverse impacts to listed species would occur. The letter of concurrence rendered by the FWS (October 2006) concurred with Forest Service determinations that projects meeting the criteria listed in the programmatic document are not likely to adversely affect the northern spotted owl or the marbled murrelet or their designated critical habitat. This project was designed using the project design standards in the programmatic document. Direct, indirect, and cumulative effects on Northern spotted owl and marbled murrelet and their critical habitats are addressed in the EA (pgs. 34-35) and the *Big Flat Vegetation and Fuels Management Project Biological Assessment/Evaluation (June 2008)*.

Fish: On December 8, 2003 the final rule regarding what are known as the “counterpart regulations” was published in the Federal Register (Vol. 68, No. 235). The purpose of the counterpart regulations is to streamline consultation under section 7 of the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended (ESA), on proposed projects that support the National Fire Plan (NFP). The alternative consultation process contained in these counterpart regulations, authorized in general at 50 CFR 402.04, eliminates the need to conduct informal consultation and obtain written concurrence from the regulatory agencies for those NFP actions that the action agencies determines are “not likely to adversely affect” (NLAA) listed species or designated critical habitat (EA, page 72).

Consultation on thinning and fuel hazard reduction projects with the National Marine Fisheries (NMFS) has occurred for many years. These discussions resulted in the development of design criteria which would ensure a determination of not likely to adversely affect listed fish for prescribed burning and thinning projects. These criteria were incorporated into the programmatic document *Biological Assessment/Evaluation for Threatened, Endangered, and Forest Service Sensitive Species: Forest-wide Thinning and Fuels Hazard Reduction Projects (August 2006, updated February 2008)*. Under the Counterpart Regulations additional written concurrence from the regulatory agencies is not required for the NLAA actions meeting NFP objectives.

Plants: No Federally listed Threatened, Endangered, or Proposed plant species are known to occur within the planning area and none were found during botanical surveys of the project area (Biological Evaluation/Biological Assessment for Threatened, Endangered, Sensitive Plant and Fungi Species, page 3). No threatened or endangered plant species would be affected by this project.

(10) Whether the action threatens a violation of Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.

The action will not violate Federal, State, and local laws or requirements for the protection of the environment. The action is consistent with the Six Rivers Land and Resource Management Plan standards and guidelines and will not threaten a violation of any laws or other requirements imposed for the protection of the environment. It is consistent with the Smith River National Recreation Area Act of 1990, National Forest Management Act, Endangered Species Act, National Environmental Policy Act, National Historic Preservation Act, Archaeological Resources Protection Act of 1979, Clean Water Act, Clean Air Act, Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, the Federal Highway Safety Act, and the California Porter Cologne Water Quality Act, and Executive Order 12898. It is consistent with the Six Rivers Land and Resource Management Plan, the Record of Decision for Amendments to Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management Planning Documents within the Range of the Northern Spotted Owl (April 1994) and the Record of Decision and Standards and Guidelines for Amendments to the Survey and Manage, Protection Buffer, and other Mitigation Measures Standards and Guidelines (January 2001). The project meets the Aquatic Conservation Strategy objectives of the Northwest Forest Plan (EA pages 74-76).

Findings Required by Other Laws and Regulations

Forest Service Sensitive Species: Biological evaluations were prepared for Forest Service Sensitive Species of fish, animals, and plants. Implementation of this action will not cause a trend towards Federal listing of any potentially affected Sensitive species. Beneficial and long-term results include accelerated development of late-successional characteristics in riparian areas and young stands within the project area.

Survey and Manage Species: A January 9, 2006 court order (NEA et al. vs. Ray et al., Civ. No. 04-844P) concluded that ground-disturbing activities need to comply or demonstrate consistency with the 2001 Record of Decision (ROD) and Standard and Guidelines for Survey and Manage (S&M) Species (USDA and USDI 2001) as amended by the 2003 Annual Species Review (Table 1-1; Species Included in Survey and Manage Standards and Guidelines and Category Assignment December 2003). Compliance with the 2001 ROD as amended by the Annual Species Review was affirmed by a February 18, 2008 Ninth Circuit Court order that concluded the 2007 Survey and Manage Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement satisfied the condition set forth by a February 12, 2007 Ninth Circuit Court decision pertaining to two Bureau of Land Management timber sales. The February 18th order thus vacated the February 12th order.

The Big Flat Vegetation and Fuels Management Project is in compliance with the 2001 ROD as amended.

