

King Peak Road Fuel Break

EA # DOI-BLM-CA-N030-2009-0021

Date: 08/18/2009

**Bureau of Land Management
Arcata Field Office
Arcata, CA**

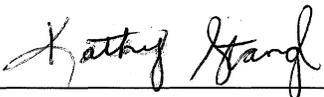
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Jared Hammatt

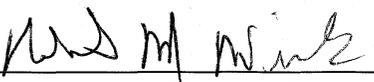
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Reviewed By:



Kathy Stangl, Asst. Field Mgr.

8/20/2009



Bob Wick, Planning/NEPA Coordinator

08/19/09

King Peak Road Fuel Break

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Decision Record

Decision and Rationale

It is the decision of the BLM Arcata Field Office to implement the King Peak Road Fuel Break treatment with associated design features to minimize impacts. The treated area will include approximately 90 acres of BLM land within the King Range NCA. The treatment will consist of reducing vegetation 75 feet back from both sides of the King Peak Road by selectively thinning and mechanically chipping or masticating brush and understory vegetation. The results of this fuel break will be well-spaced trees, approximately 300 per acre providing a shaded canopy with the absence of understory vegetation.

Mastication will be accomplished using tracked or rubber-tired equipment. All equipment operations will cease if soil moisture is sufficient to result in visible rutting or spinning tires on wet ground, or if operations result in a visible increase in turbidity within any receiving watercourses. Equipment will avoid operating on slopes greater than 60 percent or areas with evidence of recent instability. The BLM representative (Contracting Officers Representative/Project Inspector) overseeing the project will make the determination to halt equipment operations or avoid areas based on on-site observations of soil conditions. All rare plants (identified in the Special Status Plant Species Assessment) that are likely to be impacted by the proposed action will be marked with blue flagging tied to bamboo stakes and will be avoided. Preventative action will be taken to limit the opportunities for the introduction, establishment, or spread of invasive, non-native plant species.

The selected alternative best meets the purpose and need for the project which is twofold: 1) To allow for use fire as a natural land management tool and allow opportunities to re-establish a natural fire regime in the King Range backcountry; and 2) To minimize the risk to public safety, firefighter safety, and private property by improving and expanding the existing fuel break system on BLM lands. This project is not expected to adversely impact elements of the human environment due to design features and operations criteria. This decision is consistent with the King Range National Conservation Area Resource Management Plan and other relevant laws, regulations and policies guiding management of the project area.

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 this notice of decision is posted on BLM's Arcata Field Office internet website.



Lynda Roush
Arcata Field Manager,

8-26-2009

Date

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Background and Setting

The Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) Arcata Field Office manages the King Range National Conservation Area (NCA) which surrounds the community of Shelter Cove, California. The community is situated on a coastal flat below the King Range Mountains of the Northern Coastal Ranges, a location which makes the community vulnerable to high intensity wildfires that typically move from northeast to southwest. Historical fire occurrence in this area indicates a large, intense wildfire every 20 to 30 years. The last large devastating wildfire was in 1973, where approximately 16,000 acres were severely burned. Significant urban development has occurred since the 1973 wildfire and approximately 80 percent of the houses in the community of Shelter Cove are situated within the perimeter of the fire. Approximately 200 homes have been built in Shelter Cove and more development is expected. Steps are being taken by the Shelter Cove Resort Improvement District, county and state government, and local residents to address the flammability problem within the community of Shelter Cove.

The BLM has also been actively addressing the hazard fuels issue by providing grant funding to local fire departments and maintaining BLM suppression resources in the area. Over the last 10 years, the BLM has been creating and maintaining a system of fuel breaks designed to increase suppression effectiveness and thus protect Shelter Cove in the event of a wildfire. Fuel breaks are defined as an area of reduced vegetation that is available to burn in a wildfire (fuel) along strategic locations such as roads or ridgetops. Fuel load reduction is an effective way to moderate elements of fire behavior such as flame length, intensity (heat per unit area), severity (effects of fire on environment), and rate of spread. This proposed action is designed to improve the existing fuel break system by incorporating additional areas and increasing the range of available treatment options. This project is also part of a larger plan to use fire as a natural land management tool and allow opportunities to re-establish a natural fire regime in the King Range backcountry.

