

FINAL

Program Timberland Environmental Impact Report

for the

Weaverville Community Fuel Reduction Project

Lead Agency:

California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection
P.O. Box 944246
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PROJECT DESCRIPTION

A Program Timberland Environmental Impact Report (PTEIR) is prepared for an agency program or series of actions that can be characterized as one large project, which in this case is the ongoing management of timberlands, including timber operations and related land management practices on multiple ownerships [see the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection Forest Practice Rules (14 CCR 1092.01) for information on PTEIR content and intent]. In this case, the PTEIR is being prepared to provide guidance to landowners wishing to implement fuel reduction projects by filing a Program Timber Harvest Plan (PTHP) with the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection. Program EIRs generally analyze broad environmental effects of the program; with the acknowledgement that site-specific environmental review may be required for particular aspects or portions of the program (see California Environmental Quality Act Guidelines, Section 15168).

This PTEIR, like other program EIRs, documents the environmental impacts of the Proposed Project and alternatives to the Proposed Project in order to:

- Inform decision makers and the public about a project's significant environmental effects and ways to enhance or reduce such effects.
- Demonstrate to the public that the environment is being protected during project implementation.
- Discuss mitigation measures designed to minimize significant effects
- Ensure political accountability by disclosing to citizens the environmental values held by their elected and appointed public officials.

The Proposed Project will treat vegetative fuels on private forestland in the Weaverville Basin in Trinity County, California. Specifically, the project is proposed to reduce horizontal and vertical fuel continuity on up to 320 parcels of private, non-industrial forestland comprising about 4,275 acres by:

1. Removing and/or treating existing ground fuels,
2. Pre-commercial thinning to reduce ladder fuels,
3. Commercial harvesting to reduce ladder fuels and overstory crown density,
4. Initiating a system of fuel breaks, and
5. Where necessary, conducting no treatment where the benefits are outweighed by adverse effects.

Activities resulting from the project could include commercial timber harvesting-related activities, including: skid trail and landing construction; road construction; road reconstruction; road maintenance; construction and/or use of stream crossings; prescribed burning, slash piling, and treatment of sub-merchantable material through harvesting; chipping and/or other treatments. The project will be designed and implemented to be consistent with the Z'berg-Nejedly Forest Practice Act of 1973 (Forest Practice Act) requirements, utilizing the Program Timber Harvest Plan (PTHP) process detailed in the California Forest Practice Rules.

Throughout the 4,275-acre project area, private forestland owners would implement a range of

treatments, dependent upon existing vegetation, slope position, and proximity to streams or improvements. Treatments could be implemented over a 10-20 year period or perhaps longer if conditions do not change (see section 1.7 for more detail on project duration). The treatment on ridges and upper slopes would create shaded fuel breaks, where a substantial volume of commercial and non-commercial timber could be removed. On lower and mid slopes, thinning, individual tree selection, or group selection harvest with openings of up to 2 ½ acres, would allow harvesting of a moderate volume of commercial and non-commercial timber. In Class I and II WLPZs no commercial harvesting or planned fuel treatments would occur.

Landowners would also treat logging-created slash through such practices as hand or tractor piling and burning, tractor crushing or mechanical mastication, lopping to within 18” of the ground and scattering, and/or chipping, depending on the density of the fuels after harvest. Existing ground fuels would be reduced in some areas where their current configuration could create adverse wildfire behavior.

After treatment, medium-sized and large trees would generally be evenly spaced and groups of advanced regeneration, poles and small saw timber would be retained in a configuration designed to reduce fire intensity and rate of spread. This would be in contrast to the high wildfire hazard created by the existing, nearly continuous forest cover. Commercial timber harvesting could include skid trail and landing construction, construction, reconstruction, and maintenance of roads, and possibly installation of stream crossings.

This final PTEIR addresses comments made during the draft PTEIR comment period and includes changes made to that draft as a result of public comment. The draft PTEIR, dated June 1, 2004, is incorporated into this document by reference.

