

Decision Notice and Finding of No Significant Impact

Dinkey Ranger Station Buildings Decommissioning

USDA Forest Service
High Sierra Ranger District
Sierra National Forest Service
Fresno County, CA

Decision and Reasons for the Decision

The Forest Service (FS) prepared an Environmental Assessment (EA) for the Dinkey Ranger Station Buildings Decommissioning in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and other relevant laws and regulations. The EA discloses the direct, indirect and cumulative environmental impacts that would result from the alternatives. Additional documentation, including more detailed analyses of Project-area resources, may be found in the Project record is located at the Sierra National Forest Supervisor's Office in Clovis, CA.

This document contains a Decision Notice (DN) and Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI). The DN identifies the decision and the rationale for selecting or modifying an alternative from the EA. The FONSI shows that the decision does not cause significant impacts on the human environment and explains why an environmental impact statement is not necessary.

Background

The Sierra National Forest (SNF) proposes to decommission (demolish) six buildings that are economically unfeasible to maintain, underutilized at the Dinkey Ranger Station, and are now surplus to the Sierra National Forest (SNF) mission. This demolition action would remove unnecessary buildings from the Forest's Facility Maintenance expenditures, as well as clean up the SNF footprint adjacent to the Dinkey Creek Campground public recreation area. These buildings are identified in the 2009 Sierra Facilities Master Plan for removal, and replacement structures have been constructed at the nearby Dinkey Mill Work Center. Maintaining the buildings proposed for demolition to standard is also cost-prohibitive. This proposal is necessary to meet the 2012 President's List for the Decommissioning of Facilities, and the 2009 Pacific Southwest Regional Office (Region 5) Strategic Facility Plan. Region 5 has provided funds for the removal of these buildings which can only be used this fiscal year (FY12).

The SNF has determined that Dinkey Ranger Station is eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places, and that four of the existing structures contribute to that eligibility. The California State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) has concurred with that determination (SHPO Ref. USFS120326A, May 8, 2012). The demolition of the Warehouse will have an

adverse effect on a historic property (36 CFR 800.5). Under the regulations of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (36 CFR 800), the SNF will prepare a Memorandum of Agreement with SHPO describing measures to resolve the adverse effect, which will take place prior to implementation of the decommissioning actions. Demolition of five other structures at Dinkey Ranger Station would not have any adverse effect on a historic property, as the other buildings do not contribute to the National Register eligibility.

With regard to potential negative effects to wildlife species, the only possible concern would be low potential for disturbance to individual bats; none of which are classified as a Threatened or Endangered species.

Decision

Based upon my review of the analysis documented in the EA and associated Project record, I have decided to implement Alternative 1- Proposed Action, involve decommissioning the six buildings at Dinkey Ranger Station and above ground associated structure, with restorative work on the disturbed surface area so that they would be returned to “natural” conditions.

Decision Rationale

My decision to implement Alternative 1 considered existing conditions, meeting the purpose and needs for the Project, environmental effects, collaboration, and public comments. My conclusion is based on a review of the record that shows a thorough analysis using the best available science. I also considered direction provided in the Forest Facility Master Plan, environmental laws (e.g. Endangered Species Act, Clean Water Act), and related regulations and policies. I believe that the selection of this alternative best meets all the components of the purpose and need; considers the issues; ensures natural and cultural resource protection; and results in movement toward ecological restoration of the Project area.

Finding of No Significant Impact

After considering the environmental effects of my decision described in the EA (pp. 63 – 149), I determined that my decision will not have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment, considering the context and intensity of impacts (40 CFR 1508.27); therefore, an environmental impact statement will not be prepared. I relied on Dinkey Ranger Station Buildings Decommissioning Project EA and Project record in making this determination. I base this finding on the following:

Context

This Project is a site-specific action that by itself does not have international, national, region-wide, or statewide importance. The Project is located adjacent to the popular, public Dinkey Creek Campground, 12 miles SE of Shaver Lake, California, along County Dinkey Creek Road, in Fresno County, within the High Sierra Ranger District, SNF. The Project is not likely to significantly affect society as a whole in the region, state, or nationally.

Intensity

I considered the following ten elements of impact intensity (40 CFR 1508.27b) in assessing the potential significance of Project effects.

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

The project has been planned to include measures to avoid or reduce adverse impacts to affected resources, consistent with meeting objectives for watershed and wildlife/habitat management. No significant adverse impacts on water resources, plant or wildlife species or their habitat have been identified. This section summarizes no significant finding to environmental impact of the proposed action meet the definition of significance as defined by regulations to implement NEPA found at 40 CFR 1508.27 as described below.

- **Wildlife**

The Station is adjacent to highly used and popular Dinkey Creek Campground. Surveys in the area have not identified nesting or denning of threatened, endangered or sensitive species within the project footprint or within a distance that may be adversely affected by the proposed building demolition.

Some of the buildings proposed for demolition may be used by bats for roosting. Therefore, bat surveys would be conducted in June, prior to demolition actions, to determine if roosting is occurring. If bats are found entering or leaving the proposed structures then measures would be taken to eliminate or significantly reduce the potential impact of demolition to those bats. These measures would consist of modifying the access points in the structures to prohibit or substantially reduce the number of bats using the buildings prior to and during demolition.