1.2 Purpose and Need for Action and Decision to be Made

The accumulation of hazardous fuels and the expansion of the homes into the wildland urban interface have increased the risk that destructive wildfire will impact Shelter Cove. King Peak Road Fuel Break is designed to limit the spread of wildfires from the South Fork of Bear Creek and the Mattole River watershed, into Shelter Cove, a federally registered "Community-At-Risk."

The primary goal of this project is to minimize the risk to public safety and private property by improving and expanding the existing fuel break system on BLM lands. The mechanical reduction of fuel loads that accumulate with increased fire return intervals has

been proven effective in moderating fire behavior (van Wagtendonk 1996) (Graham 1999). Fuel breaks can improve the safety of firefighters and the public along access corridors in the event of a wildfire. Suppression success can also be improved by providing a safe area from which to conduct backfire operations. A backfire is a suppression tactic that involves deliberate ignition of fuel along the inner edge of a fuel break to consume the fuel in the path of an approaching wildfire.

This document is an expansion of the existing project area and the treatment methods covered under the Horse Mountain Fuel Break Environmental Assessment (EA) (AR-02-19). This analysis includes previously analyzed areas along with the addition of a 75 foot wide corridor on the west side of King Peak Road, as well as a section of BLM land that extends south from the intersection of West Rancho and King Peak Roads to Shelter Cove Road. Mastication (the use of an attachment that grinds vegetation into small pieces) with tracked or rubber tired equipment is added as a treatment option to both the proposed areas and previously analyzed portions of the fuel break (See Figure 1).

