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North Fork Forest Recovery Project

Final Decision Notice & Finding of No Significant Impact



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Introduction

The USDA Forest Service developed the North Fork Forest Recovery Project on Plumas National Forest (PNF) in partnership with the Sierra Institute for Community and Environment in response to the needs of the landscape and local communities following the 2021 Dixie Fire, which burned nearly 1 million acres and became the largest single wildfire in California's history. Many residents of Canyon Dam, Indian Falls, Greenville, Warner Valley, and other communities lost their homes and businesses in the Dixie Fire, while those in other communities in the North Fork Feather River drainage witnessed high-severity fire on surrounding forestlands.

The project encompasses 166,889 acres and is located entirely within the Mt. Hough Ranger District of the PNF in California's northern Sierra Nevada mountains. The project area extends from the PNF boundary with Lassen National Forest in the Chips Creek Inventoried Roadless Area, up the North Fork Feather River Canyon, to the southern tip of Lake Almanor, and down through Indian and Genesee Valleys. Some of the local communities in the project area include Belden, Crescent Mills, Greenville, Indian Falls, Seneca, and Taylorsville (see North Fork Forest Recovery Project Final Environmental Assessment (EA) Figure 1 and Appendix A).

The project area includes the reaches of both the North Fork Feather River and the East Branch North Fork Feather River. Water flowing from and through the project area is used to generate power at hydroelectric facilities in the Feather River Canyon. The project area is a primary source watershed for the State Water Project that provides water for more than 27 million Californians. The southern portion of the project area includes State Highway 70, an important transportation corridor and access point for electric utilities. State Highway 70 is prone to landslides, exacerbated in recent years due to impacts from catastrophic forest fires such as the 2018 Camp Fire, 2020 North Complex Fire, and 2021 Dixie Fire.

Purpose and Need: Why do we need to act?

The purpose of the North Fork Forest Recovery Project is to accelerate post-Dixie Fire forest recovery, reduce wildfire risk for local communities, and improve forest resiliency in the face of climate change. The project has two overarching purposes: 1) Community Protection and Strategic Fire Management, and 2) Forest and Watershed Health and Resilience. (EA, p. 5-15).

The project responds to the following needs corresponding with the overarching purposes:

Community Protection and Strategic Fire Management:

- Reduce wildfire threats around communities and infrastructure
- Protect, manage, and interpret cultural resources
- Improve safety for the public and forest workers
- Provide diverse economic opportunities and invest in community partners

Forest and Watershed Health and Resilience:

- Restore, improve, and maintain forest resource conditions
- Control non-native invasive species and re-establish native plant species
- Restore the landscape around recreational features to improve forest and watershed resources
- Improve and maintain NFS roads to protect and restore watershed health
- Restore and protect habitat for wildlife and plant species
- Improve meadows and streams to protect and restore watershed health



Decision

The Decision Notice incorporates by reference the Environmental Assessment (EA), dated June 2025, as well as information included in the project record.

Based on my review of the analysis disclosed in the North Fork Forest Recovery Project final EA, the project record, best available science, and consideration of public comments, I have decided to select the Proposed Action Alternative (final EA p. 19-42). My decision authorizes the implementation of a suite of actions that will improve community protection, strengthen fire management features, and improve forest and watershed health and resilience.

This decision authorizes ten treatment types described in the Proposed Action (final EA p. 19-20; Appendix C) that will be implemented across identified treatment focus areas (final EA p. 28-42; Appendix D):

