

Decision Notice and Finding of No Significant Impact

North Fork Pole Barn Decommissioning

USDA Forest Service
Bass Lake Ranger District
Sierra National Forest Service
Madera County, CA

Decision and Reasons for the Decision

The Forest Service (FS) prepared an Environmental Assessment (EA) for the North Fork Pole Barn 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) a structure known as the North Fork Pole Barn. The Pole Barn is located on the Bass Lake Ranger District of the SNF, in the south east section of the US Forest Service Compound at North Fork California. This demolition action is needed to eliminate a significant safety hazard and a severely deteriorated structure at the North Fork Compound. The proposed action would also remove from the compound an unwanted dumping nuisance for inappropriate materials and chemicals. Additionally, the demolition would reduce SNF overall facility square footage by 4680 ft²; thus reducing unnecessary deferred maintenance and future facilities expenditures by \$669,637. This Pole Barn is identified in the 2009 Sierra Facilities Master Plan as an excess building that needs to be removed. Removal of the Pole Barn will allow the SNF 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 funding for the removal of the building which can only be used this fiscal year (FY12), consequently it is imperative that the work be accomplished by September 30.

In 1989, the SNF, in consultation with the California Office of Historic Preservation (SHPO) determined that the Pole Barn (building # 2306) is a contributing element to the North Fork Compound Historic District (FS# 0515551149), and that the historic district is eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). By 1991, the SNF noticed impacts to the structural integrity of the building and began to take steps to reinforce it; however, by 1995, the building had deteriorated to the point where it no longer appeared safe. In 1996, the SNF contracted with Jack Vance, a historic preservation specialist with the National Park Service to conduct an assessment of the costs to stabilize and renovate the building to the Secretary of the Interiors Standards and Guidelines for the Rehabilitation of Historic Buildings. At that time, Mr. Vance estimated that it would cost between \$65,000 - \$98,000 to complete the renovation and stabilization. Based on the estimated costs, the SNF decided not to stabilize and restore the building. Further deterioration occurred and a portion of the central section of the building collapsed. In 2004, after thoroughly considering available alternatives, the SNF determined that it would need to demolish the Pole Barn and consulted with SHPO, and notified the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (ACHP) of the adverse effect to the historic property. In 2006 the SNF and SHPO entered into a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) that provides the stipulations of what is required to mitigate the adverse effect to the historic property. Consequently, the SNF has determined that it will resolve the adverse effects of the decommissioning on the historic property by executing and implementing the MOA.

There is a slight potential that three elderberry shrubs near this proposed demolition structure could provide habitat for the Longhorn beetle, therefore, these elderberry shrubs will be protected from demolition activities.

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 removing the Pole Barn 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 North Fork Pole Barn 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 within the North Fork Compound of the SNF (originally the SNF Headquarters), in the community of North Fork, CA. It is located in Madera County at 2600 feet in elevation in the Bass Lake Ranger District. 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.

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

- **Bats:** The pole barn that is proposed for demolition consists of sheet metal sheathing with wooden posts. One side of the building is entirely open, as well as many other openings exist in the roof and walls where sheet metal is missing. This type of structure as well as the condition of the structure do not provide reliable or typical bat roosting habitat. Additionally, no bat roosts have been found during examination of the structure, therefore, this demolition project is not expected to impact bat species.
- **Valley Elderberry Longhorn Beetle:** (*Desmocerus californicus*): The Valley Elderberry Longhorn Beetle is typically found within elderberry shrub complexes below 3,000' elevation typically in or close to riparian zones. There is a slight potential that three blue elderberry shrubs (*Sambucus nigra* ssp. *caerulea*) near this proposed demolition structure could provide habitat for the Longhorn beetle, therefore, these elderberry shrubs will be protected from demolition activities. The shrubs will be marked with flagging and their location identified to the demolition crews to help ensure they are protected. These actions will ensure there will be no significant adverse impacts to the Valley Elderberry Longhorn Beetle, in the unlikely event that those species inhabit the elderberry shrubs.
- **Other Wildlife Species:** All other wildlife species populations also are not expected to be adversely affected by the proposed demolition of this Pole Barn.