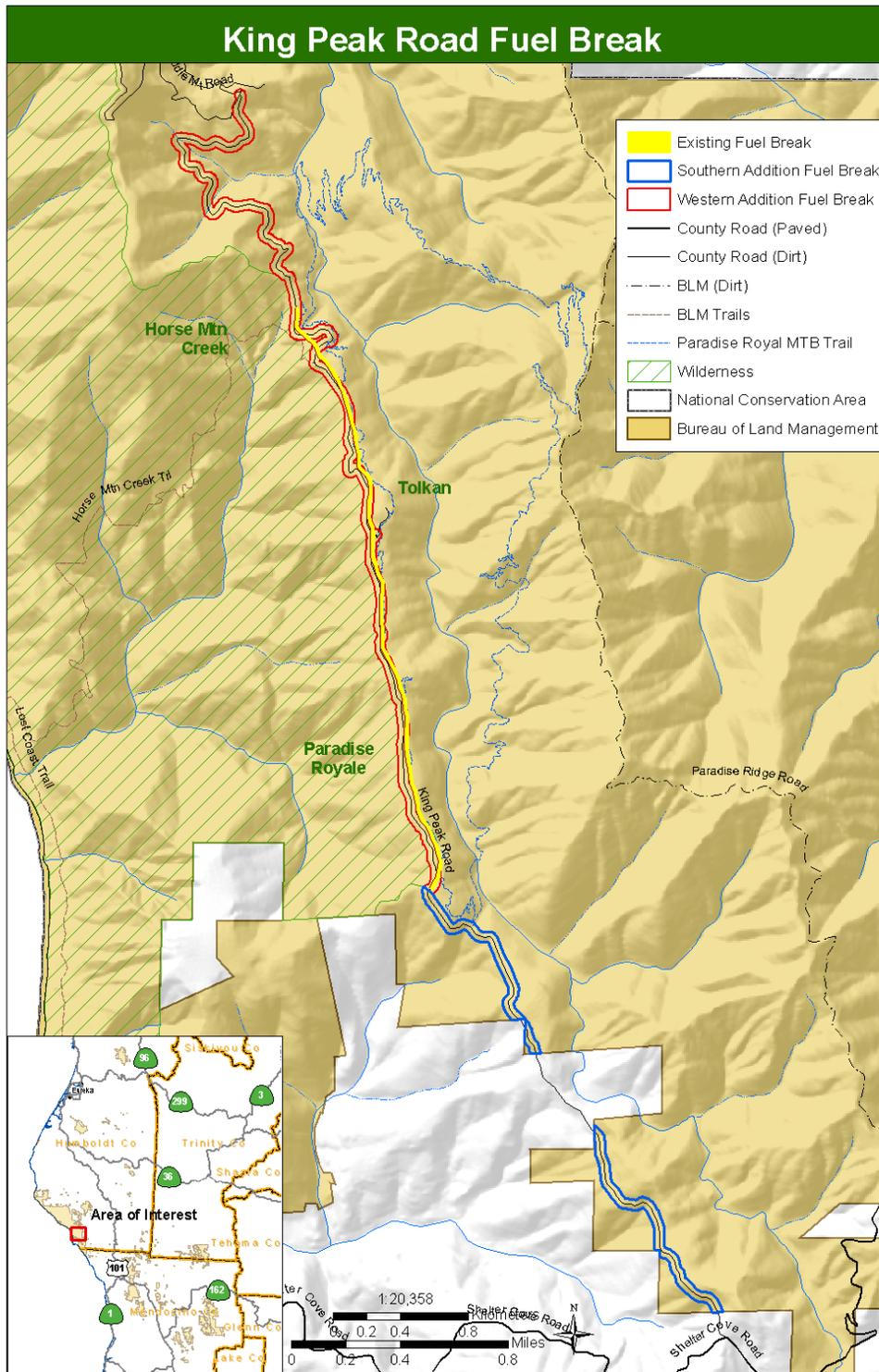


Figure 1. Map includes the existing fuel break (yellow), as well as the proposed areas to include west side of road and new segments to north and south (red, blue).

1.3 Conformance with Land Use Plan

The Proposed Action is consistent with the King Range National Conservation Area Resource Management Plan (RMP) (May 2005), and the Arcata Field Office Fire Management Plan (FMP) (March 2008).

The King Range National Conservation Area RMP Record of Decision (Page 6) gives BLM the options of using prescribed fire and mechanical fuel reduction to:

- Reduce potential for high intensity fires.
- Develop a shaded fuel break system to protect communities.
- Provide a defensible perimeter around the Backcountry Zone.
- Minimize the need for construction of bulldozer lines during fire events.

The King Range RMP allows for expansion of the fuel break system to meet the objectives of the King Range RMP and the Arcata FMP. Area specific objectives and strategies are described in detail in the Arcata FMP.

This project is consistent with Standards and Guidelines for the Management of Habitat for Late-Successional and Old-Growth Forests Related Species within the Range of the Northern Spotted Owl as stated in the Northwest Forest Plan,(1994). The plan addresses the need for maintaining the “natural” disturbance regime and also reducing the risk of stand replacement fires.

1.3 Relationship to Statutes, Regulations or Other Plans

King Range Fire Management Plan (2004)

Managing the Impacts of Wildland fires on Communities and the Environment – The National Fire Plan (2001)

Arcata Resource Area Resource Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement (1992)

Standards and Guidelines for Management of Habitat for Late-Successional and Old-Growth Forest Related Species Within the Range of the Northern Spotted Owl (1994)

North Coast Unified Air Quality Management District Particulate Matter (PM10) Attainment Plan (1995)

California Ambient Air Quality Standards for PM10 (1994)

1.4 Scoping and Issues

Residents of Shelter Cove and others have expressed concern about fire danger and have communicated support for a fuel break system designed to protect the community.

Previous fuel break projects conducted in the area have not generated public opposition.

