


Decision Memo
for
Alpine Meadows Stand Improvement Project
WUI Fuel Reduction and Forest Health

USDA Forest Service
Tahoe National Forest  Truckee Ranger District
Placer County, California
July 2009

Background

The Alpine Meadows Fire Safe Council is a very active organization that has been educating the visitors and residents of Alpine Meadows for the past few years on fire safety and things homeowners can do to protect their homes and the forest. The council commissioned the *Alpine Meadows Community Wildfire Protection Plan* (Geoarch Sciences Inc., 2005). This plan identified the overall wildfire risk around Alpine Meadows neighborhoods, as well as identified areas on private and National Forest System (NFS) land that would need timber stand/vegetation improvement activities to mitigate fire hazard and forest health concerns.

The Alpine Meadows Fire Safe Council Community Workday is an event where volunteers implement on-the-ground stand improvement and/or fuel reduction projects, many of which were identified in the *Community Wildfire Protection Plan*. The Fire Safe Council approached the Truckee Ranger District about holding the community workday on NFS lands in an area where stand improvement activities could be implemented by volunteers.

Decision

It is my decision to implement the Alpine Meadows Stand Improvement Project as described below:

Improve 4.7 acres by hand thinning sub-dominant trees less than 10 inches DBH and limbing trees greater than 10 inches DBH up to 10 feet above the ground. Thinning will occur from below to leave the tallest, best formed, damage and disease free trees. The desired spacing between leave trees will depend on the size of the trees within the stand, but will generally be 15 to 20 feet (+/- 3 feet). Sugar pine and western white pine will not be cut regardless of size and vigor unless signs of white pine blister rust are evident on the tree. Hazard trees that may hit established roads, system trails or structures will also be cut. Felled hazard trees greater than 20 inches DBH will be left on site for forest health and wildlife habitat. The cut vegetation will be hand pulled/carried to a road accessible central location. The smaller removed material will be chipped, and the larger removed material will be utilized as fire wood. Chips will be spread in areas that need ground cover (no more than 2 inches in depth) or will be available for residences.

The project is located on 4.7 acres in the southeast portion of the Tahoe National Forest in the Truckee Ranger District approximately nine miles south of Truckee between Snow Crest Road

and Mineral Springs in Alpine Meadows. The legal description for the project is Section 33, T. 16 N., R. 16 E., Mount Diablo Base Meridian. See the attached map.

Resource Protection Measures

The following measures will be utilized to protect the environment and assure that any potential impacts are minimized or mitigated.

1. Apply Standards and Guidelines from the 1990 Tahoe National Forest Lands and Resource Management Plan (LRMP), as amended by the 2004 Sierra Nevada Forest Plan Amendment (SNFPA) FSEIS Record of Decision (ROD).
2. Ensure that all plant/rock material used for erosion control is certified weed free.
3. Project generated slash will be chipped and/or removed from the site.

Rational for the Decision

In summary, it is my decision to improve 4.7 acres in the Alpine Meadows area through hand removal of small trees for the following reasons:

- I am familiar with the stands targeted for improvement, and I believe the project will effectively provide for an improvement in stand condition and forest health while decreasing fuels.
- I feel the combination of actions and the included resource protection measures will achieve the project objectives in an effective and environmentally sound manner.
- The project would also help build on an important partnership with the home and land owners in Alpine Meadows to safely and effectively manage the entire Alpine Meadows area.
- I consider this incidental removal of conifers as important to make the stands more resilient to environmental changes such as drought, disease, insect outbreaks, and potential changes in climate over the long term.

Public Involvement and Scoping

The Alpine Meadows proposal originated as a result of the Alpine Meadows Fire Safe Council contacting the Truckee Ranger District requesting stand improvement work on National Forest System (NFS) land. The idea of stand improvement work is very supported in the Alpine Meadows community and many landowners have been active in improving forest stands on their own lands. To plan improvement activities, an interdisciplinary team (IDT) was formed and the proposal was further developed into the Alpine Meadows Stand Improvement Project. Recommendations resource specialists have been included in the project design.

In addition to internal discussions, the proposal was originally published in the Tahoe National Forest Schedule of Proposed Actions (SOPA) in July 2009. The SOPA is mailed to all persons who have expressed an interest in activities that occur on the Tahoe National Forest.

Reasons for Categorically Excluding This Action

An environmental analysis was conducted for this proposed action. As a result of that analysis, a determination has been made that the proposal is in a category of actions that are excluded from

further documentation in an Environmental Assessment or an Environmental Impact Statement. This category of exclusion, which requires preparation of a project or case file and decision memo, is established in 36 CFR 220.6(e) (6). Its applicability to the Alpine Meadows Stand Improvement Project is as follows:

Category 6 - Timber stand and/or wildlife habitat improvement activities that do not include the use of herbicides or do not require more than one mile of low standard road construction. As stated earlier, the project proposes to improve stands by hand removal of small dense trees to improve stand health and decrease the risk of fire.