- **Prescribed fire treatments** would imitate the natural ecological role of fire, reducing hazardous surface and ladder fuel accumulation, and thus reduce the likelihood of high-severity fire at the landscape scale.
- **Variable-density thinning (VDT)** is an uneven-aged thinning technique that would promote the development of diverse tree species. VDT treatments would result in forested stands that reflect the natural range of variation, which encourages fire-resilient tree species, large-diameter trees, and more open forest conditions.
- The goal of **fuels reduction treatments** is to remove dangerous or excessive fuels from the environment to reduce wildfire threats around communities and reduce anticipated wildfire severity in unpopulated areas to create a more resilient forest. Fuels reduction treatment methods include hand and mechanical thinning (VDT), hand and machine piling, mastication, chipping, and targeted grazing, with the result being removal of excessive fuels to reduce wildfire threats around communities and create a more resilient forest.
- **Hazard tree removal** involves identifying, felling, and removing hazard trees capable of striking Forest Service system roads, trails, and structures; and removing hazard trees along private property boundaries where dead and dying trees present a threat to life or property.
- Strategic **reforestation** may occur anywhere within the project area where needed to meet desired conditions. Larger reforestation areas would restore conifer forests within large, high-severity burn patches with a low probability of natural regeneration. Reforestation would also occur within smaller burned patches near communities, recreational assets, and infrastructure as well as along private property lines where re-establishment of forest is important for community safety and well-being. Site preparation for reforestation may include the removal of burned trees, brush, and vegetation using manual, mechanical, or chemical treatments.
- **Invasive species management treatments** would control identified non-native invasive plant species that pose a threat to healthy forests and watersheds. Treatments would incorporate the proposed manual, mechanical, and chemical (herbicide) control methods and would include native plant re-establishment where warranted.
- **Stream and meadow improvement treatments** would use a variety of techniques to help restore the natural hydrological and biological functions of meadows and channel systems.
- **Transportation system maintenance and improvement treatments** would utilize a variety of methods to stabilize USFS roads, thereby facilitating the implementation of other treatments and improving watershed health.
- **Herbicide treatments** would be implemented as part of an integrated resource management approach to manage invasive species and improve seedling survival in reforestation treatment units.
- **Recreation treatments** would include trail maintenance and construction, including construction and maintenance of approximately 7 miles of non-motorized trails, including



a 0.4-mile interpretive trail, and 25 miles of motorized (class 1 e-bike only) trails. Recreation facility improvements would occur at already developed PNF recreation sites and may include utilities (water, electrical), host sites, shower facilities, additional parking, paved camping spurs, and upgraded restrooms. The need for these trails was identified through extensive community engagement, particularly via a survey conducted by Sierra Buttes Trail Stewardship, completed by 1,179 individuals, 68% of whom identified as local residents. Survey responses highlighted significant interest in a trail network around Greenville and Taylorsville. The results showed overwhelming support for trails, with 94% of respondents wanting more trails near their communities, and 67% of respondents provided specific suggestions for new trail locations reinforcing the community-driven demand for expanded trail networks. Additionally, 88% of respondents expressed a willingness to volunteer for trail construction and maintenance. These findings guide the planning process for new trails and reflect the community's vision of creating connected, accessible recreation opportunities.

Collectively, these treatments contribute to meeting the purpose and needs of the project, but each treatment type may be used as a stand-alone treatment, in combination with another treatment, or following another treatment.

My decision approves the Proposed Action Alternative, as presented in the final EA. This includes minor but important modifications to the Proposed Action presented in the draft EA as the result of consideration of public comments, discussions with agency staff and stakeholders, and consideration of objections. All modifications are noted in the final EA, and include the following changes:

- addition of language guiding management of waterways eligible for future designation as Wild and Scenic Rivers,
- clarification that strategic fire management features are not being added as NFS routes,
- restriction of motorized uses on a section of proposed trail near Mt. Jura that falls within the Genesee Valley Special Management Area,
- for the Greenville proposed trails, no change to proposed uses was made, but non-motorized trails were changed to a motorized designation in order to align with Forest Service policy for e-bike and adaptive device trails,
- modifications to Design Features in Appendix F to provide consistency in herbicide buffer distances (HU-10, 11 and 12),
- addition of a herbicide and mechanical treatment exclusion zone near non-industrial private lands in Genesee Valley,
- clarification of how burned areas were considered in delineating California Spotted Owl (CSO) habitat and how treatments may impact it,
- clarification of impacts to existing and post-treatment habitat for black backed woodpeckers, as well as cumulative effects from regional projects,
- modification and realignment of the Mt. Jura trail near Taylorsville, and
- updating the Minimization Criteria to include clarifications and additional information.

This decision falls within my authority (36 CFR 220.4(c)), which states I may select one of the alternatives after modifying the alternative with additional mitigating measures or select a combination of actions from those proposed in any of the alternatives analyzed.

