

United States Department of Agriculture  
Forest Service  
Pacific Southwest Region

Decision Notice  
and  
Finding of No Significant Impact  
**Pacific Heliport Reconstruction Project  
Environmental Assessment**

Eldorado National Forest  
Pacific Ranger District  
El Dorado County, CA

## Decision and Rationale

I have reviewed the 2012 Environmental Assessment (EA) for the Pacific Heliport Reconstruction project prepared by the Eldorado National Forest. It discloses and discusses the environmental effects of constructing a permanent office facility, storage building, and expanding the current size of the Pacific Heliport. The legal location is: nw ¼ section 34, T.11N., R.13E. and ne ¼, se ¼ section 33, T.12.N., R.14E. MDB&M (map of analysis area can be found in Appendix A of the EA).

The 2012 Pacific Heliport Reconstruction Project EA is available for public review at the Pacific Ranger Station, 7887 Highway 50, Pollock Pines, California. Based on the analysis described in the EA, I have selected **Alternative 1, Proposed Action**. This decision includes the actions described under Alternative 1 in the EA (pgs. 2-4), with the exception of the office demolition and removal of the existing storage building at Big Hill (i.e. items described under “Big Hill Helitack Office Demolition” and “Storage Building” in the EA pg. 3). The decision on the existing facilities at Big Hill and storage facilities may be made at a future date. Storage facilities may be incorporated into the design within the analysis area at the Pacific Heliport.

I find that the Proposed Action (Alternative 1) meets the purpose and need to upgrade the existing heliport infrastructure and construct a new facility at the Pacific Ranger Station to accommodate the National Type I Large Fire Support helicopter and National Type II initial attack helicopter and associated personnel, as well as the occasional helicopter use during El Dorado County Emergency Medical System (EMS) incidents and other municipalities such as Sacramento Municipal Utility District (SMUD). My decision was made after fully considering the physical, biological, economic and social effects of Alternative 1, and the site-specific specialist reports. These include, but are not limited to the hydrology report, biological evaluations/biological assessments (BE/BA) for wildlife species and sensitive plants, management indicator species (MIS) report, noxious weed risk assessment, heritage resources report, and other documentation found in the project file.

**The following are my reasons for selecting Alternative 1:**

- Alternative 1 meets the purpose and need to construct a facility that would accommodate the personnel and equipment needs for the daily management of the Type I and Type 2 fire suppression helicopters, as well as the occasional use of the heliport for El Dorado County EMS incidents and other municipalities by upgrading the existing heliport infrastructure and utilizing an existing administrative site.

### **Public Involvement**

The project has been listed in the Eldorado National Forest Schedule of Proposed Actions (SOPA) since January, 2012. A letter announcing a community meeting to discuss this proposal, dated April 2, 2012 was distributed to 25 local residences near the Pacific Ranger Station compound and White Meadows area. The community meeting was held at the Pacific Ranger Station on April 16, 2012. Seven residents attended the meeting and site visit, and expressed general support of the proposal. No important issues were raised.

A Preliminary EA (June 2012) was mailed to interested parties and a legal notice requesting comment on the Preliminary EA was published in the *Mountain Democrat* on August 3, 2012. No comments were received.

## **Finding of No Significant Impact**

I have determined that this project is not a major Federal action that would significantly affect the quality of the human environment. Therefore, an Environmental Impact Statement is not required. This determination was made considering the following factors:

### **1. Beneficial and adverse impacts.**

All analyses prepared in support of this document considered both beneficial and adverse effects of the proposed action; however, beneficial effects were not used to offset or compensate for adverse effects in the analyses. None of the potential effects of Alternative 1 would be significant, even when considered separately from the beneficial effects that occur in conjunction with those effects. (EA pgs. 5-7)

### **2. The degree to which the Proposed Action affects public health or safety.**

Implementation of Alternative 1 would be governed by standard public health and safety contract clauses. Safety measures including signs and traffic control devices would be put in place to ensure safe traffic flow through the Pacific Ranger District compound. The construction sites are within the administrative areas on the Pacific Ranger District compound, separate from the public areas. The construction sites would be adequately marked and would be closed to public entry. Only authorized Forest Service personnel and contractors would enter the construction site. The risk to public health or safety would be minimized through standard safety procedures.