The IDT which developed and analyzed this project included resource specialists from the Tahoe National Forest. That team consisted of a botanist, archaeologist, soil specialist/hydrologist, aquatics biologist, wildlife biologist, and timber, recreation, and fuels specialists. These resource specialists did not identify any significant issues during project review, and all concerns were addressed by inclusion as part of the project proposal.

It was also determined through the environmental analysis that there were no extraordinary circumstances or conditions, as listed in 36 CFR 220.6(b), related to this proposal that might cause the action to have significant effects. Specifically, this determination is based upon the absence, among others, of adverse effects on the following:

i. Federally listed threatened or endangered species or designated critical habitat, species proposed for federal listing or proposed critical habitat, or Forest Service sensitive species.

There are no Federally listed threatened and endangered species or their critical habitat, species proposed for federal listing, or proposed critical habitat that will be affected by this project. The project, as designed, would not result in any effects to Forest Service sensitive species. The project will not cause adverse effects to management indicator species (MIS) habitats.

ii. Flood plains, wetlands, or municipal watersheds.

Best Management Practices (BMPs) and protection measures included in the design of the project will protect Riparian Conservations Areas (RCAs) and water quality, including those associated with flood plains, wetlands, and municipal watersheds. The proposed activities will not occur within the RCAs. There are no hydrologic resources of significance in the unit areas. No risks of extraordinary circumstances related to cumulative adverse effects were identified.

iii. Congressionally designated areas, such as wilderness, wilderness study areas, or national recreation areas.

This project is not within a wilderness or wilderness study area. There are no National Recreation Areas on the Tahoe National Forest.

iv. Inventoried roadless areas.

This project is not within any inventoried roadless area.

v. Research natural areas.

This project is not within a Research Natural Area.

vi. American Indians and Alaska Native religious or cultural sites & vii. Archaeological sites, or historic properties or areas.

Based on past environmental analysis for the project area and recent consultations with American Indian tribal councils, there are no known uses of this area for religious or cultural purposes. There will be no adverse effects on any archaeological districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. The project design provides protection of potential sites identified as being adjacent to or in the project's Area of Potential Effects. An Archaeological Inventory has been completed. Heritage resources will be managed according to provisions of the applicable Regional Programmatic Agreement that governs management of heritage resources on the TNF. This work constitutes compliance with the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966.

Findings Required by Other Laws and Regulations

National Forest Management Act of 1976

All management practices and activities of the proposed action are consistent with management direction, including standards and guidelines, in the Tahoe National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (June 14, 1990), as amended by the Sierra Nevada Forest Plan Amendment Record of Decision (January 2004), which were developed in accordance with the National Forest Management Act of 1976, 16 USC 1604(i) and 36 CFR 219.10(e).

National Historic Preservation Act

Heritage resources will be managed consistent with the provisions of the Programmatic Agreement between the Forest Service, the State Historic Preservation Officer, and the National Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, and thereby will comply with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act and its implementing regulations, 36 CFR 800, and the Tahoe National Forest Plan. Surveys were conducted and completed.

Endangered Species Act (1973)

Coordination with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is required for all Federally listed threatened, endangered, and proposed species. There are no Federally listed threatened, endangered, or proposed species or their habitats affected by this project.

Clean Water Act (1972)

Water quality will not be adversely affected with implementation of resource protection and mitigation measures and Best Management Practices (BMPs) incorporated into the project design.

Clean Air Act (1977)

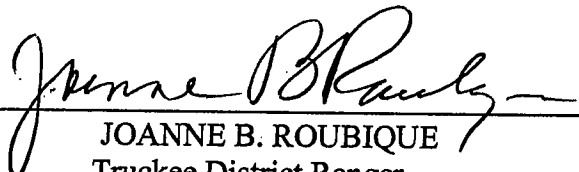
Implementation of this decision will not cause any air pollutants to be added to the atmosphere.

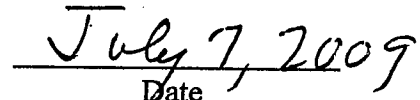
Administrative Review or Appeal Opportunity and Implementation Date

In accordance with the October 19, 2005, order issued by the U. S. District Court for the Eastern District of California in Case No. CIV F-03-6386JKS, this decision is not subject to administrative appeal pursuant to 36 CFR Part 215. Since there is no appeal period, implementation of the decision may begin upon the signing of the Decision Memo.

For more information, contact: Kris Boatner, District NEPA Coordinator
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Approved by:


JOANNE B. ROUBIQUE
Truckee District Ranger


Date

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