Public Response to Draft PTEIR

The draft PTEIR began circulation to the public on June 15 for a 45-day comment period, which closed on July 29. A legal notice advising the public of the availability of the document and of the public hearing ran in the Trinity Journal on June 23 and 30, 2004. Public notices were posted at the Weaverville Library and at the Trinity County courthouse. Copies of the document were available at Trinity County libraries in Weaverville, Hayfork and Trinity Center. Copies of the PTEIR were available for public review at CDF offices in Redding and in Sacramento. Also, the document was available on the web from the consultant's web address, which was included on all of the notices and in the legal notice. A news release was distributed to the Trinity Journal, Redding Searchlight and the Eureka Times Standard advising the public of the availability of the document.

A public hearing was held on July 14, 2004 at 7:30 PM at the Trinity Public Utilities Department. The Trinity Fire Safe Council advised its list of members and interested individuals that the PTEIR public hearing would be held in lieu of the regular July Fire Safe Council meeting and the Council urged its members to attend. Several agency officials including representatives from NOAA fisheries, USFS, CDF, RCD and the RC&D attended the hearing along with one member of the Trinity County Board of Supervisors. No members of the public attended.

Three comment letters from state agencies were submitted during the public comment period: California Department of Transportation, District 2; California Regional Water Quality Control Board, North Coast Region; and California Department of Fish and Game, North Coast Region.

Response to Comments Submitted by Caltrans District 2

Caltrans District 2 reviewed the document and noted that their PTEIR concerns were similar to concerns they normally express during THP reviews. Generally their two concerns were associated with the fact that (1) some operations might need to have an encroachment permit in order to create new or previously unpermitted road access onto State Highway 3 or 299 and (2) that efforts should be made to keep construction, logging and other debris out of locations where it could migrate into highway culverts.

No change to the PTEIR is required as a result of these comments. The Forest Practice rules require that logging slash and other debris be removed from all watercourses, which should ensure that this type of material will not migrate towards culvert crossings on Highway 3 or 299. For the vast majority of the properties this will not be an issue anyway, since most of the parcels within the project area are not tributary to either of these State Highways. The requirement for an encroachment permit is outside of the scope of the Forest Practice rules.

Response to Comments Submitted by California Regional Water Quality Control Board, North Coast Region

The NCRWQCB submitted comments dated 9/7/04 which stated generally that the regional water board had been asked to pre-consult on the PTEIR and that their comments had been incorporated.

In addition NCRWQCB observed that “many” PTHP’s might be eligible for waivers from the requirements to file a notice of waste discharge under section III, Categorical Waiver F: Other Projects (Timber Harvest Plans). In order to qualify for a waiver, the project in the PTHP has to meet 14 requirements. If the PTHP meets the 14 requirements the plan submitter has to file a “Certification Notice” which is signed by the Discharger and which states that the Discharger understands and intends to comply with all water quality requirements and eligibility criteria and conditions, specific and general, of the appropriate waiver category. In order to qualify under Waiver Category F, the PTHP must meet the following:

1. Have been approved by CDF
2. Ground based equipment cannot operate on slopes > 50% unless accompanied by a Sediment Prevention Plan.
3. No construction of new skid trails on slopes > 40% within 200’ of a watercourse unless accompanied by a Sediment Prevention Plan.
4. Timber harvest on all slides and unstable areas must retain 50% crown canopy AND be accompanied by a report from a California Certified Engineering Geologist....
5. New road construction is limited to 1000’ unless accompanied by a Sediment Prevention Plan.
6. No heavy equipment use within a WLPZ or EEZ except under specific conditions (e.g. maintenance (but not installation) of drainage structures).
7. No log haul on roads within the WLPZ unless the road is an existing permanent or seasonal road, unless accompanied by a Sediment Prevention Plan.
8. Post harvest stocking shall comply with uneven-aged stocking requirements or if even aged shall maintain a canopy closure of at least 75%
9. Within a WLPZ of a Class I 85% canopy closure is required.
10. The canopy closure must be $\geq 70\%$ within a WLPZ of a Class II in a 303(d) waterbody.
11. Generally no harvest activities between November 15 and April 1 (except hand slash work).
12. No fuels treatment during measurable rain events unless hand methods are being used.
13. No timber harvest within the channel zone of a Class III watercourse.
14. No Non-Concurrence has been filed with CDF by the Water Quality Board, which was not resolved prior to Project approval.

If the applicant project meets all of the above, the project is subject to a waiver and in order to maintain the coverage under the waiver the applicant has to comply with the 11 General Waiver Conditions of Section III G. For projects that don’t meet the waiver requirements, the applicant must obtain a general waiver of discharge requirements, which are detailed at <http://www.swrcb.ca.gov/rwqcb1/geninfo/timber/timberwg.html>.