This project would upgrade the existing heliport infrastructure to meet the facility standards needed to support wildland fire suppression activities and EMS incidents, which will benefit public safety by having this resource available in the local area.

### **3. Unique characteristics of the geographic area.**

There are no parklands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas within the project area. (EA pg. 7)

Historic properties within the project area will be protected by the design criteria incorporated into Alternative 1. Details regarding archaeological surveys and management recommendations for heritage resources sites, including specific site-by-site protective measures, are outlined in the Heritage Resource Report for this project. By following these procedures, there will be no effect to cultural resources from implementing Alternative 1. (EA pg. 7)

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

Potential adverse effects have been minimized or eliminated to the point where there are few effects to draw controversy. Public involvement efforts did not reveal any important issues or any other significant controversies regarding environmental effects of this proposal. Based on comments from the public (EA pg. 2) and the analysis of effects from the ID Team (EA pgs. 5-8), there are not significant effects expected to the quality of the human environment from implementing Alternative 1.

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

Local expertise in implementation of these types of projects minimizes the chance of highly uncertain effects or effects which involve unique or unknown risks. Proposed activities are routine in nature, employing standard practices and protection measures, and their effects are generally well known. (EA pg. 8)

**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 Pacific Heliport Reconstruction project represents a site-specific project that does not set precedence for future decisions with significant effects or present a decision in principle about future considerations. Any future decisions would require a site-specific analysis to consider all relevant scientific and site-specific information available at that time. (EA pg. 8)

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

A cumulative effect is the consequence on the environment that results from the incremental effect of the action when added to the effects of other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions, regardless of what agency or person undertakes the other actions and regardless of land ownership on which the actions occur. Resource specialists considered cumulative effects when conducting the effects analysis in the specialist report. None of the resource specialists found the potential for significant adverse cumulative effects. (EA pg.8-9)

**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.**

It was determined that there would be no effect to cultural resources from implementing Alternative 1 (Heritage Resource Report R2012-05-03-50001). Alternative 1 does not adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. The proposed action complies with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended in accordance with provisions of the October 1996 Programmatic Agreement among the U.S.D.A. Forest Service, Pacific Southwest Region, the California State Historic Preservation Officer, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation regarding the identification, evaluation, and treatment of historic properties managed by the National Forests of the Sierra Nevada, California. (EA pg. 9)

**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.**

There are no federally listed threatened or endangered wildlife or plant species that are known to occur or have potential habitat (including critical habitat) within or adjacent to the project area. There would be no effect to federally listed threatened or endangered wildlife or plant species or critical habitat from implementation of Alternative 1. (EA pg. 10)

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

Alternative 1 would not threaten a violation of Federal, State, or local law, or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment. Alternative 1 is consistent with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), National Forest Management Act (NFMA), Endangered Species Act (ESA), Clean Water Act, and the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA). Alternative 1 is fully consistent with the Eldorado National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (USDA Forest Service 1989), as amended by the Sierra Nevada Forest Plan Amendment (USDA Forest Service 2004). The proposed action would also be compliant with NFMA provisions for management indicator species (MIS). The project level MIS Report determined that activities within the project area would not alter existing trends in habitat, nor would it lead to a change in distribution of MIS across the Sierra Nevada bioregion (EA pg. 10).

### **Administrative Review or Appeal Opportunities**

Because only supportive comments were received during the 30-day comment period, this decision is not subject to appeal pursuant to 36 CFR 215.12.

### **Implementation Date**

Implementation of this decision may begin immediately following publication of the legal notice in the Mountain Democrat.

### **Contact Information**

For further information, contact Richard Thornburgh, District Ranger, Pacific Ranger District, 7887 Highway 50, Pollock Pines, CA 95726; (530) 647-5410.

  
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RICHARD THORNBURGH  
District Ranger  
Pacific Ranger District

September 24, 2012  
DATE