2.0 Proposed Action and Alternatives

2.1 Proposed Action

The project is located in Township 4S, Range 1E, Sections 34, 27, 21, 22, 16 and Township 5S, R1E, Sections 2, 3, and 11 (Figure 1). The project area runs predominantly north-south along King Peak Road for approximately 8.5 miles. The treated area would be approximately 90 acres of BLM land within the King Range NCA. The treatment will consist of reducing vegetation 75 feet back from both sides of the King Peak Road by selectively thinning and mechanically chipping or masticating brush and understory vegetation. This would be accomplished by implementing a prescription in which:

- All brush material will be cut or masticated.
- Leave trees will be spaced a minimum of approximately 15 feet apart and no stems greater than 10 inches at diameter breast height (DBH) (diameter measured at 4.5 feet above the ground) will be cut or masticated.
- All trees will be limbed proportionally to a maximum height of 7 feet.
- All severed vegetative material will be masticated or chipped and scattered on or adjacent to the fuel break.

The results of this fuel break will be well-spaced trees, approximately 300 per acre providing a shaded canopy with the absence of understory vegetation.

Mastication will be accomplished using tracked or rubber-tired equipment with a maximum overall width of 12 feet to reduce damage to leave trees. All equipment operations will cease if soil moisture is sufficient to result in visible rutting or spinning tires on wet ground, or if operations result in a visible increase in turbidity within any receiving watercourses. Equipment operations may resume when soil conditions are sufficiently dry such that rutting, tire spinning and turbid runoff is not occurring. Equipment will avoid operating on slopes greater than 60 percent or areas with evidence of recent instability. Evidence of recent instability includes, but is not limited to, slumping ground, tension cracks, bare scarps, and tilted trees. The BLM representative (Contracting Officers Representative/Project Inspector) overseeing the project will make the determination to halt equipment operations or avoid areas based on on-site observations of soil conditions.

All rare plants (identified in Appendix A) that are likely to be impacted by the proposed action will be marked with blue flagging tied to bamboo stakes and will be avoided.

Pursuant to Executive Order 13112, preventative action will be taken to limit the opportunities for the introduction, establishment, or spread of invasive, non-native plant species.

- 1) Road side trees will be maintained so as to provide sufficient shade to prevent establishment or spread of sun loving invasive weeds.

- 2) All heavy equipment and vehicles contracted to conduct project activities will be inspected and cleaned of any reproductive plant parts prior to entry on BLM lands.

2.2 Alternative 1 (No Action)

Under the no action alternative, BLM would not build and maintain a fuel break in the project area.

3.0 Affected Environment

3.1 Fire/Fuels

The coastal areas heavy winter precipitation and moist summer fog contributes to rapid vegetative growth, which can act as a fuel-bed for high intensity wildfires. Another factor that has increased fire size and behavior in the region is the increased fuel-loading that has resulted from the unconditional suppression of wildfires over the last 100 years. Fuel that would be consumed in successive wildfires accumulates with some fire dependent plant species generating large amounts of highly flammable dead material. There can also be an increased overall density of species as growth of new vegetation is no longer moderated by fire. In coniferous species higher population densities and a continual vertical arrangement of fuel creates a ladder effect which can allow a fire to transition from a surface fire into a crown fire. Crown fires are extreme events marked by high flame lengths and rapid rates of spread.

Fuels within the project area consist of ridge top chaparral (40 percent), early to mid Douglas-fir, tan oak-madrone (50 percent), and late-mature Douglas-fir/mixed evergreen forest (10 percent). Fuels are continuous with occasional jackpots of heavier fuel concentrations.

The chaparral type is predominantly manzanita (*Arctostaphylos columbiana*) and Ceanothus (*Ceanothus oliganthus* var. *sordidatus*) with associated shrubs and forbs such as yerba santa (*Eriodictyon californicum*) and Indian warrior (*Pedicularis densiflorus*). Few Douglas-fir trees are present throughout this type.