Botany and Noxious Weeds:

- No Threatened, Endangered, or Sensitive plants occur in the project area, based on a survey conducted on April 19, 2012 by the Forest Botanist. The vegetation at the site is typical of Sierra Nevada chaparral and ponderosa pine forest; dominated by foothill pine (*Pinus sabiniana*), ponderosa pine (*Pinus ponderosa*), interior live oak (*Quercus wislizenii*), withblue elderberry, Mariposa manzanita (*Arctostaphylos viscida* ssp. *mariposa*), and buckbrush (*Ceanothus cuneatus*) There is a culturally important plant, sourberry (*Rhus aromatica*), adjacent to the road leading to the pole barn. The herbaceous plants in the direct vicinity of the project are mostly non-native annual grasses such as *Bromus diandrus*, *B. tectorum*, *B. madritensis* ssp. *rubens*, *B. hordeaceus*, *Vulpia myuros*, *Avena* sp. Two invasive non-native plants (noxious weeds) were observed: about 6 woolly mullein (*Verbascum thapsus*) plants at the front of the pole barn and about 10-20 klamathweed (*Hypericum perforatum*) plants growing along the outside back wall of the shed. The project would have a low risk of introducing or spreading noxious weeds because noxious weed prevention measures have been built into the project design.

Hydrology

- This project site is not in proximity to a water body. With the restoration of the disturbed areas to natural conditions, and the applications of Best Management Practices (BMP), related to hydrology, no impact to hydrologic resources is projected.

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

Proposed Action Alternative will 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.

This project is located within the North Fork Compound which was established in 1910, in the community of North Fork, CA, by the first Sierra National Forest Supervisor, Charles Shinn. North Fork Compound is eligible for National Register of Historic Places (NRHP).

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

The effects of decommissioning this man-made improvement on the human environment at the proposed location, is not considered to be controversial. Procedures for the 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 industry-standard policies and procedures.

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 decommissioning of this building and man-made improvements, would not affect principles that would affect future decisions. This area is currently unused and in excess of government needs, and is a safety hazard. It is a surplus building which was identified in the Forest Facility Master Plan. Disposing of the Pole Barn would not affect future decisions or considerations, as each site is evaluated on its own unique set of circumstances and conditions.

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

The removal of the historically significant Pole Barn has been determined to be a direct and significant impact on the larger historic property (North Fork Compound Historic District). However, by implementing the MOA, the SNF will mitigate the direct and any cumulative effects that this action may have on the historic property. This action and its resulting potential effects are not projected to have cumulatively significant impacts on other resources.

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.

The Pole Barn is a contributor to the eligible North Fork Compound Historic District. Demolishing and removing this building will have an adverse effect to the North Fork Compound Historic District. The SNF, in consultation with the California State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO), has determined that this adverse effect to this historic property cannot be avoided and has further determined that it will resolve the adverse effect to the historic property by executing and implementing a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA), dated July 2006. The MOA identifies measures to mitigate the adverse effect. These measures include conducting an Historic American Building Survey (HABS). The final HABS report is currently being packaged to send to the National Park Service (NPS). Upon acceptance of the HABS by the NPS, consultation with the SHPO will continue until all stipulations in the Memorandum of Agreement are accomplished and concurred upon by the 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.

No bat roosts have been found during examination of the structure, therefore, this demolition project is not expected to impact bat species.

There is a slight potential Valley Elderberry Longhorn Beetle that three blue elderberry shrubs (*Sambucus nigra* ssp. *caerulea*) near this proposed demolition structure could provide habitat for the Longhorn beetle, therefore, these elderberry shrubs will be protected from demolition activities.

All other wildlife species populations are not expected to be adversely affected by the proposed demolition of this Pole Barn.

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 will be in strict compliance with all of the same.

Public Involvement

This action was originally listed as a proposal on the Sierra National Forest Quarterly Schedule of Proposed Actions (SOPA) in January 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

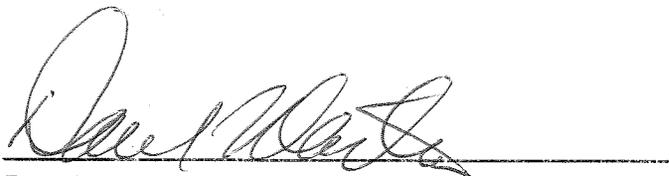
The pre-decisional administration review process for this Project has been completed in compliance with 36 CFR 218. Projects authorized under the Healthy Forests Restoration Act of 2003 are not subject to appeal (36 CFR Part 218.3(a)); therefore, no additional administrative review opportunities exist.

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)] and clearance by the State Historic Presentation Office.

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.



David Martin
District Ranger
Sierra Nation Forest

7/9/12
Date