
**DECISION NOTICE AND FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT
BUCKS LAKE HAZARDOUS FUELS REDUCTION PROJECT
U.S. FOREST SERVICE, PLUMAS NATIONAL FOREST,
MT. HOUGH RANGER DISTRICT
PLUMAS COUNTY, CA**

LOCATION

The Bucks Lake Hazardous Fuels Reduction Project (Bucks Project) is located approximately 12 miles west of Quincy, California, within the Mt. Hough Ranger District of the Plumas National Forest. The proposed project encompasses all or portions of T. 23N, R. 7E, sections 1-4, 9-12; T. 23N, R. 8E, sections 5-7, 18; T. 24N, R. 7E, sections 27-29, 32, 33, 36; and T. 24N, R. 8E, sections 31, 32, MDBM.

BACKGROUND

Recent high-severity wildfires, fueled by overcrowded forest conditions, have caused concern in local communities due to the potential for loss of life and property, timber values, water quality, scenic landscapes, and biodiversity. Over the past 15 years, 28 wildfires covering over 107,000 acres, have been recorded within 10 miles of the proposed Bucks Project area. In 2005, the Plumas County Fire Safe Council identified the Bucks Lake basin as a community at risk. The current landscape conditions within the project area, in combination with the close proximity of high use recreation areas and the increased risk of human-caused fire ignitions, makes the Bucks Project area a high priority for fuel reduction activities.

Within the Bucks Project area, historic management activities, coupled with the exclusion of fire for over a century, have resulted in dense forests with heavy accumulation of fuels; these conditions greatly increase the risk of high-severity wildfire. High-severity wildfires can result in forest fragmentation, increased erosion, reduced water quality, and degraded habitat for both common and rare species. Trees within dense, overcrowded forests also face increased levels of competition for water, light, and nutrients, which stresses the trees and increases susceptibility to drought, insect, and disease-related mortality.

The Forest Service has designed the Bucks Project to move the landscape away from these existing conditions toward a more ecologically resilient and sustainable landscape; one that has the ability to adapt and thrive in the face of natural disturbances, especially under changing and uncertain future environmental conditions.

DECISION

Based on the analysis in the Bucks Lake Hazardous Fuels Reduction Project Environmental Assessment (EA) and the associated planning record, I have decided to implement Alternative A

(Bucks Project EA, Alternatives, Including the Proposed Action, pages 9-17) with modifications based on the resolution of objections as discussed below.

Two objections were received for the Bucks Project and focused on the decision framework and the social and economic environment analysis. The objectors brought forward concerns regarding the rationale for preferring Alternative A, cost effectiveness of implementation, comparison of social and economic effects among alternatives, and consideration of the group selection treatments specified in the Herger-Feinstein Quincy Library Group Forest Recovery Act (HFQLGFRA).

Based on the resolution of these objections, approximately 22 acres of group selections from Alternative D have been added to Alternative A Modified. Alternative A did not originally include group selection treatments. Group selection placement for Alternative A Modified will comply with the guidelines for group selection as described in Alternative D – retaining all live trees greater than or equal to 30 inches DBH and considering retention of healthy, vigorous, shade-intolerant trees 20 inches in diameter and greater, where appropriate.

This decision includes the following activities on 2,065 acres (modified Alternative A): constructing 1,511 acres of Defensible Fuel Profile Zones (DFPZs) through a combination of mechanical or radial thinning (ground-based or skyline yarding), hand thinning, piling and burning or chipping; grapple piling and burning; mechanical biomass removal; masticating and prescribed underburning treatments; group selection within DFPZ units (20 acres) and as a stand alone treatment (2 acres); enhancing wildlife habitat through a combination of radial thinning around large trees (150 acres) and mechanically removing conifers within aspen stands (12 acres); abating hazard trees within 552 acres of National Forest System (NFS) land through mechanical removal (545 acres) or drop and leave (7 acres); improving water quality by developing road drainage systems along 13 miles of priority NFS roads through installation of road dips, 2-3 inch diameter rock armor, outsloping road segments, or replacing culverts; stabilizing stream banks on 1,000 feet of Bucks Creek and 500 feet of Pat Maloy Ravine through a combination of planting native riparian vegetation by hand and/or placement of log and boulder vanes. More detailed descriptions of project activities are in Table 1 and in the Bucks Project EA (Alternatives, Including the Proposed Action, pages 9-17).

