



United States Department of the Interior



BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

Mother Lode Field Office

5152 Hillsdale Circle

El Dorado Hills, CA 95762

www.blm.gov/ca/motherlode

EA Number: CA-180-09-42

Proposed Action: Davis Mill fuels reduction project

Location: MDM, T 17 N, R 9 E, Section 32, Nevada County, CA (see the project area map attached)

1.0 Purpose of and Need for Action

1.1 Need for Action

The Bureau of Land Management's Mother Lode Field Office (BLM) manages scattered public lands in the foothills of the central Sierra Nevada. Some areas have not experienced wildfires in decades. Chaparral and other fuels have grown, increasing the possibility of a catastrophic wildfire. These types of wildfires can do destroy significant historic buildings on public lands. The Davis Mill, located on BLM-administered land three miles northeast of Nevada City, California, is a significant historic building of particular concern. Dense fuels have grown on public land around the Davis Mill, and especially in close proximity to the mill's wooden superstructure. The building has no protection from wildfire.

At the same time, local communities have grown. There are now numerous private residences in the area, including residences adjacent to BLM-administered parcel containing the Davis Mill. Local residents are concerned about wildfire and are anxious to see public land managers like BLM take action to reduce fuels on public lands adjacent to their homes.

BLM proposes to reduce fuels on BLM-administered land immediately around the Davis Mill to help protect this historic building from wildfire and to help reduce the threat wildfire poses to surrounding private residences.

1.2 Conformance with Applicable Land Use Plans

The proposed action is consistent with the Sierra Resource Management Plan, approved in February 2008, and the Mother Lode Field Office Fire Management Plan, approved in March 2008. The Sierra Resource Management Plan's Record of Decision (page 15-16) gives BLM the goal of establishing a cost-efficient fire management program commensurate with threats to life, property, public safety, and environmental resources, including significant at-risk cultural resources like Davis Mill. BLM also has the goal of suppressing wildfire to protect life, property, and environmental resources. BLM's objectives for meeting these goals are use various kinds of treatments to reduce the risk of wildfire in WUI communities and reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire through fuels management. The Fire Management Plan gives BLM various non-fire fuels treatment objectives and strategies for specific lands under BLM's administration. Specific objectives and strategies for the fire management unit, in which the project area is located, are laid out in the plan.

2.0 Proposed Action and Alternatives

2.1 Proposed Action

The proposed action is to reduce fuels on BLM-administered land immediately adjacent to the Davis Mill. BLM crews would do the fuels reduction work within the project area. The project would be done by hand using chainsaws and other hand-held tools. Fuels that are in close proximity to the mill building (within 100 ft) and pose a wildfire threat would be removed, with the following caveats:

Any dead vegetation less than six inches in diameter would be cut and removed. Live trees with trunks less than 6 inches in diameter as measured six inches above the ground would be cut and removed. Tree trunks would be cut flush with the ground. Ladder fuels (branches) would be removed on the lower third (or up to 8 ft) on trees not cut down. Generally grasses and forbs may be cut with a string trimmer. All cut vegetation would be cut up and scattered on BLM-administered land. No ground disturbing activity is authorized. No new roads or trails would be created or constructed.

Clearing of vegetation by mechanical vehicles or equipment (i.e., dozers, ATVs, etc.) is prohibited unless BLM specifies that a specific type of equipment may be used. Fire suppression tools would be kept at hand during clearing. Hand tools with internal combustion engines would have state or federally approved spark arresters.

The project area is not located on public land with specific land use designations including Areas of Critical Environmental Concern, Wild and Scenic Rivers, Wilderness Study Area, Special Recreation Management Areas.

2.2 Project Design Features

Fuels reduction projects can cause the spread of invasive plant species. Of particular concern at the Davis Mill is the spread of weedy brush species Scotch broom. If this species is cut to reduce brush fuels, and the branches are moved, seed of the broom species may be spread. If branches of these species are to be moved, the branches would be cut small enough to be loaded in plastic bags. Any transport of the branches would be done inside intact and closed plastic bags. For the same reason, raking of areas with Scotch broom would not occur.