Table 1-A Fuel loadings: Mixed chaparral (Fire Behavior Prediction System: Fuel Model 4)	
1-hour:	5.0 tons/acre
10-hour:	2.5 tons/acre
100-hour:	2.5 tons/acre
Total fuel load < 3-inch dead and live:	13.0 tons/acre
Fuel bed depth:	6.0 feet
Source: Anderson, 1982, p.7.	

The early to mid-mature Douglas-fir, tan oak-madrone type is characterized by pole-sized Douglas-fir (*Psuedotsuga menziesii*), tan oak (*Lithocarpus densiflora*), madrone (*Arbutus menziesii*), canyon live-oak (*Quercus chrysolepis*), and a variety of Ceanothus species (*C. thrysiflorus*, *C. incanus*, and *C. velutinus*). Dead Douglas-fir tree snags are common throughout the area composed of this type.

The late-mature Douglas-fir/mixed-evergreen type is characterized by large Douglas-fir trees comprising the upper canopies, with mid-layer canopies comprised of madrone, California Bay (*Umbellularia californica*), and canyon live-oak, and an understory layer of shrubs and forbs such as gooseberry (*Ribes roezlii* var. *amictum*), wood rose (*Rosa gymnocarpa*) and beargrass (*Xerophyllum tenax*).

Table 1-B Fuel loadings: Closed timber litter (Fire Behavior Prediction System: Fuel Model 8)	
1-hour:	1.5 tons/acre
10-hour:	1.0 tons/acre
100-hour:	2.5 tons/acre
Total fuel load < 3-inch dead and live:	5.0 tons/acre
Fuel bed depth:	0.2 feet
Source: Anderson, 1982, p.11.	

3.1 Recreation

The King Range is a popular place for public recreation due to a well developed hiking and mountain bike trail system that enables visitors to experience the areas unique and

substantial scenic values. The proposed action will have no adverse impacts on recreational use as trails or roads will not be closed. Short delays may occur along King Peak Road during transport and while the crews or equipment is working adjacent to the road. In areas determined critical by the BLM, traffic control in the form of signs and/or BLM personnel will be provided to ensure public safety when the crews or equipment are working.

3.2 Geology/Soils

The King Range Terrane of the Franciscan Complex underlies the project area (McLaughlin et al. 2000). Rocks of the assemblage vary from more coherent blocks to highly folded, broken and sheared areas susceptible to increased erosion and mass wasting. Along the length of road proposed for treatment, the landscape alternates between sharp-crested ridges with well-defined and incised drainages to more subdued topography with irregular drainage patterns. High rainfall intensities, locally sheared bedrock and the steep topography of the King Range combine to create high erosion hazards. Ridgetop locations tend to be most stable. The upper extent of sidehill drainages often terminate in broad colluvial hollows with increased susceptibility to mass wasting. The project area is mostly along the ridgetop, although the northern end descends off the ridge to a more mid-slope position that intersects intermittent stream channels.

3.3 Threatened or Endangered Terrestrial Wildlife

Federally listed threatened and endangered terrestrial wildlife species listed under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) within the project area that could be affected by the proposed action include the northern spotted owl (*Strix occidentalis caurina*) and the marbled murrelet (*Brachyramphus marmoratus*) (USFWS 2009). The project area is located along the western edge of critical habitat for both the northern spotted owl (NSO) and marbled murrelet (MAMU). Northern spotted owls were listed as threatened in 1990 and MAMU were listed as a threatened species in 1992.

Northern spotted owls are regularly detected near the project area along South Fork Bear Creek and at Horse Mountain Campground during surveys conducted from road points and campgrounds. Surveys have also yielded detections along King Peak Road. Northern spotted owl habitat and activity centers have been identified within close proximity to Horse Mountain and Tolkan Campgrounds with protocol surveys conducted in the proposed project area from 1995 to 2009. Recent surveys (2007-2009) identified one pair east of Horse Mountain Campground and a probable pair at the southern end of the proposed project area along South Fork of Bear Creek (2009 only). Individual NSOs are occasionally detected at other survey locations on King Peak Road and near Tolkan Campground.

