

Preliminary Decision Record and Finding of No Significant Impact



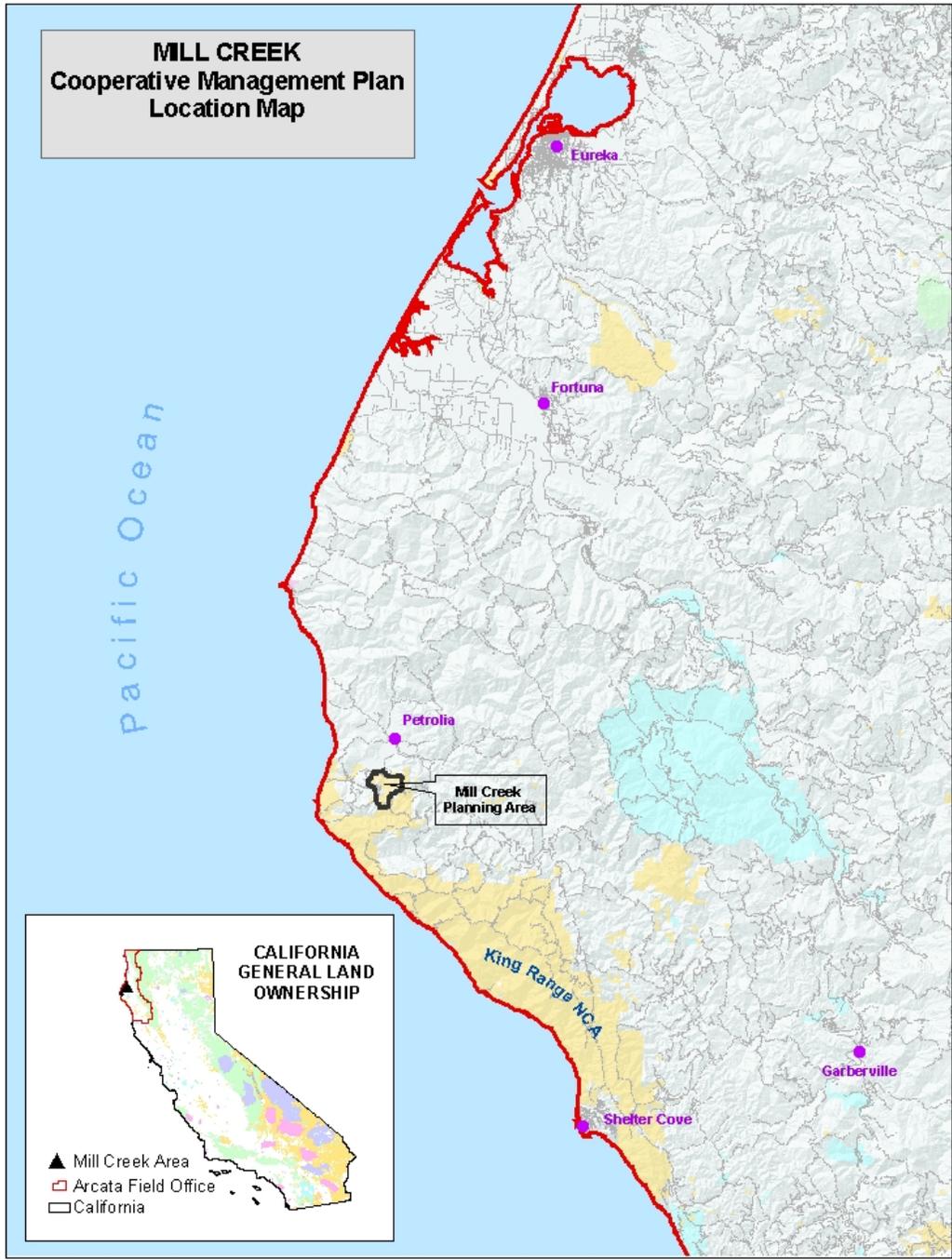
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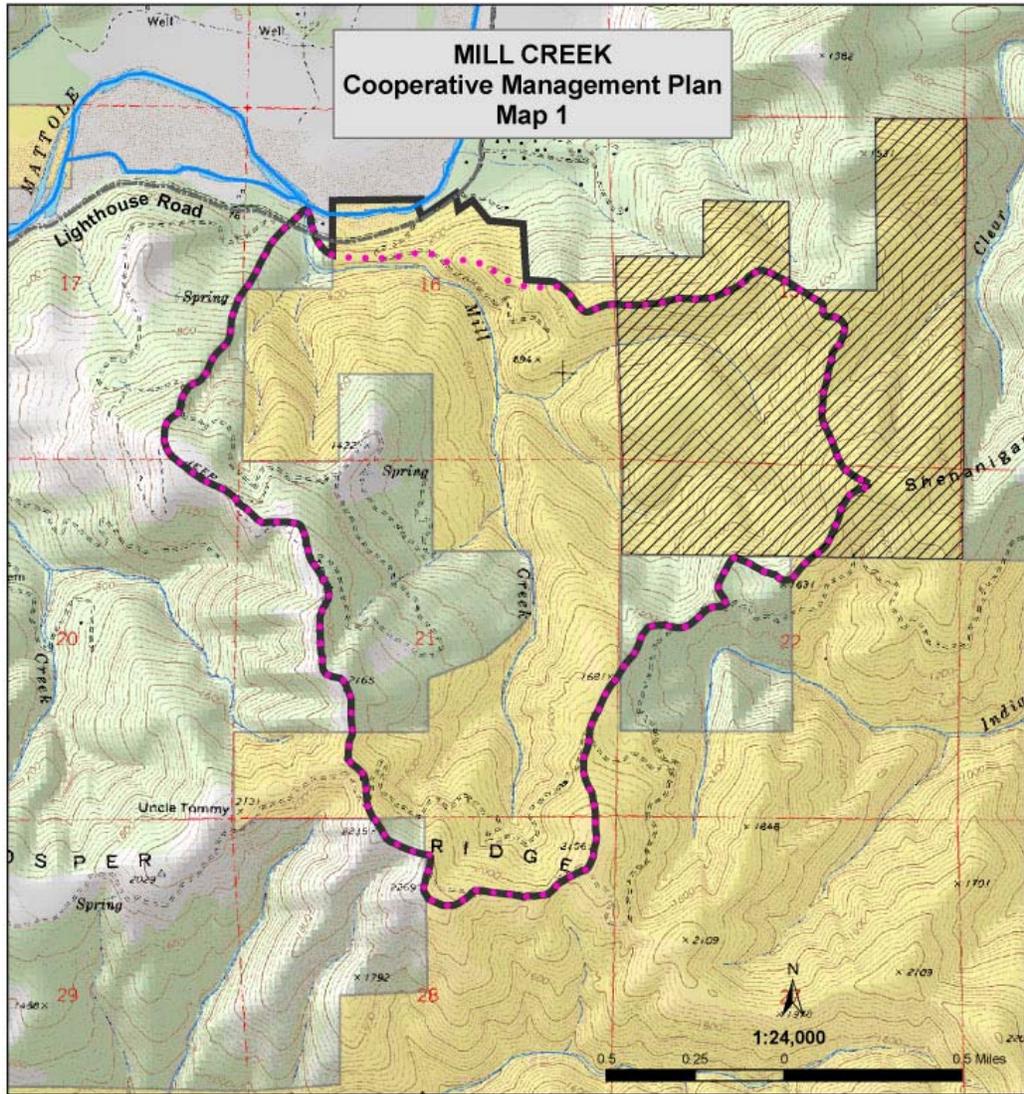
The Community Plan for the Mill Creek Watershed