Table 1. Summary of treatments and acres for Alternative A Modified (overstory treatments in bold type).

Commercial Treatments	
Sawlog Removal (Mechanical Thin)	574.8
Hand Thin, Pile, Burn	36.8
<i>No Prescribed Fire</i>	10.6
<i>Prescribed Fire</i>	26.2
Mechanical Biomass Removal	428.1
<i>No Prescribed Fire</i>	168.2
<i>Prescribed Fire</i>	259.9
No Biomass Removal	109.9
<i>No Prescribed Fire</i>	34.5

<i>Prescribed Fire</i>	75.4
Sawlog Removal (Radial Thin)	150.4
Hand Thin, Pile, Burn	42.0
Mechanical Biomass Removal	108.4
Group Selection	22.2
Hazard Tree Treatments	551.8
Hazard Tree (Removal)	544.5
Hazard Tree (Drop and Leave)	7.3
Non-Commercial Treatments (no sawlog removal)	765.5
Grapple Pile + Burn; Prescribed Fire	104.4
Hand Thin + Pile Burn	198.0
Hand Thin + Pile Burn or Chip; No Prescribed Fire	224.3
Mastication; No Prescribed Fire	16.5
Mechanical Biomass (standalone treatment)	0.0
Prescribed Fire (standalone treatment)	222.3
TOTAL PRIMARY TREATMENT ACRES	2,064.7

DECISION RATIONALE

In reaching my decision, I considered the purpose and need for action, resource specific issues, range of alternatives, and environmental consequences. I have also considered the PNF LRMP, as amended, documents incorporated by reference, including resource specialist reports and addenda, and objections to the Bucks Project EA and proposed action. The Bucks Project EA and specialist addenda document the environmental analysis and conclusions upon which this decision is based. Because effects did not differ widely across alternatives in regards to the purpose and need for forest health and fire resiliency, public safety, recreation, watershed health, and quality of habitat for wildlife species, the criterion I focused on in making the decision was the social and economic environment raised by some publics.

Alternative A Modified was designed to account for public input received during the scoping and objection periods. Other stakeholders, in addition to the objectors, were consulted in modifying Alternative A. As an example, the interdisciplinary team (IDT) worked closely with the Buck's Lake Homeowners Association to balance the desire not to have group selection units in certain areas with the economic benefits of inclusion. The IDT also worked closely with the Pacific Crest Trail Association to ensure that the locations of group selections and landings would not be visible from the trail and to develop a monitoring plan to evaluate any effects of the project on the trail.

My decision provides for treatments that will have beneficial effects and any potential negative resource impacts have been carefully considered. Many variables were considered in developing the proposed action and associated treatment unit specific prescriptions, such as purpose and need, proposed treatment, California Wildlife Habitat Relationship (CWHR) type, size, and density classes, land allocation, Visual Quality Objectives, and guidance from the General

Technical Report PSW-GTR-220, *An Ecosystem Management Strategy for Sierran Mixed-Conifer Forests* (USDA 2009). Unit specific prescriptions and maps are located in Appendix B of the EA, and address Riparian Habitat Conservation Areas (RHCA), CWHR system specific canopy closure (CC), general retention size for trees, and post-treatment underburning. Overall, this decision applies more restrictive prescriptions to RHCAs and wildlife habitat connectivity corridors as they relate to CC's and general retention size for trees than required.

Based on the analysis of Alternative A Modified with regard to forest vegetation, fire, fuels, and air quality, wildlife (terrestrial and aquatic), botanical resources (including noxious weeds), heritage resources, recreation, range, minerals, and scenic resources, the inclusion of the proposed additional groups falls within the scope and scale of the analyses of Alternatives A and D and would have negligible changes to the conclusions presented in the Bucks Project EA (Bucks Project record, resource specific addenda).

My decision to implement Alternative A Modified will meet the purpose and need for action, substantially improving resource conditions in the project area.