King Peak Road is a well used, maintained 2-lane gravel road. Nearly half of the eastern side of the road was mechanically thinned in the 2008. Owls are have not been detected within 75' of the road. However, the 75' road shoulder corridor where the thinning will take place may provide intermittent foraging habitat. Areas down-slope and along the

creek bottom contain foraging and dispersal habitat with scattered pockets of potential roosting and nesting habitat.

King Range NCA was designated as NSO critical habitat in 1992. The proposed fuel break is located in area of chapparal, tan oak, and mostly smaller Douglas-fir trees currently of low value to NSO.

Barred Owls have infrequently been detected in King Range NCA including one detection in 2009.

Potential marbled murrelet habitat does exist within the King Range NCA and the area was designated critical habitat in 1996. Comprehensive surveys by BLM staff for the marbled murrelet in the King Range NCA during the years 1994 – 1999 determined that the murrelet does not occupy any suitable habitat. One fly over MAMU was detected during the land based surveys. Several detections occurred in nearshore waters however it is believed that these animals are nesting farther inland at sites with stands of larger trees. No additional nesting or occupancy behaviors have been observed. The project area does not include trees large enough to include potential nest platforms and is located in a high wind area. These surveys allowed for a negative declaration of occupancy within the King Range NCA by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for the marbled murrelet until the year 2010. After this declaration expires, Arcata Field Office wildlife personnel will conduct clearance surveys on a project by project basis.

Several threatened, endangered, or candidate species occur in or near the King Range NCA, but are not located near the project area. Endangered species include California brown pelican (*Pelicanus occidentalis*), beach layia (*Layia carnosa*), and western lily (*Lilium occidentale*). Bald Eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) and western snowy plover (*Charadrius alexandrinus nivosus*) are threatened species and the pacific fisher (*Martes pennanti pacificus*) is candidate species with no habitat or occurrences in the project area. Targeted Fisher detections in 1999 and 2000 failed to detect Fisher. Two baited camera stations near the project area in 2009 also failed to detect Fisher.

3.5 Cultural Resources

Review of the BLM cultural resource records located at the Arcata Field Office indicates that nearly the entire area of potential effect (APE) of the proposed project has been inventoried for the presence of cultural resources. Archaeological surveys numbered S-9736 (Waechter 1986), and S-12262 (Greenway 1988) cover all but approximately the northern mile of the proposed APE. No sites were recorded by either of these survey efforts, though the latter noted “one site, CA-HUM-257, was found to have been obliterated by fire fighting activities” (Greenway 1988:1).

BLM records also show site CA-HUM-969H located along the King Peak (Horse Mountain) Road. CA-HUM-969H, the Pepperwood Springs Site (Eastman et al. 1993) is an historic hunting lodge site, covering approximately 10 acres, that includes 14 recorded features and is located to the west of the road just northwest of the BLM Tolkan campground. Although the site, in and of itself, is likely not eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, it may comprise contributing elements of a proposed

rural historic district located throughout the King Range NCA (Eastman and Praetzelis 1995).

4.0 Environmental Effects

The following table (Table 2) lists elements of the human environment that were considered in assessing the impacts of the proposed action and alternatives. Consideration of these elements is based on requirements of law, regulation, policy or other supplemental authorities. Elements that may be impacted are further described in the sections following this table.

