



# United States Department of the Interior



## BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

Mother Lode Field Office  
5152 Hillside Circle  
El Dorado Hills, CA 95762  
[www.blm.gov/ca/motherlode](http://www.blm.gov/ca/motherlode)

### PG&E brush clearing in the Tiger Creek area (CA-180-10-45) Decision Record July 2010

## 1.0 Introduction and Background

BLM is considering whether to allow Pacific Gas & Electric Company (PG&E) to use a hand crew and masticator to reduce fuels (i.e., brush, tree limbs, etc.) along roads on BLM-administered land in the vicinity of the Highway 26 and Tiger Creek, on the Amador County side of the Mokelumne River canyon. The access roads lead to PG&E facilities on the river and the fuels reduction work is needed to help PG&E personnel/vehicles to safely drive the roads and to help PG&E personnel and others to escape during a wildfire event. Based on information in the EA, the project record, and recommendations from BLM specialists, the following constitutes my decision.

## 2.0 Decision

### 2.1 Alternatives Considered but not Selected

Under the no action alternative, BLM would not allow PG&E to do the brush clearing, as proposed in the EA. With fuels (i.e., brush, tree limbs, etc.) now protruding onto the roadway on BLM-administered land, PG&E personnel/vehicles might face less safe passage to PG&E facilities on the Mokelumne River. Escape during a wildfire may be more difficult.

### 2.2 Decision and Rationale

Based on information in the EA, the project record, and consultation with my staff, I have decided to implement the proposed action—to allow PG&E to reduce fuels along roads on BLM-administered land—as described in the associated EA. There are no restrictions on the time of implementation, though PG&E must take all necessary precautions to avoid igniting a wildfire, including following all wildfire restrictions imposed by BLM, Cal Fire, other authorities. The project is justified. It will help make PG&E vehicle passage safer and will expedite escape in the event of a wildfire.

## 3.0 Consultation and Coordination

Elderberry shrubs—potential habitat for the federally listed valley longhorn elderberry beetle—were found within the project area. PG&E is aware of them and will avoid them as discussed in the EA. PG&E has an agreement with the US Fish and Wildlife Service with respect to elderberry; therefore, consultation with US Fish and Wildlife Service is not necessary.

## **4.0 Public Involvement**

The EA was posted on the Mother Lode Field Office's webpage and made available for a formal 15-day public comment period. No comments were received.

## **5.0 Plan Consistency**

Based on information in the EA, the project record, and recommendations from BLM specialists, I conclude that this decision is consistent with the Sierra Resource Management Plan Record of Decision, approved in February 2008.

## **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 this notice of decision is posted on BLM Mother Lode Field Office's internet website.

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William S. Haigh  
Field Manager,  
Mother Lode Field Office

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Date



# United States Department of the Interior



## BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

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Folsom, CA 95630  
www.blm.gov/ca/folsom

### PG&E brush clearing in the Tiger Creek area (CA-180-10-45) Finding of No Significant Impact July 2010

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 and chipping fuels. However, none of these impacts would be significant at the local scale 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 public health and safety. The fuels reduction would help allow for the safe passage of vehicles.
- 3) *Unique characteristics of the geographic area.* The project area does not have any unique characteristics. Soil, vegetation, and wildlife are all typical.
- 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 project 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 reduction along access roads 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.

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 would not affect cultural resources listed on or eligible for the National Register of Historic Places.

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 project.

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.

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William S. Haigh  
Field Manager, Folsom Field Office

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Date



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## BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

Mother Lode Field Office

5152 Hillsdale Circle

El Dorado Hills, CA 95762

[www.blm.gov/ca/motherlode](http://www.blm.gov/ca/motherlode)

**EA Number:** CA-180-10-45

**Proposed Action:** PG&E brush clearing along access roads in the Tiger Creek and Highway 26 areas

**Location:** MDM, T 7 N, R 13 E, sections 23, 26, 27, 33, and 34. Amador County, CA (see the project area maps 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. At the same time, local communities have grown. There are now numerous private residences in the area, including residences adjacent to BLM-administered parcels containing dense fuels. Pacific Gas & Electric Company also owns land and facilities adjacent to BLM-administered land in the Sierra Nevada. One such area is PG&E facilities on the Mokelumne River in Amador County. PG&E is concerned about decadent vegetation along certain roads on BLM-administered land. These roads provide access to the company's facilities. PG&E would like to take action to reduce fuels along access roads on BLM-administered land adjacent to their facilities on the Mokelumne River. This would make vehicle passage safer and would help expedite escape in the event of a wildfire.

### 1.2 Conformance with Applicable Land Use Plans

The proposed action—allowing PG&E to reduce fuels along access roads on BLM-administered land—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. 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 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

To improve access to its facilities, BLM would allow PG&E to reduce brush/tree limbs/fuels on two sections of road located on BLM-administered land along the Mokelumne River. The first section of road (3 miles long) proposed for brushing is located between the Tiger Creek Reservoir and Highway 26. The second section of road is our access to PG&E's West Point Powerhouse. The brushing would

be done with a hand crew using chainsaws. The hand crew would trim back the vegetation 3 to 4 feet on either side of the road, chip the material with a mechanical chipper staged on the road (the chipper would not leave the road), and then broadcast the chipped material back into the treated area. The work would also involve limbing trees overhanging the road to improve vehicle passage and trimming some of the blind corners to improve visibility.