Arcata Field Office
Bureau of Land Management
April 24, 2006

**MLL CREEK
Cooperative Management Plan
Location Map**





Planning Area

	Reed Parcel Acquisition
	Mill Creek Planning Boundary
	Bureau of Land Management

	US Department of the Interior
	BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
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Date Prepared: 3/29/2006	
Project: mc_forestry	

Actions associated with plan implementation will have only minor and short-term impacts to natural resources, while providing long-term beneficial environmental impacts to fisheries and wildlife habitat by helping return the area to more natural vegetation patterns and watershed conditions.

The Mill Creek Forest was acquired through the long-term effort of members of the Lower Mattole Valley and surrounding areas. The plan reflects the vision of these local residents while implementing priorities in the King Range RMP.

III. Discussion of Planning Consistency and Conformance

The proposed action is fully consistent with, and serves to implement a number of priorities in the King Range Resource Management Plan (RMP). The following objectives/actions in the RMP directly address the Mill Creek ACEC:

Objective ACEC 1.2: Establish the Mill Creek Watershed ACEC to include all public lands (currently approximately 1337 acres) in the Mill Creek watershed. The primary relevant and important features that would be protected by this designation are the water quality of this important anadromous fish stream/cold water tributary to the Mattole River, and the high quality remnant of low-elevation old growth Douglas-fir forest. Any additional lands or interests in lands acquired by the BLM in the Mill Creek watershed would be automatically incorporated into the ACEC/RNA.

Action ACEC 1.2.1: Cooperate and coordinate with local community groups to develop an activity level stewardship plan for the Mill Creek ACEC.

Objective ACEC 2.1: Establish the Mill Creek Watershed ACEC as a Research Natural Area (RNA) to represent a quality type example of the low elevation late successional Douglas-fir forest, and anadromous fish spawning stream.

Action REC 6.2.5: Construct the Mill Creek Trail linking Lighthouse Road to the Cooskie Creek Trail.

This plan also tiers to King Range RMP area-wide goals in the vegetation management, recreation, fisheries, fire, forestry and wildlife. The list below highlights some of these key goals.

Watersheds and Aquatic Ecosystems

Goal AEF 1: Restore and maintain the ecological health of watersheds and aquatic ecosystems on public lands, and, to the extent possible, partner with other landowners to coordinate restoration efforts across watersheds.

Threatened and Endangered Species

Goal WDF 1: Cooperate with federal, state, and local partners to minimize or eliminate the need for additional listing of species under the Endangered Species Act and to contribute to the recovery of the species already listed as such. The BLM will take measures to promote the recovery and conservation of all special status animal species within the King Range.

Vegetation Types and Habitats

Goal TEV 1: Manage vegetation types or habitats to produce and/or maintain a mosaic of compositionally and structurally diverse habitat types and plant communities that have historically occurred prior to the era of mechanized logging and exclusion of fire regimes in the region (approximately 1950).

Forest Management

Goal FM 1: Maintain and enhance a complex mosaic of forest vegetation communities and successional stages, and protect existing stands with late successional or old-growth characteristics. This diverse and complex mosaic of forest vegetation would be represented with stands of all age classes and structural attributes. It should also provide a range of special forest products that serve both personal and commercial interests while maintaining existing and sustainable populations of vegetative species.

Landscape-Based Fire Management

Goal FIR 1: Develop a landscape resistant to damage associated with large scale, high intensity fires by allowing for the natural dynamic effects of fire to occur on the ecosystem. Provide the appropriate management response on all wildland fires, with an emphasis on firefighter and public safety.

Recreation Management

Goal REC 1: Provide quality recreation opportunities that complement and continue the area's unique character and identity as one of the few remaining coastal backcountry recreation areas in the U.S., while protecting the quality of the recreation opportunities, resources, and community character.

The goals, objectives and actions of the Community Plan for the Mill Creek Watershed as described in section V. 1-11 below are consistent with and provide an implementation framework for the King Range RMP.

IV. Discussion of Public Participation and Comment

The following efforts were made to incorporate public input into the decisionmaking process:

1. Scoping --The MCWC held a series of public meetings in 2000 to obtain scoping input for the plan. The meetings were advertised on local bulletin boards in the Mattole Valley, and through postcard mailings to interested community members. Issues brought forward by the public included access, fire management, local employment, recreation, research and education, and facilities/signing.