No change to the PTEIR is required as a result of these comments. The Forest Practice Act, as amended requires compliance with Water Quality Control Board rules and regulations, including the recently passed rules of June 23, 2004 regarding waiver of waste discharge requirements and rules for general waste dischargers. Some of the projects within the PTEIR area will qualify for a waiver as described above while others will be required to seek a general waste discharge notice.

Response to Comments Submitted by North Coast Region of the Department of Fish and Game

DFG had numerous comments concerning the potential impacts to sensitive botanical resources within the project area.

Comment: DFG noted that several additional plants should be added to the list, as the list used in the PTEIR was from 2001 while the most current list is from 2004.

Response: These additional plants have been added to a revised Table 19 (shown in gray shading at the bottom of the table) which is attached and which will be incorporated into the Final PTEIR.

Comment: DFG also had comments on the discussion of the location of Trinity buckwheat, wherein they stated that Trinity buckwheat can also occur above 7,000 feet on serpentine and ultra basic soils.

Response: No change in the document is required since none of the project area is anywhere close to 7,000 in elevation.

Comment: DFG noted that English Peak greenbriar can occur down to 2,200 and that 12 of the 35 reported occurrences are from elevations below 3,000 feet.

Response: The document notes that: The project area is within lower elevation areas and does not incorporate meadows and wet areas where these two species occur. WLPZ retention standards of all alternatives will contribute to maintaining water quality and suitable habitat for this species. Harvest operations under all alternatives should not have a significant effect on this species if it occurs in the area (Nakamura and Nelson, 2001). While additional populations might be found within the project area as a result of extending the range to lower elevations, the analysis indicates that harvest should not have a significant effect on English Peak greenbriar, since the proposed project includes measures to protect streams, springs and seeps. No change to the document is required as a result of this comment.

Comment: DFG notes that other populations or individuals of the species listed may occur within the project area other than those specifically located in the NDDDB database. In addition DFG notes that the habitat of the species should also be reviewed on the ground in order to ensure that impacts are minimized and that these mitigation measures should be incorporated into the PTEIR.

Response: The PTEIR contains a mitigation measure that all “PHTPs shall comply with established protocols for threatened and endangered species surveying requirements. Where the PHTP may have adverse effects on listed species, a Technical Letter or appropriate consultation shall be completed prior to

initiation of operations.” Therefore, since surveying following established protocols applies to all listed botanical resources no change to the document is required as this more than meets the concern expressed by DFG in their letter.

