



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

Tiger Creek south fuel break project (CA-180-12-57) Finding of No Significant Impact September 2012

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 of the proposed action include vegetation removal and temporary dust and smoke caused by pile burning. However, none of these impacts would be significant at the local level or cumulatively because of the very small scale of the proposed action.
- 2) *The degree of the impact on public health or safety.* No aspects of the proposed action have been identified as having the potential to significantly and adversely impact public health or safety. In fact, the proposed action 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 visual resources are all typical for BLM-administered land within the west-central Sierra Nevada.
- 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 using a hand crew

and pile burning on BLM-administered land in the west central Sierra Nevada foothills 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 proposed action 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 proposed action will not affect cultural resources listed on or eligible for the National Register of Historic Places and would not cause the loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural or historical resources.

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 the decision to move forward with the proposed action would result in actions that will threaten such a violation.

William S. Haigh
Field Manager, Mother Lode Field Office

Date



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EA Number: CA-180-12-57

Proposed Action: Tiger Creek south fuel break project

Location: MDM, T 7 N R 13 E, sections 23, 24, and 25
Calaveras County, CA (see attached project area map)

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. At the same time, local communities have grown. There are now numerous private residences in the area, including residences adjacent to the BLM-administered parcels containing dense fuels. Local residents are concerned about wildfire and are anxious to see public land managers like the BLM take action to reduce fuels on public lands adjacent to their homes. The BLM proposes to use a hand crew to reduce fuels on 27 acres of BLM-administered land on a prominent ridge just east of Tiger Creek Reservoir in the North Fork Mokelumne River canyon and adjoining canyon rim. The proposed treatment would tie into a larger fuels treatment project being implemented by the BLM called the Lilly Gap biomass demonstration project.

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. The BLM also has the goal of suppressing wildfire to protect life, property, and significant environmental resources. The BLM's objectives for meeting these goals are to 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 the BLM various non-fire fuels treatment objectives and strategies for specific lands under the 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

Under the proposed action, the BLM would use hand crews to cut understory vegetation (including trees less than 8 inches DBH). The cut vegetation would be placed in 6 x 6 piles for burning, in accordance with a BLM-approved burn plan, other BLM policy, and state of California rules and regulations. This would reduce the fuel loading. If conditions are favorable and necessary safety

procedures can be maintained, the prescribed burn would be allowed to “creep” on the forest floor around the piles to emulate a low intensity surface fire. This would potentially reduce the one-hour fuels built up over time within the conifer stands and leave a “mosaic” pattern across the forest floor. During the construction of 6 x 6 foot piles, bark and branches around the basal area of the larger conifers would be reduced by 50 percent, lowering the likelihood that these trees would be killed during low-intensity, low-severity wildfire. For the long-term, the BLM would use the same methods to maintain the fuel break within the project area for a period of 10 years from the signing of the decision record associated with this EA, after which time the BLM would need to reauthorize any fuels reduction work. A fresh NEPA document would be needed as well as supporting biological and cultural resource field studies. If the BLM proposes any changes to the methods used to treat fuels within the project area, either a fresh NEPA document or Determination of NEPA Adequacy (DNA) analysis would be required along with supporting biological and cultural resource field studies.

2.2 Project Design Features

To minimize the potential for introduction or spread of invasive weeds, equipment used for the proposed action would be cleaned prior to entering the area and, where possible, would avoid operating within weed-infested areas.

2.3 No Action

Under the no action alternative, BLM would not reduce fuels within the project area.

2.4 Alternatives Considered but Eliminated from Detailed Analysis

BLM did not consider any other alternatives in detailed analysis.