2. Public comment period on the Draft Plan – A public comment period was held between October 1, 2004 and November 12, 2004 on the draft Cooperative Management Plan. Notification about the draft plan was sent to adjoining residents of Mill Creek, interested community members and people that had attended scoping meetings. In addition press releases went out to regional papers and were aired on Garberville radio station KMUD. KMUD news also interviewed a representative for the MCWC to discuss greater details of the plan during a news broadcast. MCWC received four comment letters. The letters/responses were incorporated into the plan.

3. Public comment period on the Preliminary Decision Record/Finding of No Significant Impact (Reserved--currently underway)

V. Community Plan for Mill Creek -- Goals, Objectives and Actions

The information below is compiled from the Community Plan for the Mill Creek Watershed. Included are goals, objectives and actions that are common to all alternatives in the plan, as well as those from the Preferred Alternative (C--Rewilding). Some of the information has been reworded for clarity and to be consistent with BLM public land management policies. Also, several additional objectives and actions have been added by the BLM where they complement the community plan and the King Range RMP goals. The "Community Plan for the Mill Creek Watershed" can be consulted to view the information below in its original wording/context. The goals, objectives, and actions outlined here are not intended to be a comprehensive reiteration of the community plan, but rather a compilation of priorities that will be the focus of BLM/community partnership implementation efforts over the next 10 years. Other actions in the plan will also be considered for implementation throughout the 20 year planning horizon, or as determined by available funding or community interest and involvement. These additional actions would be discussed in a separate environmental analysis.

1. Area Desired Future Conditions

The desired future conditions that this plan is intended to achieve, or move in the direction of achieving, are as follows:

- A return to pre-1940s ecological conditions including area, location, and vegetation type of forest, meadow, riparian and aquatic sites and associated terrestrial and aquatic species;
- Water quality and quantity sufficient to support abundant populations of native aquatic species and to provide quality water contributions to the Mattole River estuary;
- Protection of the primitive nature of Mill Creek, including abundant cold clear water, deep forest, open meadow, silence and solitude, and enhanced habitat values for wildlife;
- Reduction of the likelihood of a catastrophic wildfire in the watershed;
- Recreational access that enables public enjoyment without threat to the ecological or habitat conditions in the watershed, or the privacy of nearby residents.

2. Aquatic Ecosystems and Fisheries Management

Goal AE1: Follow goals of the Northwest Forest Plan Aquatic Conservation Strategy to protect and maintain or improve the quality and quantity of water throughout the Mill Creek basin; and to protect, maintain and where possible and necessary, enhance native abundance and biodiversity of aquatic flora and fauna. Manage riparian areas to maintain hydrologic, geomorphic and ecological process of Mill Creek; and maintain or restore riparian or aquatic habitats.

Objective AE1: Maintain values such as water quality including temperature, clarity, and chemical composition; and quantity including annual and seasonal flow rates at current levels;

Objective AE2: Restore riparian and upslope vegetative buffers such as old growth forest stands so that they progress towards pre-1940s area and composition within the normal range of variability (see also vegetation management).

Objective AE3: Ensure to the extent possible that slope failures or other possible sediment delivery sources are stabilized or removed;

Objective AE4: Maintain native aquatic species populations at current levels or where feasible increasing them.

Action AE1. Remove or modify wooden weir structures in the inner gorge of the creek. BLM and MCWC will work in conjunction with MSG to survey all weir structures, define which the structures will be modified or removed, and implement the strategy over as many as six years. The wood portion of the weir structures will be retained as single or opposing scour structures to allow natural processes to sort out fine sediments.

Action AE2. Stabilize the landslide that exists in the middle/upper portion of the watershed. This slope failure was caused by the road-building-related diversion of water from its streambed. The work will be accomplished using hand tools or using trail machine equipment if implementation coincides with trail construction work. All removed materials would be placed in a stable location, bare soil would be mulched with native materials, and water would be diverted along the road that had funneled water to the landslide.

Action AE3: BLM and MCWC will coordinate with MSG on any project that affects water quality or fisheries habitat in Mill Creek.

Action AE4: Where feasible and appropriate, allow for recruitment of large wood into creeks to benefit water dynamics and increase habitat values. Give first priority to using logs obtained from forest stand treatments for use in stream restoration projects.

Action AE5: If proven feasible and successful in other locations within the Mattole Basin, plant or release Douglas-fir in riparian zones to reestablish later successional vegetation component along alder lined channels. In riparian areas on Mill Creek and tributaries in the lower mile of the watershed: assess the ages of riparian alder stands and release Douglas-fir seedlings and saplings that already exist. Plant Douglas-fir seedlings in the catchment area above the upper limit of salmonid spawning, in the portions of the plan area that have a reduced conifer component.

Many previously logged stands contain an unnatural species composition that reflects past high-grading and poor restocking. Both actions 5 and 6 are proposed to treat conditions on a site-specific basis as prescribed to accelerate restoration of a more natural species composition and mature forest conditions.

Action AE6: No new roads will be built and no old roads will be reopened except to repair existing active landslides, reduce hazards, improve wildlife or fisheries habitat or to decommission roads on newly acquired property. Old roads may be temporarily reopened for forest stand treatments as described under the vegetation management actions.

3. Wildlife Management

The majority of goals, objectives and actions that support wildlife management are outlined in section 3 below (Terrestrial ecosystems, vegetation and forest management). This is because the BLM manages wildlife habitat and not populations --Populations are under the jurisdiction of

other state and federal agencies. Please refer to the vegetation management section (3) for specific actions aimed at accelerating and improving habitat characteristics.

Goal W1: Manage habitat to preserve, protect and enhance conditions for native wildlife. Re-establish habitat conditions that support the recolonization or reintroduction of locally extirpated species. Provide a migration corridor between the King Range and the Mattole River and its estuary.

Objective W1: Restore native abundance and biodiversity of, and healthy self-sustaining habitats for wildlife by managing area ecosystems so that they progress towards pre-1940s conditions.

Objective W2: Manage habitat for recolonization or reintroduction of locally extirpated species.

Objective W3: Manage habitats to maintain research values of this Research Natural Area as a reference site.

Objective W4: Manage the plan area for recolonization by old-growth dependent avian and terrestrial species including indicator species.