2.3 No Action

Under the no action alternative, BLM would not conduct fuels reduction in the project area at the Davis Mill. This historically significant mill building would not have protection from wildfire and could be destroyed. Additionally, private residences in the area would be at greater risk.

2.4 Alternatives Considered but Eliminated from Detailed Analysis

BLM did not consider any other alternatives in detailed analysis.

3.0 Affected Environment

The Davis Mill was built between 1915 and 1920 for processing gold ore from the Randolph Mine. The mill was built under the auspices of the mine's owner and operator, the Davis family, including mother Eliza and sons William, Arthur, and Harry. The mill appears to have seen its most extensive period of use during the late 1910s and early 1920s. By the late 1920s the family was leasing the mine to the Western Merger Mines Company. In 1931 the company pulled out and the mine and mill came back under the control of the Davis family. Out of work, the brothers gave hardrock mining at the Randolph another try but their efforts proved unprofitable and they were forced to earn a living by other means. Harry, who lived with his wife and mother at the mine, may have operated the Davis Mill intermittently to treat ore from other mines during the 1930s, and possibly during the early 1940s. The mill was completely shut down by the end of the World War II. Remarkably well-preserved, the mill is

today a testament to the work of a small family-run mining operation. The mill is also an outstanding example of stampmill vernacular. It exhibits distinctive characteristics of its type, period, and method of construction. The mill has an impressive multistory frame superstructure entirely clad in corrugated metal. The mill was equipped with a typical array of equipment: an ore bin, rock crusher, a five-stamp battery, an amalgamation table, a retort room, and concentrators. Much of this equipment remains in place, providing valuable insight on how the Davis family configured their mill.

The Davis Mill is in its original location on public land on Harmony Ridge, near the South Fork of the Yuba River in the central Sierra Nevada foothills. Specifically, the mill is situated at 2860 ft above sea level, in a small flat along a tributary of Rock Creek. The flat's immediate surroundings are forested with live oak, black oak, incense cedar, ponderosa pine, dogwood, and madrone. Manzanita, Scotch broom, and mountain misery are the dominant understory plants. The current vegetation is mostly native and, based on photos taken in the late 1920s and early 1930s, appears to resemble the environment that existed at the millsite during early 1900s. The photos suggest that area may have had more ponderosa pine in the past. The pine was probably sold by the Davis family to loggers in the 1930s and 1940s to help pay the bills. The house and other mine buildings associated with the mill. There are numerous private residences near the mill site.

Recreational use of BLM-administered land in the area is considered to be very low. Recreationists visit this area infrequently. BLM manages this area in accordance with class III visual resource management (VRM) standards. BLM's objective for class III is to partially retain the existing character of the landscape. The level of change to the characteristic landscape should be moderate. Management activities may attract attention but should not dominate the view of the casual observer. Changes should repeat basic elements found in the predominant natural features of the characteristic landscape.

4.0 Environmental Effects

The following critical elements have been considered in this environmental assessment, and unless specifically mentioned later in this EA, have been determined to be unaffected by the proposal: areas of critical environmental concern, prime/unique farmlands, floodplains, wetlands and riparian zones, wild and scenic rivers, wilderness, and environmental justice.

4.1 Impacts of the Proposed Action and Alternatives

The proposed action would not impact atmospheric, water, or soil resources. The area that would be treated is relatively small in size. The use of hand tools within this area is expected to cause little, if no, soil disturbance. Cut brush and other fuels would be cut up and dispersed for biomass. Cutting of fuels, as proposed, could create some dust, but not enough to affect air quality.

The BLM botanist analyzed the impacts of the project on botanical resources, especially special status plants. The analysis was designed to help BLM meet its obligations under the Endangered Species Act. He did not find any special status plants affected by the proposed action. The botanist recommended that the proposed action would not affect threatened and endangered plants or other BLM special status plants. Vegetation that would be treated within the variance area would grow back within a few years.

The BLM wildlife biologist analyzed the impacts of the project on wildlife, especially on special status wildlife. Her analysis was designed to help BLM meet its obligations under the Endangered Species Act. The biologist recommended that the project would have negligible short-term impacts on wildlife due to temporary noise and dust when fuels are cut and masticated. There would be no impacts on threatened and endangered wildlife or other BLM special status wildlife.