3.0 Affected Environment

The project area is approximately 27 acres located at in the west-central Sierra Nevada foothills. Elevations range from 3280 to 2320 ft amsl. Specifically, the project area is located mainly on a southeast-northwest trending ridge on the south side of the North Fork Mokelumne River canyon (above Tiger Creek Reservoir). A portion of the project area is located near and just above the canyon rim. Vegetation and cultural resources within the project area was inventoried by the BLM archaeologist and BLM botanist technicians on May 31, 2012. The vegetation varies depending on elevation, aspect, and other factors. In the upper elevation area, near and just above the canyon rim, the project contains open park-like areas of dense mountain misery with some poison oak and white leaf manzanita, interspersed with groups of ponderosa pine, incense cedar, Douglas fir, black oak, and interior live oak. There are large granite outcroppings in this area. Going (west) down main ridge into the river canyon toward the reservoir, the mixed conifer forest transitions to predominantly live oak woodland with an understory of poison oak, mountain misery, wood rose, deerbrush, dogwood, buckeye, and various grasses and herbs (manroot, lupine, sunflowers, common soaproot, etc.). At lower elevations, as the live oak canopy becomes more dominant, mountain misery drops out and buckeye and poison oak increases. Though the project area is immediately adjacent to Tiger Creek Reservoir, on the North Fork, recreational use of BLM-administered land in the area is considered to be low, probably due to the extremely steep slopes. BLM manages the project 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. The project area does not fall within areas with special designations such as an ACEC, wild and scenic river corridor, etc.

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 proposed action: 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 have negligible impacts atmospheric, water, or soil resources. The area that would be treated is relatively small in size. Hand cutting within the project area is expected to cause little, if no, soil disturbance. Sedimentation is not an issue. Burning of piles would create some dust, but not enough to seriously affect air quality due to the small size of the project area.

BLM botany technicians conducted rare plant and weed inventories of the project area on May 31, 2012. The inventories were designed to help the BLM meet its obligations under the Endangered Species Act and other authorities and BLM policies. The botanist recommends that the proposed action would not affect threatened and endangered plants or other BLM special status plants; none are present within the project area.

The BLM wildlife biologist analyzed the impacts of the proposed action on wildlife, especially on special status wildlife. Her analysis was designed to help BLM meet its obligations under the Endangered Species Act. The biologist recommends that the proposed action would have negligible short-term impacts on commonplace wildlife due to temporary noise and dust when fuels are masticated. Of note, 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 would be affected by the proposed action. The study was designed to help the BLM meet its obligations under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act and other authorities and BLM policies. The archaeologist identified no cultural resources within the project area and recommends that no significant cultural resources would be affected by the proposed action. This includes places of traditional religious and cultural significance to Native Americans.

The proposed action would not negatively impact recreational use. Recreational use is uncommon in the area affected by the proposed action. The proposed action may have a noticeable impact on visual resources. BLM manages the area in accordance with VRM class III standards, though the area does have natural scenic beauty. The proposed action is in line with the management objective for class III, 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, landowners may 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 have negligible impacts on air, water, and soil resources, due to the relatively small size of the project area, and the larger fuel break project. The proposed action would have negligible short-term impacts on common vegetation and wildlife.

5.0 Agencies and Persons Consulted

No outside agencies were consulted.

5.1 Authors

Brian Mulhollan, BLM fuels specialist
James Barnes, BLM NEPA coordinator/archaeologist
Beth Brenneman, BLM botanist