Objective W5: Re-establish a complex canopy, retain snags for avian and terrestrial wildlife habitat, and retain large wood on the forest floor. Manage for optimal canopy closure (70-80%).

Action W1. Manage Mill Creek to contribute to Northwest Forest Plan Goals for the King Range by contributing to the habitat base which will support 20 northern spotted owl pairs.

Action W2 Accelerate improvement of habitat values by thinning young-growth, even-aged forest stands or planting long-lived species such as Douglas-fir (see also forest management).

4. Terrestrial Ecosystems and Vegetation, Forest Resources Management

Goal TEV 1: Protect Native biodiversity and abundance: The vegetation of Mill Creek watershed will be managed to progress towards pre-1940s conditions in terms of structure, composition, native biodiversity and area (within the normal range of variability).

Goal TEV 2: Utilize management techniques to assist natural processes and provide a faster return to historic forest stand and meadow area conditions. The primary focus will be restoration of harvested forest areas to accelerate return to mature or old-growth forest conditions, as historic aerial photos show that this was the dominant seral stage within the watershed.

Objective TEV 1: Where feasible, restoration of forest stands will be completed in a manner that promotes the goal of requiring no intensive management interventions after initial treatments.

Objective TEV 2: Restore natural mosaic of habitats and species to ensure biological connectivity.

Objective TEV 3: Maintain healthy productive grasslands; encourage native species abundance and biodiversity through lowest-impact methods of encroaching tree removal and through replanting with native coastal prairie seed stocks.

Objective TEV 4: Preserve all old growth stands.

Objective TEV 5: Maintain and develop forest vegetation in second-growth areas to encourage, and where feasible, accelerate development of a complex mosaic that reflects pre-harvest conditions.

Objective TEV 6: Emphasize selective forest stand treatments in previously harvested areas in order to accelerate a return to a more natural vegetation pattern, especially mature or ancient forest conditions. The intent of these management actions is to use careful intervention to complement the natural processes, reduce risks of large-scale disturbance (especially wildfire), and restore a natural balance to the watershed faster than would occur when the area is left alone.

Objective TEV 7: Place priority on short-term or one-time vegetation management actions that would allow for positive restoration impacts & restoration needs to be completed prior to potential Congressional Wilderness designation. Note: No actions proposed in this plan would preclude designation of public lands in Mill Creek as wilderness.

Objective TEV 8: Vegetative management prescriptions will ensure protection and restoration of ecological complexity to mature forest types across the landscape.

Action TEV1: The 220-acres of old-growth forest will be named as the Bill Clow Memorial Forest in honor of the initial proponent of Mill Creek protection. (See Appendix 5 of the community plan for a detailed description).

Action TEV2: Herbicides will not be used for management of native vegetation. In instances involving noxious weed infestation, protocols for treatment are outlined in the King Range RMP. Invasive plant species will be mapped, monitored and eradicated using an integrated pest management approach.

Action TEV3: Conduct annual surveys for invasive plant species and initiate manual removal upon detection.

Action TEV4: Manual or mechanical treatments will be used to reduce the encroachment of historic meadow or grassy areas by trees and brush.

Action TEV5: No vegetation management actions are proposed in the Bill Clow Memorial Forest, except for very limited activities in the proposed Stewardship Zone, as described in the prescription below.

Action TEV6: Old overgrown roads that access vegetation treatment sites can be entered, treatments implemented, and the roads decommissioned, and revegetated with local/native seed or plant stock upon exiting the treatment area. Roadside vegetation that is in thick brush or dense second-growth as a result of the road opening will be treated for fuels reduction and conifer stand release. This action should be taken in as a part of a site-specific treatment strategy for watercourses and fire management across the plan landscape.

Action TEV7: Stewardship contracts or other community forest product harvest/use will be considered as a secondary benefit/product of actions taken to improve forest conditions. Projects will be considered at sites where road access makes such an activity feasible. No roads will be

constructed or reopened solely for community forestry projects, without a primary goal of forest improvement to accelerate old-growth development or conifer release.

Action TEV8: Implement stand treatment prescriptions on previously harvested lands. Prescriptions include stand thinning to reduce fire, insect or disease hazard and/or to release conifers whose abundance and diversity of age classes has been affected by past logging. Any vegetation management actions must conform to vegetation management prescriptions described below.

Action TEV 9: Noise pollution and associated wildlife impacts will be mitigated by scheduling restoration and other management activities during low seasonal occupation or lower sensitivity (i.e., activities would be avoided during nesting or rearing seasons).

Vegetation Management Prescriptions by Dominant Species

Note: See Map 2 for locations of vegetation management prescriptions proposed for implementation under this DR/FONSI. Additional forest management projects may be proposed in the future and will be analyzed under separate environmental analysis.

The goals of the following prescriptions are to return the plan area to its historic average of 7-15 large mature conifers per acre in mixed hardwood/conifer stands; to achieve an evolving mosaic of native vegetation in all age classes predominated by mature and ancient forest conditions, whose dynamic response to disturbance enriches forest complexity, wildlife habitat values and overall watershed character; to achieve those conditions in as short a time as possible across the landscape; and to reduce fuel loads and ladders while doing so.

These management prescriptions allow for removal of trees up to a 14 inch maximum diameter. This limit is based upon the size at which Douglas-fir or other species achieve dominance in the stand types found in Mill Creek.. Thinning to a maximum DBH of smaller than 14 inches would not effectively achieve the goals of returning the number of conifers in the stands to their higher historic levels..

