



File Code: 1950

Date: March 19, 2008

Dear Salt Timber Harvest and Fuels Hazard Reduction Participant:

The purpose of this letter is to invite you to participate in the analysis process for the Salt Timber Harvest and Fuels Hazard Reduction Project (Salt Project), by providing any comments, suggestions, or concerns you may have about this proposal. To encourage your informed participation, this letter includes a description of the proposed action and the purpose and need for that action.

In October of 2006 we anticipated an environmental assessment would be prepared for this project and requested input from the public. The District received three comment letters. Based on the initial scoping of the project including interdisciplinary team review, field work, public input and agency consultations, the District has modified the proposal<sup>1</sup> and will prepare an environmental impact statement.

The Hayfork District of the Shasta Trinity National Forest is proposing to use vegetation treatments in the Salt Creek watershed to improve forest health, reduce risks from fire and provide forest products. The proposed **Salt Timber Harvest and Fuels Hazard Reduction Project (Salt project)** is in Trinity County, 10 air miles south of Hayfork, California and 3 air miles east of Post Mountain, California<sup>2</sup> (Figure 1). The 4,560-acre project area is within the Hayfork Adaptive Management Area (AMA), and Management Area 19, Indian Valley/Rattlesnake, of the Shasta-Trinity Land and Resource Management Plan (USFS 1995, p. 4-64 & 65).

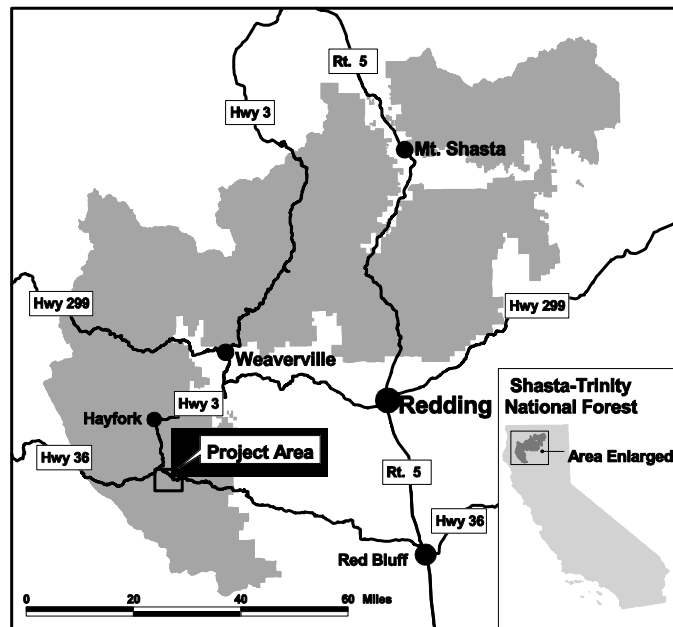


Figure 1-Salt Project Vicinity Map

The Salt project is an integral component of implementing the South Fork Management Unit watershed-level restoration strategy. A map of the proposed project is available at the Forest's web site <http://www.fs.fed.us/r5/shastatrinity/projects/>

<sup>1</sup> Precommercial thinning in plantations was added and some changes were made to proposed treatments.

<sup>2</sup> Includes treatment areas in T29N, R11W sections 4-9, T29N, R12W sections 1, 2 and 12, T30N, R11W sections 31 and 32, and T30N, R12W sections 25, 26, 35, and 36 M.D.M.



## PROPOSED ACTION

A table of proposed treatment units can be found in Attachment 1 of this letter. The table shows vegetation treatment prescriptions, sub-merchantable fuel treatments, acres, logging systems, and the Shasta-Trinity Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) management prescriptions for each unit.

In summary, the 1,658 acres of proposed vegetation treatments include:

- 984 acres of Intermediate Thinning from below, 31 units
- 14 acres of Hand Fuel Treatment, 1 unit
- 499 acres of Pre-commercial Thinning (plantations), 60 units
- 103 acres of Intermediate Thinning (shaded fuel break), 1 unit
- 58 acres of Regeneration Harvest with Green Tree Retention, 4 units

These treatments are expected to produce approximately 4.8 million board feet<sup>3</sup> of merchantable saw timber and 4,710 tons (bone dry) of biomass. Timber prices are at a 15-year low. For this reason appropriated dollars and service contracts may be required to complete all the treatments planned.

Each treatment type is further described below.