My decision includes all the necessary management requirements and design features described in the final EA and Appendices of the EA, which are incorporated in this decision and will be implemented in the treatments. This decision also includes project-specific Forest Plan amendments, as articulated in the final EA and Appendix B, that are necessary to allow the actions authorized herein to be guided by the best available science on forest resilience and wildlife habitat needs in the face of climate change, and to effectively achieve the identified purposes and needs for the project.



Decision Rationale

The North Fork Forest Recovery Project includes the public lands around communities most heavily impacted by the 2021 Dixie Fire, the latest in a string of large wildfires that have burned across over 65% of NFS lands on the Plumas National Forest and impacted more than 30 adjacent communities. As an agency, we recognize the need for a paradigm shift in land management to reduce wildfire risk to people and communities while restoring fire-adapted landscapes. Our shift in approach needs to include both a recognition of the pressing need to implement treatments strategically—around communities and focused on critical landscape elements—and an increase in the scale of management actions, whether those be the application of prescribed fire, forest thinning, or reforestation. We are committed to managing lands in a way that reduces risks to communities and improves landscape resilience in the face of climate change.

My decision to authorize the implementation of the Proposed Action Alternative is based on consideration of the purpose and need, tribal consultation, community engagement, and the alternatives and their potential effects and outcomes as disclosed in the North Fork Forest Recovery Project final EA. I believe my decision to select the Proposed Action Alternative represents a step toward the needed paradigm shift. The implementation of treatments authorized by this decision will meaningfully increase community safety and well-being, allow for strategic fire management on the landscape, and increase landscape resilience to future disturbances (e.g., drought, pests, and wildfire).

To address the project's community protection and strategic fire management purpose, there is a need to reduce post-fire fuels to protect communities and infrastructure and to ensure safe access into and out of communities. There is also a need to provide fire personnel with pre-planned, strategic locations with a high probability of successful fire management.

Without treatment, large, homogeneous, landscape-level brush cover has dominated many post-fire areas. The high fuel loads would continue to increase and exacerbate the risk of high-intensity wildfire within the wildland-urban interface (WUI), exposing humans and infrastructure to increasing risks. Future wildfire suppression efforts would be more difficult under the No Action Alternative (final EA p. 95-96). Excessive flame lengths would prevent direct attack by ground-based equipment and personnel. In the event a high-intensity fire occurs, fire suppression efforts would be indirect as ground-based equipment and personnel would not be able to directly attack the fire due to excessive flame lengths. These conditions would be expected to persist and increase without intervention.

Similarly, in unburned stands in the project area, analysis shows that a continuation of current conditions means that forest stands would continue to be at risk of mortality and tree densities would remain high (final EA, p. 95). Additional growth of ladder fuels would occur, and overcrowding in stands would contribute to an increasing vulnerability to disturbance.

Implementation of the proposed treatments for strategic fire management features would reduce roadside fuels along 45 miles of critical ingress-egress routes to support safe evacuation routes for the public and maintain access for emergency responders (final EA, p. 37-38). Additional fire management features would provide strategic operational assets for the management of both planned and unplanned ignitions across the landscape from predetermined locations with a vegetation structure supportive of a high probability of successful direct attack.

The actions authorized by my decision will also meaningfully address the project's second purpose: to improve forest and watershed health and resilience. Regional climate change trends indicate increasing mean temperatures and more variable precipitation. These changes will increase the impact of environmental stressors such as drought, insect infestations, and disease outbreaks on forest stands (final EA, p. 58). We can also expect longer fire seasons with larger, more frequent fires. There is a need to implement treatments to improve forest health to withstand these climate stressors and become more resilient to extreme climatic events. In areas that burned at high severity and large patch size, there is a need to manage post-fire fuels and reestablish forest cover within these large high-severity burn patches to prevent forest loss on the



landscape (final EA, p.60-61). Reforestation efforts in burned areas would support the goal of reducing carbon in the atmosphere as trees regrow and carbon is sequestered from the atmosphere. Reforestation will maximize carbon sequestration over the next 80 years and allow for a natural forest carbon cycle.