- **Botany and Noxious Weeds**

The project would have no effect or potential to affect Threatened, Endangered, or Sensitive plants, as no plants in these categories are known to occur in the project area. The project would have “low” risk of introducing or spreading noxious weeds because Forest Service Manual (FSM) 2900, *Invasive Species Management*, would be implemented to mitigate the introduction/spreading of these.

- **Hydrology**

This project site is not in proximity to a water body, but is located in the Riparian Conservation Area of Glen Meadow Creek and Dinkey Creek. Based on the location of this project, the limited extent and patchy nature of the ground disturbance that would result, restoration of disturbed areas to natural conditions, and implementation of the applicable BMPs, the District Hydrologist concluded that there would be no effects to riparian areas or water quality in any adjacent waterbody.

- **Cultural Resources**

Removal of the Warehouse (Building FS2202) will have an adverse effect (36 CFR 800.5) on a historic property. The SNF has determined that Dinkey Ranger Station is eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places, and that four of the existing structures contribute to that eligibility. The California State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) has concurred with that determination (SHPO Ref.

USFS120326A, May 8, 2012). The SNF will prepare a Memorandum of Agreement with SHPO describing measures to resolve the adverse effect, which will take place prior to implementation of the decommissioning actions. Demolition of five other structures at Dinkey Ranger Station would not have any adverse effect on a historic property, as the other buildings do not contribute to the National Register eligibility.

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

The Proposed Action would not affect the public health and safety. The No Action Alternative would allow the threats to public and employees' safety and health if the buildings continue in their current conditions as they would continue to deteriorate and would potentially collapse.

3. Unique characteristics of the geographic area.

The Dinkey Ranger Station is inextricably linked with the history of Dinkey Creek, a central area for recreation, lumbering, and livestock management in the forested mountains of the central Sierra. An in-depth discussion of the history of the Dinkey Creek area, including the Forest Service administration, is in *A Review of the Historic Resources of the Dinkey Creek Hydroelectric Project* (Johnson and McCarthy 1982).

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

The effects of decommissioning man-made (and soon to be vacated) improvements on the human environment at the proposed location are not considered to be controversial. Procedures for the proposed activities will follow commonly established methods that have been used in private industry and other government projects.

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

The effects to the human environment do not involve uncertain or unique or unknown risks because the decommissioning of buildings and man-made improvements would follow commonly established methods that have been used in private industry and other government projects.

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 practices and methods included in the proposed action are science and industry based, rather than precedent setting. As described previously, other locations may be decommissioned as a result of the construction of the Dinkey Mill Work Center, but each of those would be analyzed independent of this proposed action, taking into account their own set of unique site-specific criteria. The decommissioning of buildings and man-made improvements at the Dinkey Ranger Station would not impact principles that would affect future decisions.

7. Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts.

There would be low to no direct or indirect effects on cultural resources, wildlife, or hydrologic resources, and therefore, no cumulatively significant effects.

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.

As described above, the proposed action will adversely affect a historic property. In compliance with the regulations of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (36 CFR 800), the SNF will resolve the adverse effect with actions described in a Memorandum of Agreement with the California SHPO.

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.

Surveys in the area have not identified nesting or denning sites of threatened, endangered or sensitive species within the project footprint or within a distance that may be adversely affected by the proposed building demolition. Some of the proposed decommissioning buildings may be used by bats for roosting. Therefore, bat surveys would be conducted in June 2012, prior to demolition actions, to determine if roosting is occurring. If bats are found entering or leaving the proposed structures then measures would be taken to eliminate or significantly reduce the potential impact of demolition to those bats.

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

The proposed action would not threaten a violation of federal, state, or local law, or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment. Rather, it would be in strict compliance with such laws and requirements.

Public Involvement

This action was originally listed as a proposal on the Sierra National Forest Quarterly Schedule of Proposed Actions (SOPA) in April 2012 edition and updated periodically during the environmental analysis. It was made available to the public and other agencies for comment during scoping March 29, 2012 on the internet in the SOPA. Legal notices were published in the Fresno Bee, 04/23/2012, newspaper of record, requesting the public to comment on the Preliminary Environmental Assessment (Preliminary EA). The public comment period for the Preliminary EA was from April 23, 2012 to May 23, 2012. The environmental assessment lists agencies and persons consulted on page 15.

Findings Required by Other Laws and Regulations

This decision is consistent with the Sierra National Forest Land Management Plan. The project was designed in conformance with Forest Facility Master Plan. A Finding of No Significant Impact and Environmental Assessment were considered, I determined that these actions will not have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment, and that an environmental impact statement will not be prepared.

Administrative Review (Appeal) Opportunities

The pre-decisional administration review process for this Project has been completed in compliance with 36 CFR 218. Projects authorized under the Healthy Forests Restoration Act of 2003 are not subject to appeal (36 CFR Part 218.3(a)); therefore, no additional administrative review opportunities exist.

Implementation

Implementation of the decision may begin immediately following the publication date of the legal notice of this decision in *the Fresno Bee*, the newspaper of record [36 CFR 215.9(c)].

Contact

For additional information concerning this decision, contact: Suzanne Hendrickson, Assistant Forest Engineer – Facilities, Sierra National Forest, 1600 Tollhouse Road, Clovis, CA 93611, 559-297-0706 x 4852.



Ray Porter
District Ranger
Sierra Nation Forest
High Sierra Ranger District

7.10.12

Date