5.2 BLM Interdisciplinary Team/Reviewers:

/s/ James Barnes 8-23-12

NEPA coordinator/archaeologist Date

/s/ Brian R Mulhollen 8-22-12

Fuels specialist Date

/s/ Jeff Horn 8-23-12

Outdoor recreation planner Date

/s/ Beth Brenneman 8-20-12

Botanist Date

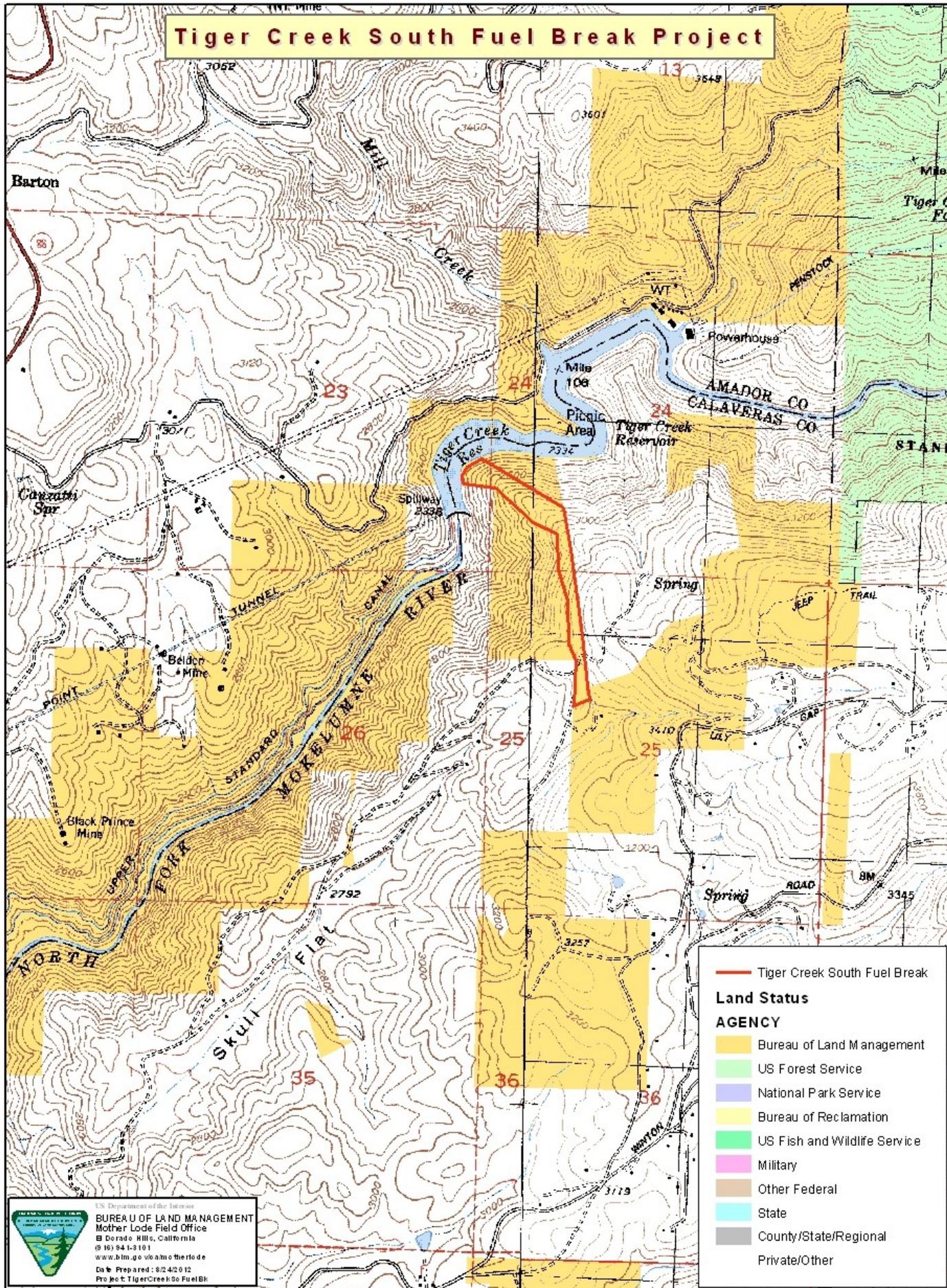
/s/ Peggy Cranston 8-17-12

Wildlife biologist 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 will 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 Hillside Circle, El Dorado, CA, 95762, or emailed to jjbarnes@blm.gov.

Tiger Creek South Fuel Break Project



Tiger Creek South Fuel Break

Land Status

AGENCY

- Bureau of Land Management
- US Forest Service
- National Park Service
- Bureau of Reclamation
- US Fish and Wildlife Service
- Military
- Other Federal
- State
- County/State/Regional
- Private/Other

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BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
 Mother Lode Field Office
 8 Dorado Hills, California
 (916) 941-3101
www.blm.gov or blmofmotherlode
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 Project: TigerCreek90 FuelBk

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