The BLM archaeologist conducted a cultural resource study of the project area to determine whether significant cultural resources could be affected by the proposed action. The study was designed to help BLM meet its obligations under Section 106 of the Historic Preservation Act. The BLM archaeologist found that no significant cultural resources would be affected by the project. In fact, the project would help protect a historically significant cultural resource—the Davis Mill. No places of traditional religious and cultural significance to Native Americans would be affected.

The proposed action would not negatively impact recreational use. Recreational use is very uncommon in the area affected by the proposed action. Recreation could be impacted, for a short period of time, during project implementation.

The proposed project would have a negligible temporary impact on visual resources. BLM manages the area in accordance with VRM class III standards, and the proposed action is in line with the management objective for this class, which is to partially retain the existing character of the landscape.

4.2 Impacts of the No Action Alternative

There would be no impacts to environmental resources, such as water, soils, and wildlife. However there could be impacts to private property. If the proposed action is not implemented, private property would have less protection against a wildfire.

4.3 Cumulative Impacts

Negative cumulative impacts are not anticipated. The proposed action would not impact significant biological and cultural resources. The proposed action would not impact atmospheric, water, and soil resources. The proposed action would have negligible short-term impacts on commonplace plants and wildlife. The vegetation would grow back and wildlife would return to the area once project work has ceased. Except for trees too large to be cut during the initial work, as long as the area is maintained, vegetation would be kept at an early seral stage. This would affect wildlife use patterns, favoring those species that make use of early seral habitat. Wildlife species that do not stray from cover would make less use of the project area. Wildlife species that use the ecotone between dense brush and more open habitat should be favored by the treated area with adjacent uncut brush. In all of these instances, other fuels reduction work in the vicinity can lead to cumulative impacts. The proposed action is expected to have beneficial cumulative impact on historically significant buildings and wildfire protection.

5.0 Agencies and Persons Consulted

No outside agencies were consulted.

5.1 Authors

James Barnes, BLM NEPA coordinator/Archaeologist

5.2 BLM Interdisciplinary Team/Reviewers:

NEPA coordinator/Archaeologist	Date
Fuels specialist	Date
Botany	Date
Wildlife/fisheries	Date

5.3 Availability of Document and Comment Procedures

This EA will be posted on Mother Lode Field Office's website (www.blm.gov/ca/motherlode) under NEPA and would be available for a 15-day public review period. The EA is also available by mail upon request during this 15-day public review period. Comments should be sent to James Barnes at Bureau of Land Management, Mother Lode Field Office, 5152 Hillsdale Circle, El Dorado, CA, 95762, or emailed to jjbarnes@blm.gov.



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Davis Mill fuels reduction project (CA-180-09-42) Finding of No Significant Impact August 2009

It is my determination that this decision will not result in significant impacts to the quality of the human environment. Anticipated impacts are within the range of impacts addressed in the Sierra Resource Management Plan/Final Environmental Impact Statement. The proposed action does not constitute a major federal action having a significant effect on the human environment; therefore, an environmental impact statement is not necessary and will not be prepared. This conclusion is based on my consideration of CEQ's following criteria for significance (40 CFR §1508.27), regarding the context and intensity of the impacts described in the EA, and based on my understanding of the project:

- 1) *Impacts can be both beneficial and adverse and a significant effect may exist regardless of the perceived balance of effects.* Potential impacts include vegetation removal and temporary noise and dust due to cutting fuels. However, none of these impacts would be significant at the local level or cumulatively because of the small scale of the project.
- 2) *The degree of the impact on public health or safety.* No aspects of the project have been identified as having the potential to significantly and adversely impact public health or safety. In fact, the project is designed to help protect private property from wildfire; therefore protecting public health and safety.
- 3) *Unique characteristics of the geographic area.* The project area does not have any unique characteristics. Soil, vegetation, wildlife, and cultural resources are all typical for the area.
- 4) *The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial effects.* No anticipated effects have been identified that are scientifically controversial. As a factor for determining within the meaning of 40 C.F.R. § 1508.27(b)(4) whether or not to prepare a detailed environmental impact statement, "controversy" is not equated with "the existence of opposition to a use." *Northwest Environmental Defense Center v. Bonneville Power Administration*, 117 F.3d 1520, 1536 (9th Cir. 1997). "The term 'highly controversial' refers to instances in which 'a substantial dispute exists as to the size, nature, or effect of the major federal action rather than the mere existence of opposition to a use.'" *Hells Canyon Preservation Council v. Jacoby*, 9 F.Supp.2d 1216, 1242 (D. Or. 1998).
- 5) *The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are likely to be highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.* The analysis does not show that this action would involve any unique or unknown risks.
- 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.* Fuels treatment on BLM-administered land is not precedent setting.