There is a long-term need to increase habitat resilience across the landscape while retaining specific habitat components for old forest-associated species, including large trees, structural diversity and complexity, and moderate to high canopy cover. Immediate action to reduce fuels left by the Dixie Fire will serve to reduce the short-term risk of another high-severity fire and create long-term landscape resiliency.

My decision to implement the Proposed Action Alternative authorizes treatments to promote stands that are resilient to threats from wildfires, drought, and insect and disease; stressors that are all projected to increase under a changing climate. This decision will enable agency staff, partners, and contractors to restore forest conditions to their natural range of variation.

Other Alternatives Considered

In addition to the selected alternative, I considered the no action alternative. The no action alternative would not meet the aspects of the purpose and need for the project.

Summary of Public Involvement

During the development of the North Fork Forest Recovery Project, the Plumas National Forest actively consulted and engaged with individuals, organizations, agencies, and Tribes. Key participants included community members from primary areas within the project, such as Taylorsville, Greenville, Genesee, Crescent Mills, Seneca, Indian Falls, Twain, Belden, Paxton, and Canyon Dam.

In addition to formal consultations as part of the NEPA process, the Plumas National Forest and the Sierra Institute for Community and Environment conducted informal outreach. This included four pre-scoping community meetings, one pre-scoping Tribal outreach meeting, one public meeting during the scoping period, one public meeting during the comment period, and a field tour focused on the North Fork Forest Recovery Project.

The first three pre-scoping community meetings took place on:

- **June 21, 2023:** Focused on Taylorsville, North Arm, and Genesee
- **July 13, 2023:** Focused on Greenville and Crescent Mills
- **July 19, 2023:** Focused on Indian Falls, Seneca, Belden, Twain, Paxton, and Canyon Dam

The pre-scoping Tribal outreach meeting was held on July 11th, 2023. The purpose of these pre-scoping meetings was to gather community input and feedback to inform the Proposed Action and Purpose and Need Document (PAPN). A public scoping meeting was conducted on October 19th to collect community feedback on the PAPN, while a field tour on October 17th focused on post-fire environments and seedling establishment and survival. Additionally, a public meeting was held on August 21st, 2024, to discuss the Environmental Assessment and gather community comments.

Beyond these community meetings, staff from the Plumas National Forest and Sierra Institute engaged in numerous discussions with stakeholders and organizations. Input was sought from groups including the Greenville Rancheria, Susanville Indian Rancheria, Dixie Fire Collaborative, Sierra Buttes Trails Stewardship, Seneca Firewise Committee, Taylorsville Firewise Committee, Friends of Plumas Wilderness, and others.



Response to Public Comments

Several changes were made to the project between the Draft Environmental Assessment and the Final Environmental Assessment in response to public comments and concerns. Here is a summary of the key changes:

1. **Mining Design Feature:** A new design feature (MIN-6) was added to ensure the protection of valid existing mining rights and accessibility.
2. **Fire Management Feature Clarification:** The document now explicitly states that fire management features will not be converted into off-highway vehicle (OHV) trails, or used for OHV recreation.
3. **Wild and Scenic Rivers:** Management direction and additional protections for eligible Wild and Scenic Rivers have been included, including design features (WSR-01 through WSR-10).
4. **Mt. Jura Trail Modification:** The proposed Mt. Jura trail has been shifted from a multi-use motorized trail to a Class 1 e-bikes only motorized trail.
5. **Mature and Old-Growth Forests:** The EA defines mature and old-growth forests according to regional guidelines and describes an identification and review process for managing mature and old-growth stands following current USFS direction.
6. **Slope Restriction:** Additional direction has been included for conducting operations on slopes exceeding 35%. Mechanical operations are permitted on steep slopes if restrictions regarding skid trails, ground cover maintenance, and Road Construction and Maintenance (RCA) practices are followed. Consultation with district hydrologists and soil scientists is required when thinning on slopes greater than 35% to effectively mitigate sedimentation and erosion risks (HYD-17).
7. **Climate Estimates:** Carbon emissions have been recalculated in collaboration with the Regional Carbon Specialist, utilizing more precise project volume estimates for green trees in a predominantly burned project area.
8. **Forest Plan Amendments:** Minor edits were made to the Forest Plan Amendments for clarity. The Forest Service Regional Office offered guidance on how to clarify several of them further.