Intermediate Thinning (984 acres; 59 percent of treatments): In general, these are young, single-storied, mixed conifer stands that have had previous harvest entries and are in an over-stocked condition creating health and fire concerns. The objective is to improve stand health, vigor and growth by thinning the smaller trees that are competing with the larger trees for limited water, sunlight and nutrients. The thinning treatments would improve the ability of the remaining trees to withstand future drought conditions, insect attacks and fires. The reduction of stand density and fuels would moderate fire behavior and lessen the potential impacts of wildfire. Approximately 50 percent canopy closure would remain after treatments, and generally the largest healthiest trees would be retained.

Sixty acres of intermediate thinning would occur within intermittent or ephemeral stream riparian reserves. These thinning treatments would create riparian reserves that are more resistant to drought, insect attacks and fire, which would be consistent with the nine Aquatic Conservation Strategy objectives described in the Northwest Forest Plan.

Three tenths of a mile of temporary road would be constructed to access units and would be obliterated when the project is completed.

Hand Fuel Treatment (14 acres; 1 percent of treatments): The objective for this treatment is to improve stand health, resulting in trees that are more vigorous, with improved growth and resiliency to drought, insects, disease and fire. The stand would be thinned to about 150 trees per acre, but larger diameter trees would be retained. Suppressed and intermediate crown class trees

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<sup>3</sup> Equivalent to approximately 10,600 ccf.

would be removed if they are contributing to increased fire-hazard through ladder-fuel effects. Generally the trees that would be removed would be 10 inches diameter at breast height or less.

Pre-commercial Thinning (plantations, 499 acres; 30 percent of treatments): These single story stands were planted primarily in the 1970s and 1980s and are generally over-stocked. In the event of a wildfire, they are more susceptible to crown fire behavior because of their low hanging crowns and the presence of ladder fuels. The objective for thinning these stands is to improve stand health, vigor and growth making them more resilient to drought, insects, disease and fire. Stands would be thinned to about 150 trees per acre.

Intermediate Thinning (shaded fuel break, 103 acres; 6 percent of treatments): An old fuel break extends for approximately three miles along Blue Point Ridge on the western boundary of the project area; however, currently it has too much fuel accumulation to be effective. The objectives of a fuel break are to serve as a point of control in the event of wildfire, serve as a safety area for fire suppression forces, or be used as an anchor point for prescribed underburning operations. The Salt project would thin the overstory trees to approximately 40 percent canopy closure and most of the understory vegetation would be removed within the approximately 200 to 330 feet width of the fuel break. Two acres of the fuel break thinning would occur within intermittent or ephemeral stream riparian reserves. These treatments would be designed to be consistent with the nine Aquatic Conservation Strategy objectives described in the Northwest Forest Plan.

Regeneration Harvest with Green Tree Retention (58 acres; 3 percent of treatments): These stands are exhibiting very poor growth and high tree mortality. Regeneration of these stands is needed to develop vigorous, two-storied mixed conifer stands that become resilient to drought, insects, disease and fire over time. While most tree vegetation would be removed, 15 percent of the unit area would be untreated and retained as pockets of large trees. Large individual trees would be retained throughout the unit as well. The treated area would be planted with a mixture of conifer species to insure adequate regeneration.

Additionally, the proposed action would decommission approximately 8 miles of road no longer needed for management activities to improve watershed conditions. Approximately 3.4 miles proposed for decommissioning are “unclassified” roads, meaning they are abandoned or illegally developed roads. The remaining 4.6 miles are classified roads, meaning they are currently maintained and tracked as Forest Service System roads.

The Proposed Action was developed with design features to minimize or eliminate impacts from vegetation treatments. Some of the design features include:

- Maintenance and reconstruction of 18 miles of road that will be used to haul timber to reduce potential sedimentation
- Snags and downed logs greater than 19 inches in diameter at breast height would be left on site for wildlife habitat. Snags felled for safety reasons will be left on site as downed logs.
- Five tons of logs per acre will be retained with a preference to have 4 to 6 logs per acre at the largest available diameter.

- All hardwoods that have a reasonable chance of surviving and thriving after stand treatments will be retained.
- Numerous detailed specifications and restrictions will be fully explained in the environmental impact statement, and implemented to assure thinning within the intermittent and ephemeral riparian reserves meet the Aquatic Conservation Strategy Objectives.
- Limited Operating Periods would be applied to avoid direct adverse impacts to spotted owls if territories are occupied
- Ground disturbing activity will not occur during wet weather conditions.

## **PURPOSE AND NEED**

The purpose and need for the Salt project is four-fold:

- Improve forest health and resiliency
- Reduce hazardous fuels conditions and the potential for adverse impacts from wildfire to the National Forest and neighboring land
- Provide timber products
- Retain roads needed for future management; decommission those not required.