Achievement of Purpose and Need

Contribute to the Economic Health and Stability of Local Rural Communities

Although there was not a specific economic purpose and need statement included in the Bucks Project, this project was planned as part of the Herger-Feinstein Quincy Library Group (HFQLG) Forest Recovery Act Pilot Project, which contains specific suggestions in regards to supporting local rural communities. The Forest Service has a role to play in providing a wood supply for local manufacturers and sustaining a part of the employment base in rural communities (2004 SNFPA ROD; USDA 2004b). The economics of the Bucks Project are an important component to weigh and balance in making this decision. While maintaining a balance between potential resource impacts, I decided to modify Alternative A to incorporate group selections to increase sawlog net value while retaining important environmental features. Due to the modifications incorporated for Alternative A, the combined sawlog value increased by \$150,708. Overall, the total net value of sawlogs and biomass for Alternative A Modified increased by \$93,503 for a total net value of \$598,503. The modifications to Alternative A result in an additional 19 full time jobs and increase employee-related income by \$331,249 for a total employee-related income of \$3,695,249. These modifications increase project financial viability and therefore increase overall likelihood of implementation. Economically, Alternative A Modified results in a positive net value, enhanced by the addition of 22 acres of group selection units.

Reduce Hazardous Fuels Accumulation and Abate Hazards around Facilities and Within Developed Recreation Sites

This project will modify fire behavior in specific stands by reducing high fuel loading and reducing risks to people, structures, property, and resources. In addition, the Bucks Project area encompasses numerous campgrounds, trails, day use facilities, and Forest Service recreation residences. All of these factors make the Bucks Lake area a popular destination for forest visitors and a high priority for hazard abatement.

My decision will reduce hazardous fuel accumulation by creating conditions that provide for a surface versus crown fire, less than 20 percent basal area predicted level of mortality for residual

trees, and a flame length less than one foot. This reduction in fire hazard will decrease the risk of losing valuable wildlife habitat to wildland fire. Hazard trees will be removed on 552 acres including removal along 16 miles of road within developed recreation sites, substantially improving public safety in this highly-used recreation area. Fuel treatments will also reduce hazards around recreation residences and facilities, including trails, campgrounds, and day use areas.

All hazard trees identified and proposed for treatment will be abated. Alternative A Modified results in the least total surface fuel loading and proposes more acres of prescribed burn, in an effort to reintroduce fire into the project area. While maintaining larger (20 inches DBH) trees, Alternative A Modified reduces basal area by 20 percent and results in a larger number of acres meeting desired conditions. Alternative A Modified improves stand species composition in all treated stands and meets Visual Quality Objectives.

Improve Forest Health and Watershed Conditions

Current high stand densities in the Bucks Project area are leading to mortality from drought, insects, and fire. Also, improperly constructed or unmaintained roads may restrict passage of fish or other aquatic species and transport sediment to streams and riparian areas, thereby degrading water quality and aquatic habitat. Stream bank instability is another source of elevated sediment production within the project area.

Following treatment, stands will retain approximately 90 percent of trees greater than 20 inches DBH, canopy cover post-treatment will range from 30 to 60 percent across all stands, and the distribution of CWHR size and density classes will be more diverse. Post-treatment conditions will better meet the establishment, growth, and development of shade-intolerant tree species.

My decision will improve stream bank stabilization along 1,000 feet of Bucks Creek and 500 feet of Pat Maloy Ravine, and improve 13 miles of roads. Equivalent Roaded Acres (ERA) values have been calculated to reflect the addition of group selection units (Watershed Addendum); all other modifications to Alternative A Modified are not expected to alter ERA values reported in the original Alternative A analysis. Modifications to Alternative A would result in minor increases in ERA. The Bucks Project will not cause any subwatershed to exceed the threshold of concern (TOC) and only two subwatersheds will approach the TOC (Bucks Creek Watershed, 72.2 percent of TOC; Pat Maloy Ravine: 74.6 percent TOC). Cumulative ERA values are now predicted to range from 3.66 percent (Haskins Creek subwatershed) to 10.45 percent (Pat Maloy Ravine subwatershed) of the TOC. Because group selection units will not occur within RHCAs, riparian area ERA values are expected to remain consistent with the estimates reported in the proposed action in the EA.

Protect and Enhance Habitat for Region 5 Forest Service Sensitive Wildlife Species

High-severity wildfires decrease the quality of habitat for Region 5 Forest Service Sensitive wildlife species (such as bald eagles, spotted owls, and goshawks) by removing overstory nest structures, eliminating nesting and foraging habitat, and reducing habitat connectivity.

My decision will enhance 12 acres of aspen habitat and improve 703 acres of habitat for early seral species. This decision will reduce four percent of stands suitable to old-forest dependent species (CWHR size and density classes 4D/4M/5M/5D) to an unsuitable condition (open forest canopy or early seral). No treatments are planned in 5M and 5D stands, highly suitable for

nesting and denning for several old-forest dependent species. The existing seven spotted owl territories and four northern goshawk territories will be better protected from future risk of stand-replacing wildfire.