These changes reflect a commitment to addressing community concerns, addressing any issues with clarity, and enhancing environmental protections.

Response to Objections

Several changes were also made to the project in response to the 10 project objections. Here is a summary of the key changes:

1. **Herbicide Use Near Genesee Valley:** In response to public input and site-specific resource evaluation, a mechanical treatment and herbicide exclusion zone (562 acres) has been identified on the south side of Genesee Valley. Similar site-specific resource evaluation and solicitation of public input will occur throughout the life of the project as part of the Implementation Guide process described in Appendix G.
2. **Impacts to Spotted Owls:** Clarification was added to explain how burned areas were considered when delineating California Spotted Owl (CSO) habitat, and how mechanical and post-fire treatments may affect it.
3. **Black-Backed Woodpecker Habitat:** The EA was updated to include additional detail on how treatments may affect Black-Backed Woodpecker habitat, including both existing and post-treatment conditions and cumulative effects with other regional projects.
4. **Mt. Jura Trail:** The EA was updated to include a modified trail segment for the Mt. Jura Trail near Taylorsville. The alignment was adjusted slightly to accommodate community concerns about the original route.



5. **Minimization Criteria – Wildlife:** Concerns about trail impacts to wildlife and connectivity (particularly gray wolf habitat) were addressed. The minimization criteria have been updated to more specifically consider these impacts.
6. **Minimization Criteria – Use Conflict:** Objections related to potential user conflict from e-bike designations were addressed. The minimization criteria worksheets were updated to demonstrate compliance with the Travel Management Rule and to explain the designation process.
7. **Trail Maintenance Capacity:** Concerns that the Plumas National Forest already has more trails than can be maintained were addressed by clarifying maintenance needs and available resources for maintenance.

Finding of No Significant Impact

Based on the analysis summarized in the final EA and the associated project record, I have determined that the Proposed Action Alternative is not a major federal action and will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment; therefore, an environmental impact statement (EIS) is not required. Under regulation 36 CFR 220, significance is evaluated for both context and intensity. The evaluation of context and intensity is summarized below.

Context

The significance of an action must be analyzed in several contexts, such as society, the affected region, the affected interests, and the locality. In the case of a site-specific action, significance usually depends on the effects in the locale, rather than in the world as whole. Both short- and long-term effects are relevant.

While larger in scale than traditional projects, the introduction and decision rationale sections highlight the need for this shift in our approach to landscape management goals. Still, the project area accounts for roughly 14% of the Plumas National Forest. The physical and biological effects are limited to the analysis area and immediate vicinities as disclosed in the EA.

Any adverse effects will be limited and short-term (e.g., smoke from prescribed fire or pile burning), while benefits will be long lasting. The selected alternative will not affect regional or national resources. Even in a local context, the North Fork project will not pose significant short- or long-term effects. Additionally, implementation of integrated design features will serve to avoid or minimize negative effects.

Intensity

Intensity is a measure of the severity, extent, or quantity of effects, and is based on information from the effects analysis of this EA and the references in the project record. The effects of this project have been appropriately and thoroughly considered with an analysis that is responsive to concerns and issues raised by the public. The agency has taken a hard look at the environmental effects using relevant scientific information and knowledge of site-specific conditions gained from field visits. My finding of no significant impact is based on the context of the project and intensity of effects using the ten factors identified in 36 CFR 220. . 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.***

Both beneficial and adverse effects are disclosed in the EA. I have reviewed these findings and have determined that none of the actions will result in significant effects to natural or cultural resources. All analyses prepared in support of this document considered both beneficial and adverse effects, but all effects determinations were made on only adverse effects. Beneficial effects have not been used to offset or compensate for potential significant adverse effects.

Beneficial effects of the chosen alternative include increased flexibility and efficiency to: improve



community safety and well-being by decreasing hazardous fuel in the wildland urban interface; improve forest health, structural and successional diversity; repair, replace, or decommission infrastructure contributing to sedimentation and poor water quality, and ensure sustainability of recreational opportunities.