Improve forest health and resiliency: Competition for limited water, nutrients and sun in many highly stocked stands in the Salt project area has reduced the vigor, growth and resiliency of the mixed conifer species. Thinning is needed to improve tree resiliency to disturbance factors such as drought, insects, disease, and fires. Conversely, there are some stands in the suitable timber base that are understocked and are not growing well because of decadence. These stands are not meeting the growth and yield potential for those sites, and will not unless regeneration occurs.

The need to improve forest health is consistent with the Shasta-Trinity Land and Resource Management Plan Goals #34 and #35 and the ecosystem objective to obtain stocking control (thinning) and minimize mortality (USFS 1995, p. 4-5).

Fire Hazard: Fuel loadings and ladder fuels have created the potential for crown fire initiation and spread resulting in fires that can pose a threat to National Forest System lands as well as private land near the Salt project area. Decreasing fuels in the Salt project area is needed to help reduce the threat of wildfire to forest resources and local communities. The Trinity County Community Wildfire Protection Plan (Trinity County Fire Council 2005, p. 61, 62) discusses the need for pre-fire fuel treatment in and around three dispersed residential communities that are all within 3 miles of the Salt project area (Post Mountain - 1 mile west; Peanut - 3 miles north; and, Wildwood - 3 miles east). Salt is the sixth in a series of watershed scale projects occurring in a south to north pattern. This project strategically connects fuels treatments from other projects to reduce the ability for crown fire transition and spread that can be a threat to these communities.

The need to reduce fire hazard is consistent with the Shasta-Trinity Land and Resource Management Plan Goals #10 and #11 (USFS 1995, p. 4-4).

Timber products: Reducing fuels and stocking levels through thinning and regeneration harvests requires the removal of trees, some of which have commercial value. Providing wood products

to meet regional and national needs is consistent with Shasta-Trinity Land and Resource Management Plan Goals #3, #35, #36 (USFS 1995, p. 4-5).

Decommissioning roads not needed for management: Roads can be a major source of sedimentation. Watersheds can be improved and future road maintenance costs reduced by removing this potential sediment source when road access is no longer needed for management activities. This is consistent with Shasta-Trinity Land and Resource Management Plan Goals #39, #40 (USFS 1995, p. 4-6).

## PROJECT SCHEDULE

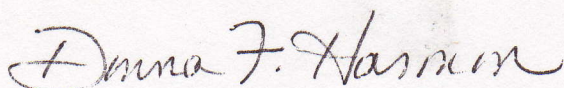
We expect to complete a draft environmental impact statement in the summer of 2008 and a final environmental impact statement and record of decision in the winter of 2008/2009. Service contracts would likely be offered in 2009 or 2010 following the decision. Project work is expected to be completed as funding becomes available.

## COMMENTS

Comments may be submitted by e-mail, fax, or U.S. Mail. Please provide any issues, concerns, suggestions, or additional information you may have regarding this project to: Sandy Mack, TEAMS USFS Enterprise Unit, 1801 N. First, Hamilton, MT 59840; Fax: 406-375-2638, or Email: [comments-pacificsouthwest-shasta-trinity-yollabolla-hayfork@fs.fed.us](mailto:comments-pacificsouthwest-shasta-trinity-yollabolla-hayfork@fs.fed.us)

Comments which are site specific, or are based on your knowledge of the area will better help us develop and evaluate alternatives to the Proposed Action. Although comments are welcome throughout the planning process, **providing comments by April 22, 2008<sup>4</sup>**, will allow time for us to consider your input during alternative development and analysis. Comments are a matter of public record and as such may be provided to interested parties upon request. Questions about this proposal should be directed to Sandy Mack, project team leader; 406-375-2638.

The TEAMS Forest Service Enterprise Unit is working closely with the Hayfork Ranger District to assist in planning and analysis for this project. Your comments may also be hand delivered to the Hayfork Ranger District office. Thank you for your participation in this process.



Donna F. Harmon  
South Fork Management Unit District Ranger

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<sup>4</sup> A notice of intent to prepare an environmental impact statement was filed with the Federal Register at the same time this letter was mailed. Comments concerning the scope of the analysis should be received no later than 30 days after the publication of that notice in the Federal Register.