Table 2 Effects Summary				
Element	No or Negligible Impact	May Impact	Not Present	Rationale (if applicable)
Air Quality	X			
Areas of Critical Environmental Concern			X	
Cultural Resources	X			Cultural clearances were conducted as required under the Programmatic Agreement between California BLM and the California SHPO. These are included in the administrative record.
Environmental Justice			X	
Floodplains			X	
Invasive, Nonnative Weed Species	X			Foxglove, French broom, fennel, and briar rose are invasive, non-native weeds of particular concern in the project area. The proposed action includes design criteria to ensure there is no effect to this element.
Native American Religious Concerns	X			Resources of potential religious significance will not be impacted.
Threatened or Endangered Terrestrial Wildlife		X		Limited short term noise disturbance. Long term habitat benefits.
Threatened or Endangered Fish--- Essential Fish Habitat	X			The project is limited to generally stable ridge locations away from watercourses. Erosion caused by this project is highly unlikely to reach fish habitat. Thus, no effects are expected.
Threatened or Endangered Vegetation	X			A complete field survey was conducted. Avoidance

Table 2 Effects Summary				
Element	No or Negligible Impact	May Impact	Not Present	Rationale (if applicable)
				recommendations are included in the proposed action.
Waste- Hazardous/Solid	X			No hazardous materials or solid wastes beyond small generator quantities would be produced. These small quantities will be disposed of at approved facilities.
Water Quality: surface/ground/drinking	X			The project is limited to generally stable ridge locations away from watercourses.
Wetlands/Riparian	X			Where project operations cross small stream channels, sediment delivery is expected to occur in the first storms after project completion. The few channels that are crossed, combined with operating measures for riparian areas, will result in turbidity levels that are likely non-detectable in downstream reaches. Thus, effects are negligible.
Wild & Scenic Rivers			X	
Wilderness/Wilderness Study Areas			X	
Recreation	X			
Visual Resources	X			Project will enhance visual resources.
Public Health and Safety	X			Public Health and Safety will be enhanced as a result of this project.
Social and Economic			X	
Forests/Rangelands	X			Treatment will benefit forest stand growth and resilience.
Fuels		X		Fuel loading will be reduced within project area.
Coastal Zone			X	
Geology/soils		X		Potential impacts and mitigations are included in the proposed action.

4.1 Direct and Indirect Effects

Proposed Action

Fire/Fuels

The creation and maintenance of fuel breaks could have positive effects on wildfire suppression and management of fire as an ecosystem process. Past timber harvest practices and fire exclusion have created excessive fuel-loading across the west and the restoration of historic fire regimes is the most viable long-term solution (Brown and Arno, 1991). Successful containment of wildfires through fuel breaks could allow appropriate fires to be managed for resource benefit in designated areas. This would help facilitate the restoration of fire as a natural process in the King Range. Use of the fuel breaks in suppression strategies could improve the success of minimal impact suppression tactics and reduce or eliminate the need for tactics that create long-term impacts. Fuel breaks and other forest thinning projects that minimize fire behavior could reduce the risk that wildfire will negatively impact public safety and private property in and around the community of Shelter Cove. Fuel breaks can also increase the range of suppression options such as backfire operations where fuel between the flaming front and the fuel break is burned to limit fire spread.

Geology/Soils

The proposed action may affect erosional processes. Operation of equipment off of the road surface has the potential to displace soil and expose bare ground susceptible to erosion. A combination of factors will limit any erosional effects to less than significant. The ridgetop location of much of the project area represents some of the more stable ground in the area. Mulching (vegetative by-product of proposed action) of treated areas will cover much of the area disturbed by equipment, reducing the vulnerability to surface erosion. Halting equipment operations during wet weather conditions will reduce the potential for soil disturbance. Avoiding visibly unstable areas and wet areas will limit the potential for soil displacement and landsliding. Excluding equipment from riparian areas will reduce the potential for any disturbed soil to reach a watercourse. Overall, any ground disturbance and soil displacement that occurs as a result of the proposed action is likely to be localized (<50ft²) and limited to soil displacement that rapidly revegetates following project completion. Where project operations cross small stream channels, sediment delivery is expected to occur in the first storms after project completion. The few channels that are crossed, combined with operating measures for riparian areas, will result in sediment levels that are likely non-detectable in downstream reaches.

