



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

December 2003



Finding of No Significant Impact

Boswell Creek Watershed Healthy Forest Initiative Project

Sam Houston Ranger District, Sam Houston National Forest
Walker and San Jacinto County, TX

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http://www.southernregion.fs.fed.us/texas/healthy_for_ini/index.shtml

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After considering the environmental effects described in the attached EA, I have determined that these actions will not have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment considering the context and intensity of impacts (40 CFR 1508.27). Thus, an environmental impact statement will not be prepared.

/s/ Timothy R. Bigler

12/9/03

Responsible Official

Date

I base my finding on the following:

Context.

The setting of this project is localized with implications to the immediate treatment areas only. The people most affected by the treatments will be local residents. This action is also a continuation of fuels and thinning projects that have occurred for many years on the Sam Houston National Forest. Short-term adverse effects would be mitigated through implementation of the Standards and Guidelines in the Revised Land and Resource Management Plan for the National Forests and Grasslands in Texas, Best Management Practices, and design criteria developed for the project. These design criteria include, but are not limited to, actions to limit the intensity of prescribed fire in streamside management zones; restricting the use of mechanized equipment in streamside management zones to limit disturbance; imposing a limited operating period for thinning activities to minimize the potential for damage to trees; and modifying activities along the Lone Star Hiking Trail and Four Notch Road to protect scenery. Long-term adverse effects are not expected.

Intensity.

- 1. Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse: A significant effect may exist even if the federal agency believes that on balance the effect will be beneficial.**

Both beneficial and adverse effects have been taken into consideration when making a determination of significance. While there will be beneficial effects, this action does not rely on those effects to balance adverse environmental effects. No adverse effects would be significant. (EA, pages 10-16)

- 2. The degree to which the proposed action affects public health or safety.**

The fuel treatments are designed to increase the efficiency of fire suppression efforts and reduce risks to firefighters, local residents and the public, facilities and

structures, water quality, and natural resources. There would be improved community safety because the fuel reduction would allow direct suppression tactics by firefighters, which would increase the chance of suppressing the fire before it reaches the private structures. (EA page 12, Fuels and Fire Report)

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.

The project area does not contain any unique characteristics that will be significantly impacted by the project. Heritage surveys have been completed and no previously undiscovered sites within project boundaries were found (EA, p. 13). Forest Plan Standards and Guidelines required for project implementation prevent impacts to existing sites and provide protection for new sites if discovered during project implementation. There are no known wetlands within the project area (EA, p. 11).

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

Based on the limited context of the project and my review of public comments and the project's analysis, I do not find any highly controversial effects to the human environment. Controversy revealed during scoping and public comment generally dealt with decisions made in the NFGT Plan regarding the desired composition and structure of the forest and the acceptable activities to meet the desired conditions. There is no substantial scientific controversy related to the environmental effects of the Proposed Action.

5. The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment is highly uncertain or involves unique or unknown risks.

Based on my review of this project's analysis, I find the possible effects on the human environment that are uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks are minimal or non-existent. This project is similar to the past fuel reduction activities and thinning conducted on many acres in this same area and across the Sam Houston National Forest. These projects have exhibited the environmental effects associated with the Proposed Action including the desired changes in fire behavior and southern pine beetle hazard that are the objectives of this project. The effects associated with the project are recognized, familiar, and acceptable (EA, p. 10-16). The analysis is based on our best use of available data on fire behavior and our extensive experience with this type of project.

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.

The Boswell Creek Watershed Healthy Forest Initiative Project represents a site-specific project that does not set precedence for future actions or present a decision

in principle about future considerations. Any proposed future project must be evaluated on its own merits and effects. The activities are in accordance with the best available science we have to manage fuels, fire behavior, and southern pine beetle hazard.

- 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.**

Based on the analysis and disclosure of effects in the EA and the specialist reports in the project file, the project does not represent potential cumulative adverse impacts when considered in combination with other past actions or reasonably foreseeable future actions.

- 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 (NRHP) or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources.**

There are no districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for the NRHP (EA, p. 13).

- 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.**

No threatened or endangered animal or plant species will be adversely affected by my decision. Additional information can be found in the Wildlife Report, the Biological Evaluation, and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Concurrence in the project file.

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

The project meets the above requirements imposed for the protection of the environment and meets disclosure requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act.