The prescriptions specifically address the different vegetation types, age classes and management boundaries in the Mill Creek watershed. They all include common values, listed below:

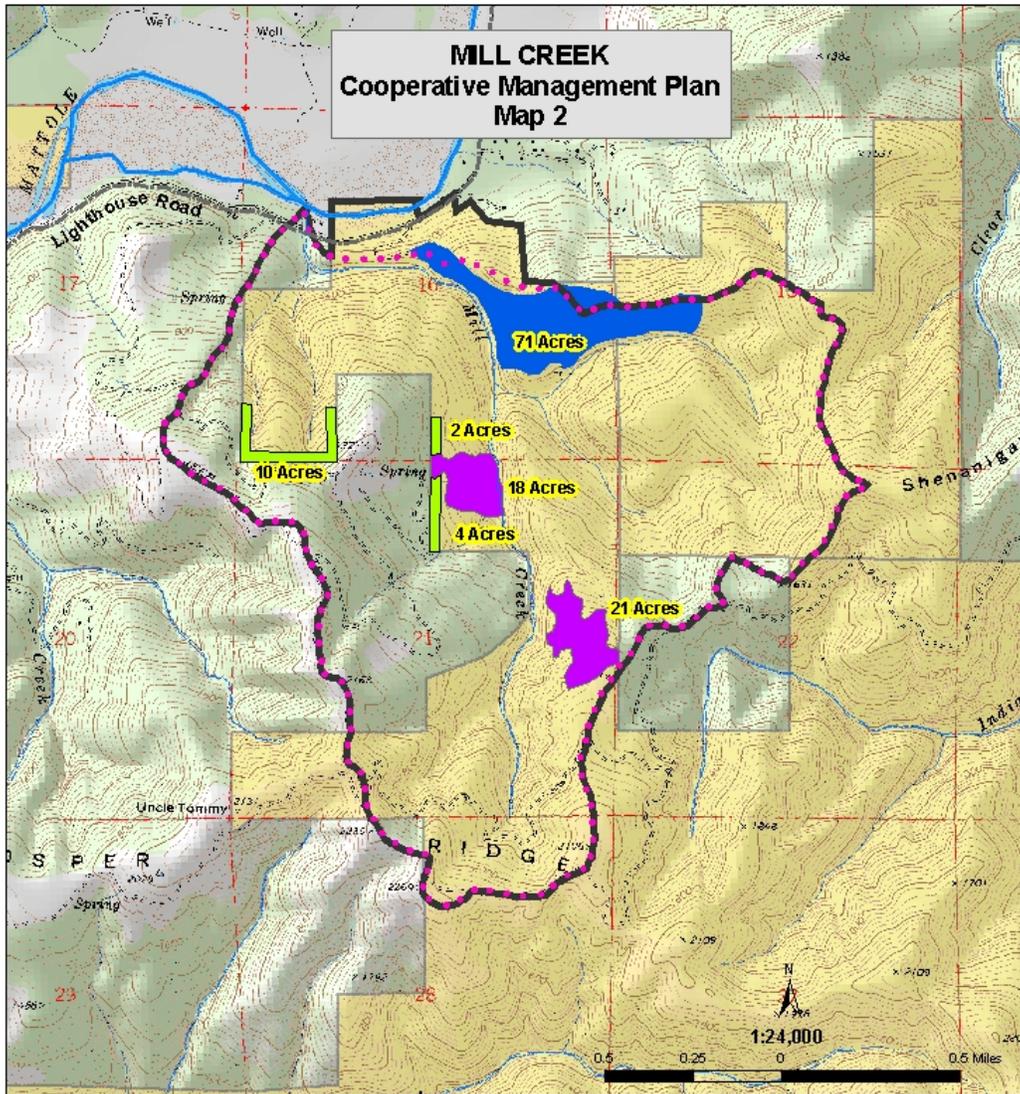
- Older trees, which add complexity and diversity to forest structure and attendant habitat values, will be retained.
- Release 7-15 Douglas-fir per acre in variable density and spacing, clearing competing trees and brush up to 20' from the released trees, depending on site conditions. Treat for fire protection up to 15 feet high and 15 feet wide around each released tree.
- Canopy closure sufficient to suppress brush and fuel loads will be maintained.
- Snags greater than 1 foot in diameter will be retained and may be protected by removing brush and fuel load in a circle around the base for a distance of three feet. (Where determined important for wildlife or fuel reduction treatments).
- Down large wood will be treated for fuel ladder reduction as necessary and appropriate by removing limbs that act as jackpot fuels, and lopping/scattering or piling/burning as appropriate.
- Byproducts such as poles, saw timber under 14 inches DBH, and firewood can be available as forest products as a byproduct of stand improvements.

- Crews marking vegetation for stand release and fuels reduction will survey for down large wood on the forest floor and adjacent stream channels, and in consultation as necessary, indicate sites to which large wood will be retained.
- Recruiting large wood that is a byproduct of vegetation management to stream channel or forest floor as necessary and appropriate. Use of wood for this purpose will receive priority over forest product sales. Availability of trees removed during treatments for forest products use will be dependent on proximity to open roads.
- Slash will either be piled and burned in the winter or lopped and scattered depending on the slope, fuel load, and accessibility of treatment area and safety to firefighters and public interests. Any lop-and-scatter slash treatment should leave nothing higher than 18 inches from the ground. Trunks will be left whole on the forest floor, provided the fuel bed height is not significantly increased through jack piling.
- No tree that exceeds 14 inches DBH will be cut.
- All management actions will ensure protection of wildlife habitat and forest integrity across the landscape.

Prescription 1: Second-Growth Tanoak Dominated Stands (39 Acres)

Second-growth tanoak dominated stands are at risk to stand-reducing fire every fire season. They exist in the Mill Creek watershed as a result of logging practices in the 1950's and '60's that removed the Douglas-fir component without adequate reforestation. As a result, the Douglas-fir component is minimal and frequently dominated by tanoak. It is important that the Douglas-fir withstand fires or other disturbance events if the watershed is to return to a more natural composition and structure and associated habitat values. To accomplish this, the Douglas-fir must grow to a size at which they can withstand fire events, continue to grow in size and height, and re-establish their natural stand domination and old growth characteristics upon which water quality, wildlife habitat and other forest values depend.