Threatened or Endangered Terrestrial Wildlife

The proposed action will have a negligible effect on NSO and no effect on MAMU. As described above, the project will not remove trees over 10" DBH and occurs along side of an existing maintained road. The proposed action will leave approximately 300 trees per acre which is expected to accelerate growth into a late succession forest type. The fuel reduction will not remove or degrade habitat for either species. Potential disturbance from noise generated chainsaws and other equipment would be of short duration, limited to the few weeks of project execution. Owls have demonstrated some resistance to noise

disturbance (Tempel and Gutierrez 2003) but frequent high intensity operations such as timber harvest or OHV routes can alter NSO use pattern in the landscape. Northern spotted owls are also believed to be sensitive to visual disturbance. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has determined that 500 feet is the distance in which these birds would be negatively affected from the noise generated from equipment used on this project. Current surveys by BLM staff for the northern spotted owl indicates that there is not any territories with roost or nest sites within 500 feet of the project area.

In addition, the fuels treatment will protect existing suitable habitat from catastrophic wildfire which has the potential to degrade or eliminate large areas for extended periods of time.

No MAMU are known to use the project area. All trees large enough for potential nest platforms will remain in place. There will be no affect on MAMU.

Cultural Resources

The proposed action should have no adverse effects on known historic properties with the APE. Prior to project implementation, both the reportedly obliterated prehistoric site CA-HUM-257, and the extant historic site CA-HUM-969H will be flagged for avoidance by ground-disturbing activities.

Alternative 1 (No Action)

Fire/Fuels

Under the No Action Alternative, no hazard fuel-loading would be reduced and fuel loads would continue to increase until a fire occurred. Without a fuel break in place a fast-moving fire could spread unimpeded toward the community of Shelter Cove threatening private property and public safety. Vegetation surrounding the project area could be subject to high severity fire causing negative ecological effects including high rates of mortality, loss of soil cover, increased runoff with hydrophobic soils, and an extended vegetative conversion from mature fire resistant conifers to more flammable brush and hardwood species (Peteson 2005).

Geology/soils

Under the No Action Alternative, fuel breaks would not be constructed. High intensity fires would be more likely to travel across the roadway, greatly enlarging the area of erosional effects. The result could be a much larger area subject to the erosional effects of high severity wildland fires

Threatened or Endangered Terrestrial Wildlife

The No Action Alternative would leave timber to grow under the current conditions resulting in a slower transition into late-seral stage forest. Fuel conditions continue to facilitate spread of wildfire. High intensity wildfire has the potential to severely degrade habitat value by injury or mortality to roosting or nesting trees. Under worst case

scenarios, entire stands could be lost. Not constructing the fuel break may result in more substantial habitat impacts during wildfire suppression operations. Northern spotted owls would not be subjected to temporary noise disturbance under the No Action Alternative.

Cultural Resources

Under the No Action Alternative, fuel breaks would not be constructed. High intensity fires would be more likely to travel southwesterly across the roadway, greatly enhancing the potential for further destruction of extant elements of the historic site CA-HUM-969H.

4.2 Cumulative Effects

Past actions that have contributed to negative cumulative effects in the vicinity of the proposed action include:

- timber harvest practices that focused on removal of large mature trees without regard for future stand conditions. This caused shifts in species composition, toward less fire resistant hardwoods.
- timber associated road construction that removed vegetation and organic layers exposing soil and increasing erosion.
- National fire suppression policies that removed fire as a natural disturbance process in the ecosystem resulting in increased fuels, less frequent, large, high intensity wildfires. These fires can remove soil stabilizing vegetation and alter the biological and chemical properties of soil creating increased erosion.

The proposed action would off set these past actions through positive cumulative effects, including the reduction of tree density in portions of the treatment area that are highly stocked with young trees. This will encourage a more rapid re-establishment of forest canopy characteristics that existed prior to the past actions listed above.

Under the No Action Alternative reduction in fuel loading and tree density would not occur to facilitate reestablishment of conditions prior timber extraction and fire exclusion.

5.0 Tribes, Individuals, Organizations and Agencies Consulted

6.0 References

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