7) *Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts.* No significant cumulative impacts have been identified. The project is consistent with the actions and impacts anticipated in the Sierra Resource Management Plan and its associated environmental impact statement.

8) *The degree to which the action may adversely affect National Historic Register listed or eligible to be listed sites or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural or historical resources.* The project will not affect cultural resources listed on or eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. In fact, it will specifically help to protect a historically significant mill building.

9) *The degree to which the action may adversely affect ESA listed species or critical habitat.* No ESA listed species (or their habitat) will be affected by the proposed action.

10) *Whether the action threatens a violation of environmental protection law or requirements.* There is no indication that this decision will result in actions that will threaten such a violation.

William S. Haigh
Field Manager, Mother Lode Field Office

Date



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Davis Mill fuels reduction project (CA-180-09-42)

Decision Record

August 2009

1.0 Introduction and Background

The Bureau of Land Management's Mother Lode Field Office (BLM) proposes to have crews treat fuels, by hand, on BLM-administered land around the Davis Mill in Nevada County, CA. Based on information in the EA, the project record, and recommendations from my staff, the following constitutes my decision.

2.0 Decision

2.1 Alternatives Considered but not Selected

The no action alternative was considered but not selected. Under this alternative, fuels would not be treated around the Davis Mill. The historically significant Davis Mill would not have any protection from wildfire and BLM would miss an opportunity to address its fire management goals, objectives, and strategies laid out in the Sierra Resource Management Plan and the Mother Lode Field Office Fire Management Plan.

2.2 Decision and Rationale

Based on information in the EA, the project record, and recommendations from my staff, I have decided to implement the proposed action as described in the EA. There are no restrictions on the time of implementation. I have decided to implement the project before the usual 15-day public review period has ended because, with fire danger so high this time of year, this fuels treatment project is needed to help protect a significant cultural resource as well as lives and property.

3.0 Consultation and Coordination

No special status animal or plant species (or their habitats) will be affected by the project; therefore, consultation with US Fish and Wildlife Service was unnecessary.

4.0 Public Involvement

Although I have decided to forego the comment period, The EA will be posted on the BLM Mother Lode Field Office internet website for public viewing.

5.0 Plan Consistency

Based on information in the EA, the project record, and recommendations from my staff, I conclude that this decision is consistent with the cultural resource and fire management goals, objectives, and strategies in the Sierra Resource Management Plan and the Mother Lode Field Office Fire Management Plan. The decision is also in compliance with the Endangered Species Act; Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act; and other applicable environmental laws, regulations, and policies.

6.0 Administrative Remedies

Administrative remedies may be available to those who believe they will be adversely affected by this decision. Appeals may be made to the Office of Hearings and Appeals, Office of the Secretary, U.S. Department of Interior, Board of Land Appeals (Board) in strict compliance with the regulations in 43 CFR Part 4. Notices of appeal must be filed in this office within 30 days after publication of this decision. If a notice of appeal does not include a statement of reasons, such statement must be filed with this office and the Board within 30 days after the notice of appeal is filed. The notice of appeal and any statement of reasons, written arguments, or briefs must also be served upon the Regional Solicitor, Pacific Southwest Region, U.S. Department of Interior, 2800 Cottage Way, E-1712, Sacramento, CA 95825.

The effective date of this decision (and the date initiating the appeal period) will be the date the notice of this decision is posted on the BLM Mother Lode Field Office internet website.

William S. Haigh
Field Manager, Mother Lode Field Office

Date