Thinning for fuels reduction and release of conifers is intended to convert brushy, dense younger-growth tanoak dominated stands back to normal hardwood/conifer populations of 7-15 large mature Douglas-firs in the overstory, with tanoak in the intermediate layer. This will be accomplished by selecting individual conifers and thinning non-conifers around them to a distance of up to 20 feet from each Douglas-fir tree. This clearing distance will remove adjacent fuels and reduce the likelihood that the conifers will be destroyed in the event of fire. It will also benefit the conifers by releasing nutrients and opening and diversifying the structure of the understory. Selectively applying this method reduces ground disturbance across the landscape by limiting activities to the vicinity of selected trees. Healthier fir trees and trees larger than 14 inches DBH that are within the 20-foot treatment diameter will be kept. Where appropriate and determined important to either wildlife or fuel reduction needs, workers will pull slash away from snags to reduce potential loss from wildfire, and will remove ladder fuels from fallen trees by removing and disposing of branches and vegetation, leaving the trunk. Slash will be piled and burned or lopped and scattered. Slash treatment methods will be selected on a site-by-site basis that considers fuel loads, slope, accessibility, safety, and density of conifer growth. No tree planting will occur in this forest type as an adequate conifer component is present.



Forest Treatment Areas	
Description - Acres	
	Second-Growth Tanoak Dominated Stands = 39 Total Acres
	Thick Brush / Scattered Trees = 71 Total Acres
	WUI Stewardship Treatment = 16 Total Acres
Total Acres = 126	

	Mill Creek Watershed
	Bureau of Land Management
	Mill Creek Planning Boundary



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Note: The above map (map 2) is intended to depict general forest treatment project areas. Actual treatment boundaries will be determined during project layout. Treatments will only occur in forest stand and group types/locations that conform to those described in the prescriptions in this document.

Prescription 2: Second-Growth Douglas-fir Dominated Groups

Second-growth Douglas-fir in Douglas-fir-dominated groups is at risk of stand-replacing fires until such time as natural selection thins the dense ranks of young conifers. Trees in this category may be up to 40-50 years old and their size depends on density of trees and nutrient availability. These areas exist in up to 1-acre patches/groups across the landscape and some are scattered within the proposed treatment areas. Thinning trees from below up to 14 inches in diameter leaves dominant, healthy trees. Suppressed low-vigor trees will be removed to provide space and increase available soil nutrients. Selecting for dominant trees with larger branches and a better developed crown ratio enables higher rates of photosynthesis and improves habitat for a greater number of wildlife species that depend on late successional habitat. Variable spacing and variable density thinnings avoids uniformity across the landscape. Slash will be piled and burned or lopped and scattered depending upon slope, stand density, accessibility, safety, and fuel loads.

Prescription 3: Even-aged Young-Growth Conifer Groups

This prescription will be applied to areas where even-aged young-growth conifers (generally up to 20 years in age and less than 12 inches DBH) are growing at more than 300 trees per acre. These areas exist in up to 3-acre patches/groups across the landscape and occupy approximately 14 acres of the plan area. Some of these are scattered within the proposed treatment areas. Trees will be thinned to a spacing that will accelerate old growth forest conditions. Variable spacing and variable density will ensure that stands do not have a uniform "tree farm" appearance after the treatment. Retaining a high percentage (75-80%) of canopy closure through the thinning process will suppress the growth of brush and young trees, and maintain lower temperatures and higher humidity. It will also encourage structural complexity and diversity. Openings in the canopy will occur over time through natural processes such as windthrow. Retaining the hardwood component protects the diversity of habitat available in these areas, which in turn provides opportunities for a greater species diversity. Slash will be piled-and-burned or lopped-and-scattered depending upon slope, stand density, accessibility, safety, and fuel loading. No forest products component is anticipated under this prescription due to the distance from roads.

Prescription 4: Thick Brush/Scattered Trees (71 Acres)

This management prescription applies solely to an area adjacent to the proposed trail in the northeastern portion of the plan area. This area features poor forest regeneration and a low conifer component. Actions will include replanting of conifers where appropriate: specifically, where stumps indicate that conifers have been harvested for timber. Brush will be removed after planted conifers have become established. Existing trees will be pruned to 15' or half the total tree height, whichever is less, to reduce fuel ladders, and open the understory to recolonization by native plants. There is no forest products component in this management prescription, because the area is not adjacent to roads and because only brush and slash will be removed. Slash will be piled-and-burned or lopped-and-scattered on site depending upon slope, stand density, accessibility, safety, and fuel loading.

Prescription 5: Ancient Forest

No silvicultural treatment is proposed except within the WUI Stewardship Treatment Zone. The purpose of activities in the WUI Stewardship Treatment Zone where it encompasses mature and ancient forest conditions is to reduce the likelihood or the impacts of fire moving across land ownership boundaries. To fulfill that goal and ensure the protection of large, mature trees and

ancient forest ecological conditions, management actions are limited to the following: No trees over 14 inches DBH will be cut regardless of species.

Prescription 6: Grassland/Meadows

The goal for managing grassland areas is to restore native grassland/meadow areas to the condition and area of the Mill Creek basin at or prior to 1942. Specific actions include repeated surveys of the areas for listed and candidate species and manual removal of encroaching brush and trees.

WUI Prescription (16 Acres)

See Fire Action F5 below for treatment description.

Commercial Special Forest Products Management

Commercial gathering of special/alternative forest products is not permitted within the Mill Creek ACEC under the King Range RMP.

5. Fire Management

Goal F1: In accordance with the King Range RMP Frontcountry Zone management goals, wildfires that occur in the Mill Creek watershed will be suppressed because of the proximity of residences to the BLM land holdings. Additional Mill Creek Fire Management Goals are:

- Reduce the likelihood of catastrophic fire.
- Reduce the likelihood of fire moving across land boundaries, public-private or vice-versa.
- Ensure that fire suppression techniques, if applied, do not damage the long term health and beauty of the Mill Creek watershed, or the associated native flora and fauna.

Objective F1: Reduce the wildfire risk to life, resources and property;

Objective F2: Decrease the fuel load of this watershed to return second-growth areas to mature forest structure and composition that resists damage from wildfire;

Objective F3: Reduce fire hazard along the public travel route and adjacent private roads;

Objective F4 Ensure that post-fire rehabilitation prioritizes ecosystem restoration;

Objective F5 Minimize the damaging effects of fire suppression activities on natural and cultural resources;

Objective F6: Develop a landscape resistant to large-scale high intensity fires and beneficially responsive to low intensity fires.