Forest Service Manual 7700, Chapter 7710 – Transportation Atlas, Records and Analysis, Effective December 14, 2001: In November 2005, The Six Rivers National Forest completed a Roads Analysis Process (RAP) for the Smith River NRA. Using information from this RAP, the Forest Supervisor has determined that there is adequate road information to inform the decision on the Big Flat Vegetation and Fuels Management project. The proposed action is consistent with the recommendations developed during the Smith River NRA RAP. Interdisciplinary team members reviewed the roads within the project area during the planning process and arrived at the following conclusions:

Forest Road 15N38 is currently an Objective Maintenance Level (OML) 2 road necessary for project activities. The Smith River RAP recommends keeping and maintaining the road, however there are some inconsistencies for an associated lower road segment between the map location and both public comment and agency recommendations. The system road is shown correctly on the map; however the descriptive comments and recommendations indicate they were intended for a non-system road that leads to private property and public lands along the South Fork Smith River known as Indian Bar. Therefore to correct the discrepancy in the RAP and follow management direction and public comment, this non-system road would be added to the National Forest road system as 15N38A, an OML 2 road. This road segment is needed for the project to access unit CH 50. No construction is required, only maintenance. The road is currently open to the public and is functioning like an OML 2 road. The road has future management needs for fire, private property access, and recreation.

Forest Plan, Noxious Weeds: The overall level of risk for the project is low when implemented with project design features in place. Requiring equipment to be washed prior to entering the project area will ensure that new weeds are not introduced into the

project area by equipment. Using certified weed- free seed and straw will also prevent the introduction of new weed populations. (EA, page 98)

The treatment areas will retain fully stocked timber stands after completion of the project. The high level of shading and the retention of duff and litter levels sufficient to meet Best Management Practices will prevent the easy introduction of weeds into areas with ground disturbance.

Monitoring of the project area will ensure that any noxious weeds that may be introduced into the area can be quickly controlled by hand pulling methods.

Forest Plan, Port-Orford-Cedar Root Disease: The project area was evaluated for risks associated with the introduction or spread of Port-Orford-Cedar root disease (EA Appendix D) in the project area. The overall level of risk for the project is low with project design features in place. Requiring equipment to be washed prior to entering the project area and limiting operations to the dry season will ensure that the risk of root disease spread and infection of uninfected areas is kept low. (EA, page 99)

Clean Water Act, Porter-Cologne Act, and Basin Plan: Under the Federal Clean Water Act, the Environmental Protection Agency delegated its authority for regulation of water quality on Federal Lands in California to the State Regional Water Quality Control Board. A management agency agreement between the U.S. Forest Service and the North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board was developed to cover management activities on National Forest Service lands. The management agency agreement requires the U.S. Forest Service to implement the state certified and Environmental Protection Agency approved water quality management program and practices referred to as Best Management Practices (BMPs) to protect water quality from sources of pollution. Both the program and practices were developed in compliance with the Clean Water Act requirements and are consistent with the California Porter Cologne Water Quality Act and with the North Coast Basin Plan. (EA, pages 76-77)

The proposed action is not expected to have a detrimental effect on the water quality objectives for suspended sediment, settleable material, turbidity or temperature. The North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board's Basin Plan standards set for each parameter will not be exceeded and adverse affects to beneficial uses are not anticipated. No significant water quality effects were predicted to occur from implementing the proposed action. Riparian Reserves will undergo long-term improvement of conditions and water quality will be maintained so that domestic water users and other beneficial uses such as fisheries and aquatic habitat will not be adversely impacted by activities.

The EA (Chapter 3 pgs 56-76), Fish BA, and the Hydrology and Fisheries Assessment address the effects of the project on federally Threatened coho salmon and their designated Critical Habitat. The fish biologist for the project determined that the action is not likely to adversely affect coho salmon or coho Critical Habitat.

Executive Order 12898, Environmental Justice: This Federal order requires an assessment of whether there would be disproportionate effects to minority or low-income populations. Although there are minorities and low-income people living in the California North Coastal California area, they will not be disproportionately affected as there will be no effect on cultural properties, and access will not be changed in the

proposed action. All people will benefit by the reduction in fire risk in and around the Big Flat community. (EA, pages 104-105)

Healthy Forest Restoration Act--Monitoring: A collaborative multi-party monitoring plan will be developed and will be implemented in order to gauge achievement of project objectives and project associated resource effects.

Administrative Review or Appeal Opportunities

This decision is not subject to appeal pursuant to 36 CFR 218.12 (Decisions and actions not subject to appeal). The objection process pursuant to 36 CFR 218 provided the sole means of administrative review of this HFRA project.

Implementation Date

Implementation of this project can begin immediately. My intention is to implement this project through timber sale and service contracts. Project activities will be restricted as described in the Project Design Features Section of the EA (EA, pages 20-24).

Responsible Official and Contact Information

Tyrone Kelley, Six Rivers National Forest Supervisor, is the responsible official for the Big Flat Vegetation and Fuels Management Project EA. For further information, contact Linda West, Forest Environmental Coordinator at (707) 441-3561, or Mary Kay Vandiver, Smith River NRA District Ranger at (707) 457-3131.

/s/Tyrone Kelley

September 22, 2008

TYRONE KELLEY
Forest Supervisor
Six Rivers National Forest

DATE

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