More acres of radial thinning, early seral habitat improvement, and aspen enhancement treatments are proposed under Alternative A, therefore meeting the R5 Forest Service sensitive wildlife species habitat enhancement purpose and need.

Conclusion

The benefits of implementing the Bucks Project include reducing the risk of wildfires, improving forest health, protecting valuable wildlife habitat, decreasing hazards to human safety, and contributing to the economic health and stability of our local community. The current conditions within the project area include high fuel loads; risks to people, structures, property, and resources; and high forest stand densities where trees are susceptible to drought, disease, fire, and insect damage. Because of these existing conditions, the risks associated with no action are greater than the risks of implementing this project.

When implementing this project, we will adhere to standards and guidelines to protect important wildlife habitat features and sensitive riparian areas, ensuring that any disturbance is eliminated or minimized and mitigated. Design criteria, best management practices (BMPs), and standard management requirements (SMRs) are incorporated into Alternative A, modified to minimize potential harm caused by this project (Bucks Project EA, Chapter 2, Alternatives, Including the Proposed Action, Design Criteria, pp. 18-29; Appendix G, Standard Management Requirements and Monitoring). In Chapter 2 of the Bucks Project EA, Tables 2 – 12 display design criteria common to all action alternatives and include criteria for actions such as DFPZs, area thinning, group selections, riparian habitat conservation areas (RHCAs), noxious weeds, access and transportation, and watershed improvements. The criteria identified in the tables include logging systems requirements, snag retention levels, burn constraints, treatment of stumps, and residual species preferences. Appendix E includes Riparian Management Objectives (RMOs) and provides justification for treating RHCAs. Appendix G includes SMRs for several resources including wildlife and fisheries, hydrology and soils, botanical resources and noxious weeds, heritage resources, and treatment implementation as it relates to access. The SMRs include items such as limited operating periods, BMPs, a water drafting plan, and monitoring recommendations. Means to avoid or minimize environmental harm from this decision have been adopted. As described in the Bucks Project EA and specialist reports, the long term benefits to human safety and ecological resources outweigh the short term impacts of this project.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

This action was originally listed as a proposal on the Plumas National Forest Schedule of Proposed Actions on December 18, 2006 and updated periodically during the analysis. As required in the Healthy Forest Restoration Act (HFRA) process, the District held an open house on September 15, 2009. An announcement for the open house was published in the *Feather River Bulletin* and informational flyers were sent to key contacts, including media.

The public was invited to review and comment on the proposal. The Forest Service held individual collaboration meetings with interest groups during the spring of 2010 and hosted a

field trip on May 26, 2010. A scoping letter was sent out on April 29, 2011. In May of 2011, presentations were made to the Plumas County Fire Safe Council and to the Bucks Lake Homeowner's Association Board of Directors. The initial scoping period was extended for an additional 30 days and a legal ad was published in the *Feather River Bulletin* on June 8, 2011. IDT members attended the Bucks Lake Homeowner's Association annual meeting July 9, 2011. The EA lists agencies and people consulted on pages 6-7.

Four verbal and nineteen written comments on the proposed action were received during the scoping period. A compilation of scoping comments and a summary of the issues is located in the project record at Mt. Hough Ranger District in Quincy, CA. Using the comments from the public, other agencies, and Native American tribes, the IDT developed a list of issues to address. These issues are described in detail in the Bucks Project EA, pages 8-9. Within a NEPA context, no significant issues were identified. However, several features were adjusted in Alternative A to address concerns raised by the public during scoping. For example, the Bucks Lake Homeowners expressed concerns about closing two roads after project implementation because these roads are used extensively for hiking and non-motorized recreation. The interdisciplinary team considered these concerns and decided to keep these roads open and blocked to motorized travel after implementation (Bucks Project EA, page 137). Also, the Pacific Crest Trail Association (PCTA) expressed concerns about the number of landings and crossings that would impact the Pacific Crest Trail. The interdisciplinary team worked closely with the PCTA and modified our project design to address their concerns. Also, Alternative D was developed in response to two issues that were raised during the scoping period: (1) group selections would increase biodiversity, decrease amounts of overstocked stands, and ensure an economically viable project; and (2) roadside hazard units would make the project a deficit sale. In response to these issues, Alternative D incorporated group selection treatments and 141 acres of hazard tree "removal" was changed to "drop and leave".