All fires in the watershed will be suppressed, because of its wildland/urban interface values. In the King Range Plan, the BLM has restricted certain activities to protect the Mill Creek watershed from fire. They include restrictions on overnight camping and any fires.

Action F1: Complete trailside fire hazard reduction work during construction of the Mill Creek Trail.

Action F2: Complete thinning and fuel ladder reduction in areas along the roadways and along the trail route. Roadside prescriptions include ladder fuels removal up to fifteen feet in height, and 50 feet back from the road side. Small debris will be chipped, or lopped and scattered. Where necessary slash may be piled and burned. Trailside prescriptions include ladder fuel removal up to 15 feet in height, eight feet back from either side of the trail.

Action F3: Pull back fuels from the base of any snags that are determined to be important wildlife habitat components to facilitate snag retention across the landscape. This activity will be carried out primarily as a supplemental action during implementation of vegetation management prescriptions, and not on an area-wide basis.

Action F4: When large wood falls to the forest floor in locations with high fire hazard (along roadways etc.), reduce fuel ladders by limbing branches from the trunk. Lop and scatter or pile and burn as appropriate for slope, local fuels and other conditions.

Action F5: Where public land forest stands are directly adjacent to private lands with improvements (the **“WUI Stewardship Treatment Zone”**), the adjoining private landowner may enter into a written agreement with the BLM for fuels reduction projects. This area encompasses a 150-foot deep strip on BLM lands adjoining privately owned lands, regardless of dominant vegetation or age class. This agreement would allow the landowner to complete fuels reduction actions on public lands based on the prescriptions in the agreement. All activities must be consistent with the prescriptions for the representative dominant vegetation type and age class, and require a written agreement between the BLM and the landowner prior to any action taking place. Any debris pile burning on BLM lands requires a BLM reviewed and approved Prescribed Fire Burn Plan. All BLM, state, and local policies and procedures must be followed for any pile burning associated with stewardship projects, regardless of pile locations. In treatment areas adjacent to currently open roads, a potential for a forest product component that utilizes poles, firewood or small (less than 14 inches DBH) timber exists strictly as a byproduct of fuels reduction work.

Fire Management Standards and Guidelines

FIR SG1: Retain snags of one foot in diameter or larger for habitat unless they individually present a hazard to crews in a fire event, or threaten the security of an established fire line.

FIR SG2: Site restoration following disturbances such as fire will employ local/native seed or plant stocks for any revegetation that takes place.

FIR SG3: No management action will take place that increases the risk of fire or encourages the development of post-treatment fuel ladders or brush encroachment.

FIR SG4: No cut vegetative debris will be left against the boles of leave trees or piled beneath crowns.

FIR SG5: Use of heavy mechanical firefighting equipment (dozers) is restricted to existing roads to insure passage for suppression equipment and crews unless otherwise authorized by the Arcata Field Office Manager or BLM Agency Representative.

FIR SG6: Fire suppressive chemicals, foams, retardants, or gels shall not be applied within 300 feet of any waterway.

FIR SG7: Damage associated with fire suppression activities shall be repaired to minimize erosion and sedimentation, cultural, visual, and recreational resource loss, and habitat fragmentation.

FIR SG8: Noise pollution and associated wildlife impacts will be mitigated by scheduling restoration and other management activities during low seasonal occupation or lower sensitivity (i.e., activities should be avoided during nesting or rearing seasons).

The BLM recognizes that extreme fire conditions may occur when life or property would be immediately threatened by limiting suppression action. Under extreme conditions the incident commander has authority to utilize appropriate suppression action to mitigate immediate threats to life or private property.

6. Recreation

Goal R1: Provide recreational opportunities commensurate with the special ecological, research, and conservation values of the watershed.

Objective R1: Design and build a public trail that provides enjoyable public access while protecting resource values.

Objective R2 : Establish the Bill Clow Memorial Forest. The Mill Creek Watershed Conservancy was established almost twenty years ago for the purpose of acquiring and permanently protecting the Mill Creek watershed as a memorial to Bill Clow. The 220-acre old growth forest will be named in his honor.

Objective R3: Preserve the values of wild nature, wildlife and plant habitat of the Bill Clow Memorial Forest. Provide a means for the general public to view the forest without harming its component values.

Action R1: Construct a recreational trail with an approximately 3 foot wide tread to link Mill Creek to the King Range coastline via a connection with the Cookie Creek Trail.

Action R2: Construct parking for approximately 5-7 vehicles on the north side of Lighthouse Road immediately across from the beginning of the trail. The parking pullout width will be the minimum necessary to allow for parallel parking and provide for pedestrian safety consistent with County and BLM requirements. Any site hardening to accommodate parking will make use of materials that provide a minimal level of visual intrusion.

Action R3: A standard King Range Trailhead sign (brown background/white letters) will be placed along Lighthouse Road as it approaches to the trailhead to alert oncoming traffic that they are nearing the pulloff. Safety sign(s) may be placed along Lighthouse Road to alert drivers of the pedestrian crossing & need to slow down. BLM will coordinate with the county on this potential need. A small routed redwood sign post (approximately 3 foot tall fence post) will be placed on the south side of the road so that it is visible to those who park. The sign will indicate the beginning of the trail. A standard BLM trailhead kiosk will be placed along the trail approximately 100 feet from the trailhead to provide visitor orientation information.

Action R4: Trail use may be limited to foot traffic during the winter season when conditions warrant—I. E. when equestrian or mountain bike use is causing trail tread damage (rutting etc). The seasonal closure would typically take place from November when the rains soak the ground, through April or May, by which time the ground is generally firm and relatively dry. The limitation will depend on soil conditions and not a set date.

Action R5: Recreational gathering of special forest products including mushrooms will be permitted as long as monitoring indicates that the resources are not harmed by this activity.

Action R6: The BLM will coordinate with the MCWC when considering applications for recreation permits to conduct tours or other non-profit group or commercial activities in the plan area, or products that advertise or educate the public about the watershed.