Adverse effects will be minimized by the use of integrated design features and best management practices (EA, Appendix F). All anticipated adverse effects are short-term and limited in their geographic extent and the intensity of their impact to resources. For example, in the short term, air quality may be impacted by prescribed fire and pile burning; in the long term, prescribed fire reduces the risk of larger, uncontrolled wildfires. Controlled burns help manage smoke production and dispersion, minimizing impacts on air quality and public health (Air Quality Section, page 49). Short- and long-term impacts are detailed in the Environmental Impacts section of the EA, beginning on page 46. None of the adverse effects are anticipated to have a significant impact on the environment (see Environmental Impacts in the EA beginning on pg.40 and supporting analysis in the project record).

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

I considered safety during project design, and it is my determination the selected alternative will not have significant effects on public health and safety because of the limited scope of actions that would result in impacts to public health and safety. Proposed activities may cause short-term effects such as smoke and road dust, but these effects are anticipated to be short-term and limited in nature. The project's integrated design features would effectively mitigate potential effects to public health or safety (Design Features, Appendix F). For example, herbicide use, timing and application methods are chosen to minimize risk to human health. Buffers for herbicide application will be applied strategically to protect water courses, sensitive plants, and other sensitive resources (see Design Features for Hydrology, Soil, and Aquatic Resources & Herbicide Use, starting on page 218).

The project will improve public safety by reducing the chances for a high-intensity fire that may affect the public that recreate in the project area. The reduced chances of high-intensity wildfire will also reduce the chance of impacting the public's health from smoke from a wildfire in the project area.

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.*

After considering the analysis in the EA, I have concluded there will be no significant effects to unique characteristics in the project areas because such areas are to be avoided or impacts mitigated through the implementation of project design features (EA, Appendix F) or adherence to law, policy, and regulation. Measures are incorporated to protect cultural resources that exist in the project area and treatments have been designed to protect and enhance values associated with cultural resources where appropriate based on cultural significance and feasibility (EA, p. 31). No parklands or prime farmlands exist in the area. Wetlands will be protected through the implementation of integrated design features designed to limit impacts from equipment and activities related to the implementation of proposed restoration (Hydrology, Soil, and Aquatic Resources Design Features, p. 218). Some ecologically critical areas will be affected through projects designed to improve them, but not adversely affected (e.g., meadow restoration), while others will be avoided or protected (e.g. Some of the rare communities will be affected through projects designed to improve them, but not adversely affected (bog and canebrake improvements) and others will be avoided or protected (rocky cliff habitats, serpentine rock outcrops). Proposed treatments within or in proximity of waterways eligible for protection under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act are designed to protect and enhance the outstandingly remarkable values of these potential designations and in accordance with the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, Forest Plan, and other regulatory guidance (Wild and Scenic River Design Features, Appendix F, p. 229). Actions in specially designated lands (Research Natural Areas, Inventoried



Roadless Areas, proposed botanical Special Interest Areas) are designed to enhance the values associated with these designations while limiting potential adverse impacts (EA, p. 32). For example, proposed treatments within the Mud Lake RNA aim to reduce the risk of fire eliminating the immature population of Baker cypress by reducing snag density and fuel loading around young seedlings vulnerable to fire (EA, p. 32).

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

The term “controversial” in this context refers to cases where substantial scientific dispute exists on the size, nature, or effect of a major Federal action on some human environmental factor, rather than public opposition of a proposed action or alternative. As such, the effects on the quality of the human environment are not likely to be highly controversial. There is no known credible scientific controversy over the impacts of the proposed action. The Environmental Impacts section of the EA provides the scientific and analytical basis for the determination of effects to the physical, biological, and social environments. Reference information is provided within the project record and provided with each specialist report. A review of the EA and the project record indicates the best available scientific information was used to inform the environmental analysis. While I appreciate and expect the likelihood that some members of the public disagree with various aspects of the project and raised concerns related to the proposed action, there is no unusual or high degree of scientific controversy related to the effects of the project. Concerns have been raised by the public regarding the use of herbicides to control brush during reforestation and invasive species treatments. To address these concerns, Design Features (Herbicide Use, p. 225) will be implemented to safeguard human health and safety, both for workers applying the herbicide and for nearby community members. For further details, please refer to the Human Health Herbicide Risk Assessment for the scientific findings on the risks associated with specific application rates and scenarios. The effects associated with this type of action are well understood and documented in scientific literature referenced in this EA and supporting documentation.