Revised Pages to Draft PTEIR

**TABLE 19
CNPS CATEGORY 1A, 1B, AND 2 PLANTS IN TRINITY COUNTY**

GENUS AND SPECIES	COMMON NAME	1/	2/	3/	4/	FED LIST	CA. LIST	5/	6/
<i>Lewisia cotyledon heckneri</i>	Heckner's <i>Lewisia</i>	Y	1	LCFrS	1B			Per	Herb
<i>Penstemon filiformis</i>	Thread-leaved beardtongue	Y	1	LCFrS	1B			Per	Herb
<i>Penstemon tracyi</i>	Tracy's beardtongue	Y	1	UCFrS	1B			Per	Herb
<i>Juncus regelii</i>	Regal's rush	Y	1	UCFrS	2			Per	Herb
<i>Juncus dudleyi</i>	Dudley's rush	Y	1	LCFrS	2			Per	Herb
<i>Smilax jamesii</i>	English Peak greenbriar	Y	3	BUFrS	1B			Per	Herb
<i>Balsamorhiza sericea</i>	Silky balsamroot		1	LCFrS	1B			Per	Herb
<i>Chaenactis suffrutescens</i>	Shasta chaenactis		2	LCFrS	1B			Per	Herb
<i>Harmonia stebbinsii</i>	Stebbins's <i>harmonia</i>		1	LCFrS	1B			Ann	Herb
<i>Harmona doris-nilesiae</i>	Niles's <i>harmonia</i>		1	LCFrS	1B			Ann	Herb
<i>Raillardella pringlei</i>	Showy raillardella		1	UCFrS	1B			Per	Herb
<i>Anisocarpus scabridus</i>	Scabrid alpine tarplant		1	UCFrS	1B			Per	Herb
<i>Arabis macdonaldiana</i>	McDonald's rock cress		3	LCFrS	1B	FE	CE	Per	Herb
<i>Draba carnosula</i>	Mt. Eddy <i>draba</i>		1	UCFrS	1B			Per	Herb
<i>Campanula wilkinsiana</i>	Wilkin's harebell		1	UCFrS	1B			Per	Herb
<i>Minuartia decumbens</i>	The Lassics sandwort		2	LCFrS	1B			Per	Herb
<i>Sedum paradisum</i>	Canyon Creek stonecrop		2	BUFrS	1B			Per	Herb
<i>Arctostaphylos klamathensis</i>	Klamath manzanita		2	LCFrS	1B			Per	Shrub
<i>Lupinus antoninus</i>	Anthony Peak lupine		2	LCFrS	1B			Per	Herb
<i>Lupinus elmeri</i>	South Fork Mtn. lupine		1	LCFrS	1B			Per	Herb
<i>Lupinus constancei</i>	The Lassics lupine		1	LCFrS	1B			Per	Herb
<i>Swertia umpquaensis</i>	Umpqua green-gentian		2	LCFrS	2			Per	Herb
<i>Phacelia leonis</i>	Siskiyou <i>phacelia</i>		1	UCFrS	1B			Ann	Herb
<i>Clarkia borealis</i> ssp. <i>borealis</i>	Northern <i>clarkia</i>		1	LCFrS	1B			Ann	Herb
<i>Epilobium nivium</i>	Snow Mountain willowherb		1	UCFrS	1B			Per	Herb
<i>Epilobium oreganum</i>	Oregon fireweed		2	LCFrS	1B			Per	Herb
<i>Epilobium siskiyouense</i>	Siskiyou fireweed		1	UCFrS	1B			Per	Herb
<i>Oenothera wolfii</i>	Wolf's evening-primrose		1	LCFrS	1B			Per	Herb
<i>Eriogonum alpinum</i>	Trinity buckwheat		1	UCFrS	1B			Per	Herb
<i>Lewisia stebbinsii</i>	Stebbins's <i>lewisia</i>		2	LCFrS	1B			Per	Herb
<i>Montia howellii</i>	Howell's <i>montia</i>		1	NCFrS	2			Ann	Herb
<i>Ivesia pickeringii</i>	Pickering's <i>ivesia</i>		1	LCFrS	1B			Per	Herb
<i>Galium serpenticum</i> Ssp. <i>Scotticum</i>	Scott Mountain bedstraw		1	LCFrS	1B			Per	Herb
<i>Picea engelmannii</i>	Engelmann spruce		1	UCFrS	2			Per	Tree
<i>Rhynchospora capitellata</i>	Brownish beaked-rush		2	LCFrS	2			Per	Herb
<i>Erythronium citrinum</i> Var. <i>roderickii</i>	Scott Mountains fawn lily		1	LCFrS	1B			Per	Herb

Abies lasiocarpa var. lasiocarpa	Subalpine fir			LCFRs	2		Per	Tree
Balsamorhiza lanata	Woolly balsam root			LCFRs	1B		Per	Herb
Carex hystericina	Bottlebrush sedge			LCFRs	2		Per	sedge
Carex leptalea	Flaccid sedge			LCFRs	2		Per	sedge
Claytonia umbellata	Great basin claytonia			LCFRs	2		Per	Herb
Draba aureola	Golden draba			LCFRs	1B		Per	Herb
Erastrum tracyi	Erastrum			LCFRs	2		Per	Herb
Iliama bakeri	Bakers hollyhock			LCFRs	2		Per	Herb
Potentilla cristae	Crested potentilla			LCFRs	1B		Per	Herb
Sidalcea oregana ssp. Eximia	Coast checkerbloom			LCFRs	2		Per	Herb
Swertia umpquaensis	Umpqua green gentian			LCFRs	2		Per	Herb
Tonestus lyallii	Lyalls tonestus			LCFRs	2		Per	Herb
Tracyina rostrata	Beaked tracyina			LCFRs	1B		Per	Herb

1/ Present in project area, 2/ # of populations, 3/ CNPS habitat code, 4/ CNPS list, 5/ perennial or annual, 6/ type of vegetation.

Original Comment Letters