Action R7: The BLM will work with the MCWC, local landowners and recreational visitors to prevent any uses or access that might spread Sudden Oak Death Syndrome or other disease into the watershed.

Action R8: Noise pollution and associated wildlife harassment will be mitigated by scheduling construction and maintenance activities during low seasonal occupation or lower sensitivity (i.e., activities should be avoided during nesting or rearing seasons).

Trail construction will follow the Area-wide standards and Guidelines outlined in the King Range RMP:

REC SG1: Limit trail tread construction and maintenance (except drainage work) to non-rain periods.

REC SG2: Minimize disruption of natural hydrologic flow paths, including diversion of streamflow and interception of surface and subsurface flow.

REC SG3: Minimize sediment delivery to streams from trails. Outsloping of the tread surface is preferred, except where outsloping would increase sediment delivery to streams or where outsloping is infeasible or unsafe. Route drainage away from potentially unstable channels, fills, and hill slopes.

REC SG4: Provide and maintain fish passage at all crossings of existing and potential fishbearing streams. Most stream crossings in the KRNCA Backcountry Zone would be fords with no permanent bridges. BLM personnel or users may place temporary primitive low-water bridges (stepping stones, driftwood logs etc.) at crossings during the summer months. These crossings would be constructed/inspected so that they do not impede fish passage.

REC SG5: Fords on inland streams would be constructed/armored so that bank erosion is minimized.

REC SG6: Use materials for bridge repair, replacement, or temporary crossings that minimize the possibility of introduction of fine sediments or toxins into the drainage system.

REC SG7: Minimize the disturbance to riparian reserves for bridge and stream crossing replacement. Disturbed ground should receive appropriate erosion control treatment (mulching, seeding, planting etc.) prior to the beginning of the wet season.

REC SG8: Close and rehabilitate random social trails within riparian areas.

REC SG9: Trail maintenance activities within ¼ mile of spotted owl nest sites would be conducted with hand-tools only between February 1 and August 6.

REC SG10: Use vegetative or topographic screening, create distance buffers and establish additional construction criteria in consultation with NMFS and FWS for proposed new trails to minimize impacts to listed species.

7. Visual Resources Management

Goal VRM1: The King Range National Conservation Area's Resource Management Plan has determined that the Mill Creek plan area is in VRM Class II.

Action VRM1: Trail development will use hand tools where possible and a trail tread of no wider than three feet in width to minimize visual intrusions. The graveled trailhead parking area will be placed in a level location immediately adjacent to Lighthouse Road, with minimal need for grading or other construction impacts.

Action VRM 2: The BLM and MCWC will obtain input from the Mattole Salmon Group regarding design options for the trailhead parking or any other new facilities on lands on the north side of Lighthouse Road. The Mattole Salmon Group will ensure that their facilities do not present a cluttered or visually obtrusive appearance as outlined under their site agreement with the BLM.

8. Research and Education

Goal RE1: The Mill Creek Watershed is designated as a Research Natural Area under the King Range RMP. The area provides opportunities for qualified researchers to gather and analyze information on healthy forest ecosystems and watersheds, as well as restoration effectiveness. Managers will encourage collection of reference condition and trend information from Mill Creek so that it can be used to improve restoration efforts in similar watersheds in the region.

Goal RE2: Build an understanding and affinity for place by enabling an experiential learning opportunity to the community and other members of the public. Also, provide an understanding of the dynamic components of watershed health, function, values, and changes over time.

Objective RE 1: Plan and conduct research projects that complete the understanding of natural mechanisms, functions and changes over time throughout the watershed.

Objective RE2: Ensure that research and analysis is widely accessible among the public, educational institutions, agency and other research institutions and personnel.

Objective RE3: Ensure that educational uses of the watershed are lowest possible impact and that those using the watershed are informed of the sensitivity of the resources and need for minimal impact use practices.

Action RE 1: The MCWC will work to establish a publicly accessible archive of data and studies/interpretations.

Action RE2: Formalize the ongoing student and general public educational efforts (salmon in the classroom, fish identification) as a cooperative partnership.

Action RE3: Establish a registration and monitoring program of educational uses of the watershed.

Action RE 4: The MCWC may continue data gathering on weather, rainfall and microclimate; fish surveys, V-Star sediment, stream flow and other non-impacting activities. Other ongoing or recurring research such as channel depth and thalweg profile measurements may take place with the appropriate Federal and state permits, as required.

Action RE 5: Develop monitoring/research programs as opportunities arise to compare treated and untreated stands under the vegetation management prescriptions outlined above. Focus areas would include the relative resistance of conifers to disturbance events and their response to release/increased space and nutrients.

Action RE6: The BLM will notify the MCWC about new research projects proposed in the plan area. Request that researchers share any data and analysis with the co-managers where possible.

Action RE7: Pursue research projects that rise from area management activities. Opportunities include monitoring the reactions of riparian vegetation to thinning and planting; monitoring rates of snag and large wood recruitment, mapping locations of stumps and determining type, age and approximate date of logging; and response of Douglas-fir to fuels reduction and tree release.

Action RE8: Complete formal botanical surveys to confirm anecdotal sightings of plant species.

9. Social and Economic Conditions

Goal SE1: Minimize impacts to the privacy, quiet and rural sense of remoteness prized by local landowners while providing public access to BLM lands.

Goal SE2: Encourage local employment for work projects undertaken in the watershed.

Action SE1: BLM and MCWC will work with other agencies and non-profit organizations to secure grants for implementing the actions outlined in this plan. Efforts will be made to provide job opportunities to local community members in implementing the actions, and in marketing forest products such as poles and saw timber that are a by-product of management activities.

10. Cultural Resources Management

Cultural resource management actions will focus on surveying and protection under the goals and objectives of the King Range Resource Management Plan (RMP). No other specific actions are proposed.

11. Inventory Units and Study Areas

The MCWC nominated the public lands in the watershed as a Research Natural Area (RNA) and an Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) through the KRNCA Plan. Note: These designations became effective through the signing of the Record of Decision for the King Range RMP. All actions in this Decision Record must be compatible with ACEC/RNA designation.