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

The actions are similar to actions implemented in other areas on National Forest System land. Effects will be similar to those of past actions. Public scoping, or other communication with the public and stakeholders did not reveal any highly uncertain, unique, or unknown risks associated with the effects of the project. The Forest Service has considerable experience with these types of activities. I find the effects of this project are well established, predictable, and that there are no characteristics of the project or project area that have not been previously encountered or which constitute highly uncertain or unknown risks to the human environment. The implementation guide outline (EA, Appendix G) provides a roadmap to ensure an opportunity to revisit and review the analysis and/or account for any new or changed information as the project progresses.

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.*

Similar actions have been applied nationally, regionally, and in the Plumas National Forest and neighboring forests with success for many years. The proposal is not expected to establish a precedent for future actions. Any future actions proposed in addition to those considered and evaluated in the EA will be subject to future public involvement and a separate environmental analysis under the National Environmental Policy Act.

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

The combined effects of past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions were considered and are summarized in the cumulative effects analysis for each resource. The analysis of cumulative effects in the environmental assessment follows the National



Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) regulations (36 CFR 220.4(f)). Based upon review of the analysis in the environmental assessment and project record, I find that the project does not represent a potential cumulative significant impact on the environment. Cumulative effects from treatments have the potential to directly affect species through smoke, ground disturbance, or noise (2.4.2 Cumulative Effects). Actions such as ground thinning would reduce foraging resources for species like the western bumblebee or Monarch butterfly who depend on nectar from flowering plants for sustenance. Additionally, the cumulative effect of the proposed ingress-egress roads could result in habitat fragmentation and reduce habitat quality. However, long term effects of the cumulative actions are foreseen to be beneficial to a variety of species by enhancing foraging habitat, reducing insect and disease mortality in trees, and reducing sediment flows. There are no indications of significant cumulative effects to the environment, and direct and indirect effects will be minor.

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 proposed project will have no adverse effects to resources listed on, or potentially eligible for, listing on the National Register of Historic Places because standard protection measures would eliminate or minimize direct and indirect effects as outlined in the PNF Protect and Recover Project HIP developed under the National Programmatic Agreement for phasing Section 106.

Pursuant to 36 CFR 800, the 2021 National Programmatic Agreement among the U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, and the National Conference of State Historic Preservation Officers, for phasing Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act for large scale multi-year undertakings has been developed to allow the Forest Service to carry out Section 106 of the NHPA with a phased approach. This National PA requires a Heritage Implementation Plan (HIP) to document how Section 106 responsibilities will be met post-NEPA decision but pre-implementation.

The PNF developed the PNF Protect and Recover Project HIP in consultation with the Greenville Indian Rancheria, Susanville Indian Rancheria, Enterprise Rancheria, Berry Creek Rancheria, Mooretown Rancheria, Washoe Tribe of California and Nevada, Mechoopda Indian Tribe of the Chico Rancheria, Maidu Summit Consortium, Konkow Valley Band of Maidu, Ya-Mani Maidu Cultural Association, Tasmam Koyom Foundation, Maidu Cultural Group and the California State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO). The PNF HIP was signed by the Forest Supervisor in April of 2023.

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 Endangered Species Act (ESA) of 1973 (16 USC 1531 et seq.) requires any action authorized by a federal agency to not jeopardize the continued existence of a threatened or endangered species or result in the destruction or adverse modification of the critical habitat of such species. The effects of the project on threatened and endangered species are summarized in the aquatic, botanical, and terrestrial wildlife analysis sections of the EA, and detailed analysis provided in supporting documentation within the respective technical resource reports and in the Biological Assessment, in compliance with Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act.

The Forest Service has had ongoing communication with the USFWS throughout the development of the North Fork Forest Recovery Project and initiated consultation on August 1, 2024, regarding the project under Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act. The Biological Assessment and associated correspondence can be found in the project record. Any subsequent changes to the project required post-consultation with the USFWS will be documented in the final DN and adopted prior to any implementation.