## Attachment 1 ~ Salt Project Proposed Treatment Units

Unit	Acres	Treatment Prescription*	Logging System	Sub-merch Fuels Treat. **	Forest Plan Mgmt. Prescrip. ***
1	87	Intermediate Thin	Tractor	TOS	III & IX
2A	10	Intermediate Thin	Tractor	TOS	III & IX
2B	50	Intermediate Thin	Tractor	TOS	III & IX
2C	95	Intermediate Thin	Tractor	TOS	III & IX
3	12	Intermediate Thin	Tractor	TOS	III & IX
4	8	Intermediate Thin	Tractor	TOS	III
5	19	Intermediate Thin	Tractor	TOS	III, IX & VII
6	3	Intermediate Thin	Tractor	TOS	III
7	21	Intermediate Thin	Tractor	TOS	III & IX
9A	12	Intermediate Thin	Tractor	TOS	III
9B	17	Intermediate Thin	Tractor	TOS	III & IX
10	24	Intermediate Thin	Tractor	TOS	III & IX
11	17	Intermediate Thin	Tractor	TOS	VII & IX
12	36	Intermediate Thin	Tractor	TOS	VII & IX
13	9	Intermediate Thin	Tractor	TOS	III & IX
14	19	Intermediate Thin	Tractor	TOS	III
17	15	Regen. Green Tree Retention	Tractor	TSP/BP	III
18	16	Regen. Green Tree Retention	Tractor	TSP/BP	III
20	19	Intermediate Thin	Tractor	TOS	III & VIII
21	19	Intermediate Thin	Tractor	TOS	VII & IX
22	76	Intermediate Thin	Tractor	TOS	III & VIII
25A	12	Intermediate Thin	Tractor	TOS	III & IX
25B	5	Intermediate Thin	Tractor	TOS	III
25C	4	Intermediate Thin	Tractor	TOS	III
25D	14	Hand Fuel Treatment	None	HP/BP	III
25E	34	Intermediate Thin	Tractor	TOS	III
26	17	Intermediate Thin	Tractor	TOS	III & IX
30A	17	Intermediate Thin	Tractor	TOS	III & VIII
30B	13	Intermediate Thin	Tractor	TOS	III
32	138	Intermediate Thin	Helicopter	HP/BP	III, IX & VII
33A	109	Intermediate Thin	Tractor	TOS	VII & IX
33B	16	Intermediate Thin	Tractor	TOS	VII
33C	31	Intermediate Thin	Tractor	TOS	VII
36	35	Intermediate Thin	Tractor	TOS	VII & IX
37	10	Regen. Green Tree Retention	Tractor	TSP/BP	VII
40	17	Regen. Green Tree Retention	Tractor	TSP/BP	VII
45	103	Thin shaded fuel break	Tractor	TSJ/BP	III, IX & VII
****	499	Thinning in Plantations	None	TOS	
	<b>1,658</b>				

**\*Treatment Prescriptions:** See the scoping letter for descriptions of each treatment type.

**\*\*Sub-merchantable Fuel Treatments:** TOS -Treat On Site, removal, chipping, or concentration for burning within treatment units; TSP- Tractor Site Prep; HP - Handpile; TJP - Tractor Jackpot Pile; BP – Burn Piles. Mastication may be used in conjunction with any of these treatments. Mastication is the operation of reducing forest vegetation in the stand by grinding, shredding or chopping material. This treatment can lower fuel bed depth, raise crown base height, and increase fuel-ground contact to promote decomposition. Mastication is utilized with the goal of creating fuelbeds that, when burned, support slowly spreading fires that are easily controlled.

**\*\*\* Forest Plan Management Prescriptions** come from Shasta-Trinity Land and Resource Management Plan (1995, pages 4-64 -67).

III - Roaded Recreation - Within Prescription III, Roaded Recreation, “The emphasis of vegetation management activities will be to meet recreation, visual and wildlife objectives while maintaining healthy and vigorous ecosystems.” Applicable management practices include: “Fuels reduction and management, vegetation treatment by burning, Integrated Pest Management and Timber”. The Forest Plan ecosystem objectives are to obtain stocking control (thinning), and minimize mortality.

VIII - Commercial Wood Products Emphasis. - The objective is “to obtain an optimum timber yield of wood fiber products within the context of ecosystem management.” Management emphasis pertaining to this project includes fuels reduction and management, vegetation treatment by burning, integrated pest management, timber and wildlife habitat management. The Forest Plan desired ecosystem objectives are to obtain an sustained yield of wood fiber products from productive lands and to maintain and enhance habitat for big game, small game, upland game, birds, and species dependent on early seral stages. There is also an objective to reduce fire intensity in the thinned stands.

IX - Riparian Reserves. - Forest Plan direction for Prescription IX, Riparian Reserves states, “Apply silvicultural practices for Riparian Reserves to control stocking, reestablish and manage stands, and acquire desired vegetation characteristics needed to attain Aquatic Conservations Strategy objectives.” The Forest Plan ecosystem objectives are to provide connecting travel.

\*\*\*\* Thinning in old plantations would occur in 60 different units throughout the analysis area.

A map of the proposed project can be found on the Forest’s web site at <http://www.fs.fed.us/r5/shastatrinity/projects/>