The original scoping letter indicated that there would be an extra 30-day comment period on the EA before the objection process would take place. This comment period was not required under HFRA. The Bucks Project had extensive public review, including time added to the public scoping period. In order to advance the environmental review process as quickly as possible, in January 2012 the Forest Service sent a letter to 699 individuals, organizations, agencies, and tribes informing them that the extra 30-day comment period would not take place. The EA was distributed for a 30-day objection period, as specified by HFRA. Calls were made to individuals and organizations who had responded during scoping and no concerns were raised. The EA was distributed to the public and the objection period began on February 15, 2012 with a legal notice in the *Feather River Bulletin*. Information on the objection process is in the Administrative Review Opportunities section below.

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

The significance of environmental impacts must be considered in terms of context and intensity. This means that the significance of an action must be analyzed in several contexts such as society as a whole (human and national), the affected region, the affected interests, and the locality. Significance varies with the setting of the proposed action. 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. Intensity refers to the severity or degree of impact. (40 CFR §1508.27)

CONTEXT

The local context of this action is limited to the Bucks Project area, in the vicinity of the Bucks Lake Recreation Area on the Plumas National Forest (Bucks Project EA, page vii). Proposed treatments focus on reducing surface, ladder, and canopy fuels in order to modify fire behavior and reduce fire severity. Decreasing stand density (trees per acre) and retaining the healthiest fire-resilient trees would improve tree health, growth rates, and the ability to combat insects and disease (Bucks Project EA, pages vii-viii, 6).

The Bucks Project is part of the larger Herger-Feinstein Quincy Library Group Forest Recovery Act Pilot Project. The law that authorizes this pilot project was passed by Congress and signed by the President in October of 1999. An EIS was completed for this Pilot Project in 1998, and was supplemented in 2003. The Act limits total acreage affected by resource management activities to about 70,000 acres annually across three National Forests. The 2,065 acres of treatments proposed for the Bucks Project, will constitute approximately three percent of the total annual acreage of management activities under HFQLG. For that reason, the scale of the Bucks Project is not indicative of significant effects in terms of local effects within the Pilot Project area, and is not significant in scale even when considered in terms of one year's program of activities under the Pilot Project.

INTENSITY

The intensity of effects was considered in terms of the following:

1. **Impacts 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.**

No significant adverse *direct or indirect effects to the environment* from this project were identified during the environmental effects analysis. No significant irreversible or irretrievable commitments of resources, such a loss of soil productivity, water quality, wildlife habitat, or recreational opportunities, would result from this project. By reducing the likelihood of large, high intensity wildfires, the project would enhance long-term productivity and enjoyment of the affected forests.

My finding of no significant environmental effects is not biased by the beneficial effects of the action. Project benefits include reducing the threat of a catastrophic fire adjacent to and within the Bucks Lake area; abating hazards; increasing the resilience of forests to insect attack and disease; improving stream bank stability; enhancing aspen stands; and promoting an adequate timber supply and local economic stability.

As described in the Bucks Project EA, potential adverse effects and the reasons they are not expected to be significant include:

- a. particulate emissions (smoke) during prescribed burning – burning will be limited to periods when weather conditions are conducive to smoke dispersal (page 58);

- b. reduction in number of snags – the number of snags retained per acre will meet 2004 SNFPA standards intended to preserve habitat for wildlife and provide future down-log habitat required by a variety of wildlife species (page 19);
 - c. short-term reduction in visual quality – will be minimized by design criteria for treatments near County and NFS recreation facilities, roads, and trails (including the PCT), and will result in improvement in visual quality over the long term (pages 72-73 and Recreation Addendum);
 - d. possible disturbance of recreationists at certain locations during project operations – the extent of the potential effect is small and would be of short duration; no major recreation resources would be affected in the long term (pages 68-72);
 - e. increases in equivalent roaded area in three watersheds –will be below the thresholds of concern for these watersheds and will be naturally reversed within a few years (pages 140-143 and Watershed Addendum);
 - f. temporary increases in soil compaction –will be offset by sub-soiling skid trails and landings and areas of legacy compaction (pages 147-149);
 - g. losses or disturbance of wildlife inhabiting the treatment units – may occur, but in relatively small numbers and not sufficiently to threaten species viability, population maintenance, or eventual re-occupancy in the treated areas (pages 176-179, 183, 194, 199, 205, and 209-210 and Wildlife Addendum);
 - h. losses of individuals of certain special-status plant species – may occur, but only to those not provided full protection because they are tolerant of disturbance and will benefit from thinning of the canopies (pages 227-233);
 - i. soil disturbance that could allow noxious weed occupancy—will be effectively prevented through application of standard management requirements attached to contracts for project activities and through monitoring and noxious weed treatments (pages 240-241).
2. **The degree to which the proposed action affects public health or safety.** There will be no significant effects on public health and safety because of project specific design features and mitigations (Bucks Project EA, pages 58, 62-80).