A Biological Evaluation was completed to review and document how the project may affect both federally listed and Regional Forester's Sensitive Species per Forest Service Manual 2672.4. No determinations were reached that found that any Regional Forester's Sensitive Species were likely to experience a loss of viability or a trend toward Federal listing as threatened or endangered because of the actions. The Foothill yellow-legged frog is considered threatened and while likely to be affected is unlikely to be adversely affected. The California Red-Legged Frog and North American Wolverine are also considered threatened but actions were deemed as having no effect. The Sierra Nevada Yellow Legged Frog and Gray Wolf are endangered species within the project area and it was decided that the proposed actions may affect them, but are unlikely to adversely affect them. The Biological Evaluation is found in the Project Record.

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 requirement for the protection of the environment. Applicable laws and regulations were considered for each resource analyzed in the EA. Implementation of the proposed actions may impact individual migratory birds unintentionally, however the actions are consistent with the Migratory Bird Executive Order because it incorporates Project Design Features and BMPs as directed in the MOU, between the USDA USFS and the USFWS to Promote the Conservation of Migratory Birds (USDA & USFWS, 2008). The project was developed taking into consideration the best available science and encouraged collaboration with the public through numerous forums.

Findings Required by Other Laws and Regulations

My decision complies with all applicable law, regulation, and policy for the activities in this project. The selected Proposed Action Alternative was developed in accordance with and does not violate any Federal, State or local laws or requirements for protecting the environment (i.e., Clean Air Act, Clean Water Act, Endangered Species Act, National Environmental Policy Act, National Forest Management Act, National Historic Preservation Act, etc.). The activities under the Proposed Action Alternative are consistent with the Plumas National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan, as amended by the 2004 Sierra Nevada Forest Plan Amendment and the project-specific forest plan amendment described in Appendix B (see also National Forest System Land Management Planning Rule (36 CFR 219) section, below).

National Forest System Land Management Planning Rule (36 CFR 219)

The National Forest System Land Management Planning Rule (2012 Planning Rule) sets forth process and content requirements for development, amendment, and revision of land management plans to maintain and restore NFS terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems and watersheds while providing for ecosystem services and multiple uses. A land management plan (forest plan) may be amended at any time. Plan amendments should be used to keep plans current and help units adapt to new information or changing conditions (36 CFR 219.13(a)). Amendments to forest plans require the following: (1) identification of the need to change the plan; (2) provision of opportunities for public participation; (3) amendment of the plan consistent with Forest Service NEPA procedures; (4) adherence to the applicable format for plan components set out at Section 219.7(e), and (5) determination of which specific substantive requirements within 36 CFR 219.8 through 219.11 are directly related to the plan direction being added, modified, or removed.

The need to change the plan and the project-specific forest plan amendments adopted in this decision are detailed in Appendix C of the EA. The public comment period for the Draft EA provided opportunity for public participation. The substantive requirements directly related to the amendments are identified in Appendix C of the EA along with a description of how the directly related substantive requirements were applied within the scope and scale of the project-specific forest plan amendments.



Implementation

I intend to initiate implementation immediately after notifying interested and affected parties of this decision.

Administrative Review

This decision was subject to objection pursuant to 36 CFR 218, Subparts A and B (also called the “objection process”). A legal notice announcing the 45-day objection period on the draft decision appeared in the Mountain Messenger, the newspaper of record, on August 14, 2024.

A total of 10 objection letters were submitted during the designated objection period. The Reviewing officer completed the objection review, including an objection resolution meeting on May 2, 2025, that included invitations to all objectors. The Project planning team and I engaged with the Regional Office and lead objectors to work to resolve issues and incorporate updates into the final Environmental Assessment and final decision. These updates are noted above and are documented in the November, 2024 letters sent to objectors. The Reviewing Officer approved my issuance of this decision.

The responsible official shall notify interested and affected parties of the availability of the EA, FONSI and decision notice, as soon as practicable after the decision notice is signed.

Contact

For additional information concerning this decision, contact:

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