## **2.2 Project Design Features**

There are four elderberry shrubs growing along the road between the Tiger Creek Reservoir and Highway 26. Prior to any work, PG&E would flag all elderberry shrubs and completely avoid these shrubs during road brushing work. PG&E would also plan to follow the PG&E/USFWS programmatic agreement that covers PG&E's activities when working in the vicinity of elderberry shrubs. This should also help BLM meet its requirements with respect to elderberry and potential valley elderberry longhorn beetle habitat.

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

Fuels reduction projects like the one proposed under the proposed action herein can cause the spread of invasive plant species. Of particular concern is the spread of weedy brush species like Scotch broom, French broom, and Spanish broom. If these species are cut to reduce brush fuels, and the branches are moved, seed of the broom species may be spread. To prevent the spread of these weeds, PG&E would flag the broom for avoidance in advance of project implementation. PG&E would have a supervisor/specialist on site who can identify the brooms (i.e., Scotch broom, French broom and Spanish broom all occur in the canyon). **Areas with broom would be cut and lopped in place. It would not be chipped. The stems would not be moved, so broom seed would not be moved into new areas.**

## **2.3 No Action**

Under the no action alternative, BLM would not allow PG&E to reduce fuels along access roads to their facilities on the Mokelumne River.

## **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 located in the foothills of the central Sierra Nevada. Specifically, the project area is located along a road that runs along the North Fork of the Mokelumne River. The elevation is approximately 2200 ft above sea level. Vegetation and wildlife is typical for this elevation in the foothills. Live oak, black oak, ponderosa pine, gray pine, poison oak, and other species are common on the Amador County side of the Mokelumne River canyon within and adjacent to the project area.

Recreational use of BLM-administered land in the area is considered to be very low. Recreationists visit this area infrequently. The area is within a proposed wild and scenic river corridor. The area was recommended eligible and suitable to become part of our wild and scenic rivers system, under the Sierra RMP, approved in February 2008. The area was classified as recreational. In general, the river's outstandingly remarkable values include cultural resources and water quality.

Under the Sierra RMP, this area is to be managed by BLM in accordance with class I visual resource management (VRM) standards. BLM's objective for class I is to preserve the existing character of the 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, wilderness, and environmental justice.

##### **4.1 Impacts of the Proposed Action and Alternatives**

Atmospheric, water, or soil resources: 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. Cutting and chipping of fuels, as proposed, could create some dust, but not enough to affect air quality. The chipped fuels would be broadcasted into the treated area for mulch.

Botanical resources: the BLM botanist analyzed the impacts of the proposed action on vegetation, especially special status plants. His 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 project area would grow back within a few years. The botanist has told PG&E that they must take certain steps to prevent the accidental spread of noxious invasive "broom" weeds (Scotch broom, French broom, etc.) during implementation of the project to other areas away from the project area (see Design Features 2.2).

Wildlife resources: 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. There are four elderberry shrubs growing along the road between the Tiger Creek Reservoir and Highway 26. Prior to any work, PG&E would flag all elderberry shrubs and completely avoid these shrubs during road brushing work. PG&E would also plan to follow the PG&E/USFWS programmatic agreement that covers PG&E's activities when working in the vicinity of elderberry shrubs. If these measures (see Design Measures 2.2) are taken to avoid negative effects to the elderberry shrubs—potential habitat for the federally listed valley elderberry longhorn beetle, then there would be no impacts on threatened and endangered wildlife or other BLM special status wildlife. The biologist recommended that the project would have negligible short-term impacts on commonplace wildlife due to temporary noise and dust when fuels are cut and chipped.

Cultural resources: 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 the proposed action had no potential to affect significant cultural resources. No places of traditional religious and cultural significance to Native Americans would be affected (refer to the attached findings).

Recreational resources: the proposed action would not negatively impact recreational use. Recreational use of the road is uncommon in the area affected by the proposed action. Recreation here could be impacted, for a relatively brief period (hours rather than days), during project implementation. The adjacent river has outstanding recreational opportunities. These opportunities would not be negatively impacted.

Visual resources: the proposed action would not negatively impact visual resources. There would be negligible fuels reduction. The vegetation would grow back, probably relatively quickly. There would be no permanent change to the visual resources. Under the Sierra RMP, BLM is managing this area in accordance with the Class I VRM standard—the strictest standard. The proposed action is in accordance with this standard.

Wild and scenic river values: None of the outstandingly remarkable values would be negatively impacted. River-based recreation would not be affected.

#### **4.2 Impacts of the No Action Alternative**

There would be no negative impacts to the environmental resources including water, soils, atmospheric, vegetation, wildlife, cultural, recreation, and visual. Proposed wild and scenic river values would also not be negatively impacted. However there could be impacts to PG&E's operation on adjacent private land. PG&E uses the road to access its facilities. The proposed action is needed to make vehicle passage safer and to facilitate escape during 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. The proposed action is expected to have beneficial cumulative impact on 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:

*/s/ James Barnes* 6/23/10

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NEPA coordinator/Archaeologist Date

*/s/ Brian Mulhollen* 6/23/10

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Fuels specialist Date

*/s/ Jeff Horn* 6/23/10

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Recreation Date

*/s/ Albert Franklin* 6/21/10

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Botany Date

*/s/ Peggy Cranston* 6/21/10

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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](http://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](mailto:jjbarnes@blm.gov).