Access and harvest operations will involve use of mechanical equipment; falling of trees; hauling of harvest products on National Forest System (NFS) roads, County roads, and State highways; and use of prescribed fire, all of which potentially pose risks to workers and to the public. Such risks will be reduced because the public will be alerted to active harvest areas, and haul routes on NFS roads will be clearly signed and monitored as required in contract provisions to warn the public of potential hazards during project activities. Roads, trails, and campgrounds within the project area may be closed to the recreating public on a temporary basis for safety reasons. These closures are of limited duration (Timber Sale Contract Provisions).

The project area lies within the Northern Sierra Air Quality Management District (NSAQMD). In accordance with Title 17 of the California Code of Regulations, a smoke management plan will be submitted to and approved by the NSAQMD prior to any prescribed fire ignitions that are part of this alternative. Adherence to the burn plan including a mandatory smoke management plan (SMP), daily coordination among local

fire management officials (Air Quality Management Districts, the California Air Resources Board, the Geographical Area Coordination Center meteorologists and agencies that are conducting prescribed fire operations) and Air Quality Management District requirements for burning and managing other project activities, it is unlikely that emissions caused by the project would exceed California Air Quality Standards for the Air Quality Management District. Smoke direction and dispersal would be continually monitored during burning operations and ignition would be halted if poor conditions develop (Bucks Project EA, pages 54-60).

Fugitive dust from operations will be mitigated by standard operating procedures and contract requirements for road watering or other dust abatement techniques (Bucks Project EA, page 58).

- 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.** There will be no significant effects to unique characteristics of the area, because there are no park lands, prime farmlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas within the project area.

The Bucks Lake Wilderness Area is adjacent to a treatment unit, but no activities included in this decision will occur within the Wilderness. The Pacific Crest Trail (PCT), a National Scenic Trail, runs through two units and is adjacent to one unit. Less than one mile of the PCT is within or adjacent to treatment units. The Bucks Project has been designed to minimize impacts to the PCT by ensuring that no landings or group selection units will be visible from the trail, thereby maintaining the Visual Quality Objectives as set forth in the PNF LRMP, as amended (Bucks Project EA, pages 60-61, and Recreation Addendum). Furthermore, mitigations have been designed to ensure that short-term impacts to the PCT are minimized and remedied after project completion (Bucks Project EA, page 71).

The Bucks Project provides protection to wetlands and riparian habitat conservation areas (RHCAs) by implementing Best Management Practices (BMPs). By using BMPs, the Bucks Project meets the requirements of the 2004 SNFPA ROD (Bucks Project EA, pages 120-123).

The Bucks Project will have no significant effect to historic or cultural resources because sites will be avoided by flagging and requiring contractors to exclude these areas from any activity (see #8 below and Bucks Project EA, pages 241-243).

- 4. The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial.** The effects on the quality of the human environment are not likely to be highly controversial. The activities included in this decision are routine forest management activities and there is no known credible scientific controversy over the impacts of the proposed action. Based on comments received during the public involvement process, there is no substantive scientific controversy related to the effects of the proposed treatment on the human environment (Bucks Project EA, pages 6-9).
- 5. The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.** The Forest Service has considerable

experience with actions like the one proposed. The analysis shows the effects are not uncertain, and do not involve unique or unknown risk. The possible effects of implementing Alternative A, Modified are neither highly uncertain nor will they present unique or unknown risks. The consequences of these actions are known, as described in specialist reports and addenda (Bucks Project record and summarized in the Bucks Project EA, pages 30-33).

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 action is not likely to establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects, because it conforms to all existing PNF LRMP direction and is applicable only to the project area (Bucks Project EA, page 3-6).
7. **Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts.** This decision does not represent potential significant cumulative adverse impacts when considered in combination with other past, ongoing, or reasonably foreseeable future actions. A cumulative effects analysis was completed separately for each resource area. The geographic scope of the cumulative effects analysis area varied among resource areas (Bucks Project EA, pages 53-54, 59-60, 73-78, 109-113, 139-154, 182-183, 191-195, 199, 204-206, 209-210, 225-226, 228-229, 230-232, 240-241, and 247). None of the specialists found the potential for significant adverse cumulative effects. A summary of projects considered in each cumulative effects analysis is contained in Appendix F (Bucks Project EA, Appendix F, pages 1-7). Future maintenance actions will be analyzed separately and site-specifically, in compliance with NEPA.
8. **The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed, 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 action will have no significant adverse effect on districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, nor will it cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources because all cultural resources will be avoided by flagging sites and requiring contractors to exclude these areas from any activity. (Bucks Project EA page 241-243).
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.** The action will not adversely affect any endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species act of 1973, because no federally listed terrestrial, or aquatic wildlife, or botanical species exists within or adjacent to the project area (Bucks Project EA, page 160, 223)
10. **Whether the action threatens to violate 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. Applicable laws and regulations were considered in the EA (see EA pages 37-38, 54, 60-61, 79-80, 116-117, 157-158, 212, 221-222, 234-235, 241-242 and 244). The action is consistent

with the Plumas National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (PNF LRMP), as amended.

After considering the effects of the actions analyzed, in terms of context and intensity, I find that these actions will not have a significant impact on the quality of the human environment. Therefore, an environmental impact statement will not be prepared.

FINDINGS REQUIRED BY OTHER LAWS AND REGULATIONS

In addition to the FONSI, I find that this project is consistent with the standards and guidelines for land management activities described in the Plumas National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (PNF LRMP) (USDA 1988) as amended by the Herger-Feinstein Quincy Library Group (HFQLG) Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (FSEIS) and Record of Decision (ROD) (USDA 1999a, 1999b, 2003b, 2003c), and the Sierra Nevada Forest Plan Amendment (SNFPA) FSEIS and ROD (USDA 2004a, 2004b). Therefore, this project is consistent with the requirements of the National Forest Management Act of 1976. The interdisciplinary team process for identifying road system needs and roads with resource damage included a roads analysis consistent with legal requirements (36 CFR 212 Subpart A—Administration of the Forest Transportation System, 16 U.S.C. 551, 23 U.S.C. 205). In addition, the Bucks Project complies with the Endangered Species Act (Bucks Project EA, page 160), the Clean Air Act (Bucks Project EA, pages 54-60), the Clean Water Act (Bucks Project EA, page 121), and other federal, state, and local laws or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.

ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW (APPEAL) OPPORTUNITIES

This project was planned under authorization of the Healthy Forest Restoration Act (H.R. 1904; Public Law 108-148; 36 CFR §218 – Predecisional Administrative Review Process). It is not subject to notice, comment, and appeal procedures of 36 CFR §215. In accordance with 36 CFR §218, subpart A, I provided an opportunity for submission of objections for 30 days from the date of publication of the legal notice in the *Feather River Bulletin* on February 15, 2011. During the 30-day objection period, two objections were received.

On March 14, 2011, Frank Stewart, Counties' QLG Forester, and Bill Wickman, American Forest Resource Council, filed objections on the Bucks Project with the Regional Forester (Reviewing Officer). Mr. Stewart and Mr. Wickman both objected to the lack of group selection treatments in Alternative A. The Forest held meetings with the objectors and with other interested parties on March 21 and 23, 2012. I agreed to add 13 group selections in units 64, 83, 87, 105, 114 and 951. American Forest Resource Council withdrew their objection on March 25, 2012. Frank Stewart withdrew his objection on March 30, 2012.

IMPLEMENTATION DATE

Implementation of the decision may occur immediately.

CONTACT

The Bucks Project EA and supporting documents are available for public review at the Plumas National Forest, Mt. Hough Ranger District, 39696 Highway 70, Quincy, CA 95971. For additional information concerning this decision, contact: Dave Kinateder (dkinateder@fs.fed.us), Bucks Project Interdisciplinary Team Leader, at 530-283-7676.

/s/ Earl W. Ford

05/24/2012

Earl W. Ford

Date

Forest Supervisor

Plumas National Forest

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