

DECISION MEMO

LOWER SAN ANTONIO FUELS AND VEGETATION MANAGEMENT ACTIVITIES ADMINISTRATIVE SITE DEFENSIBLE SPACE

USDA FOREST SERVICE SAN GABRIEL RIVER RANGER DISTRICT, ANGELES NATIONAL FOREST LOS ANGELES COUNTY, CALIFORNIA

BACKGROUND

Creation of defensible space around administrative sites is included under the Angeles National Forest's Fuels and Vegetation Management Activities. Defensible space around Lower San Antonio will enhance strategic and tactical opportunities in case of a wildfire. Various treatments will be employed to reduce flammable fuel per acre on the project site.

Characteristics of the project site are summarized in Table 1 and the location of the project site is illustrated in Figure 1.

Table 1. Characteristics of the Project Site

Project Name	Location	Acreage	Elevation Range
Lower San Antonio Administrative Site Defensible Space	Township 4N, Range 11W, Section 31; and Township 4N, Range 12W, Section 36; Mt. Baldy, CA USGS Quadrangle	7.9 acres	2,482 to 2,555 feet

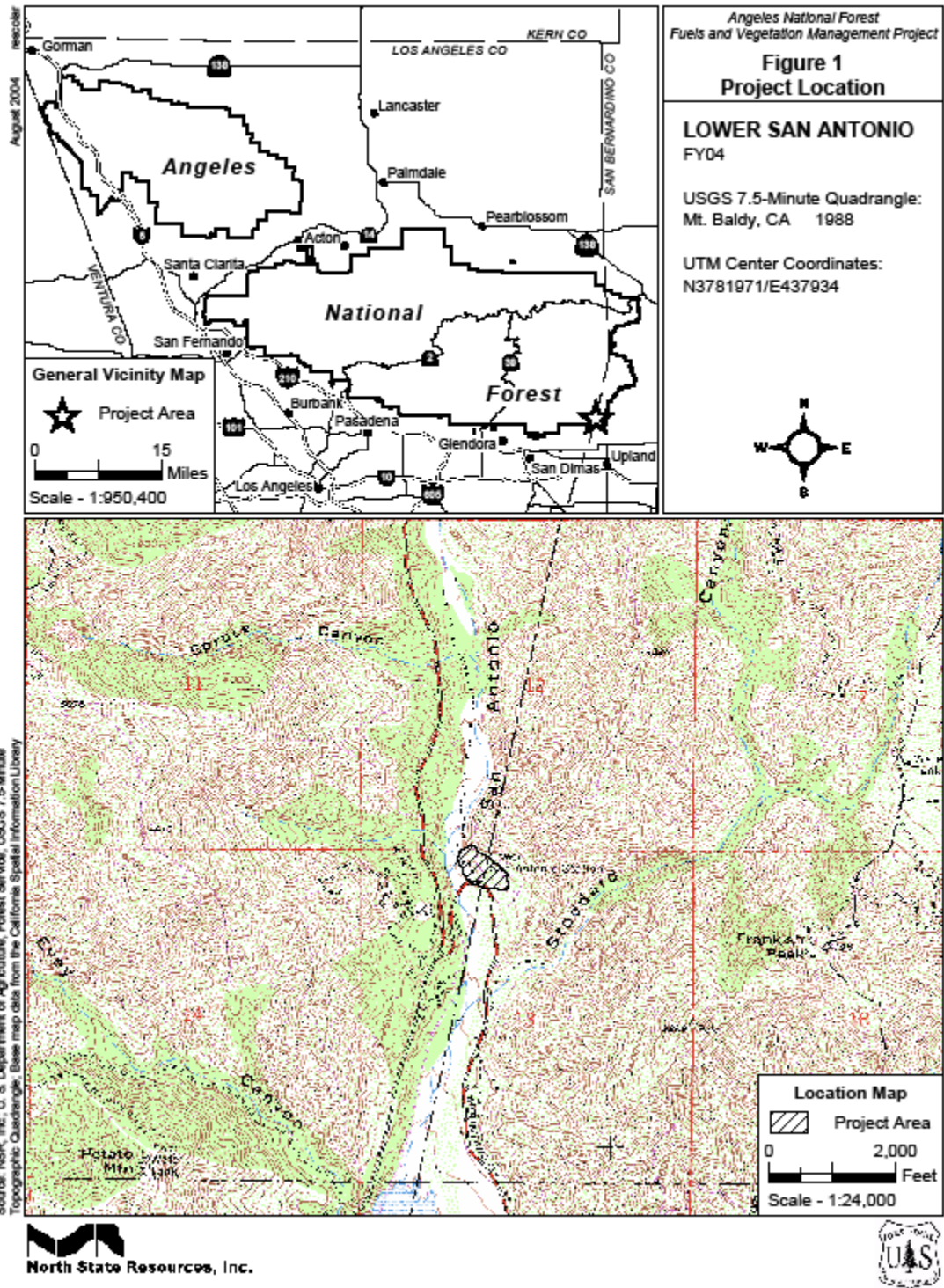
DECISION

It is my decision to proceed with the Lower San Antonio Administrative Site Defensible Space Project. This project follows the direction of the National Fire Plan and would not result in adverse environmental effects.

Project Description

The purpose of the project is to provide for public, employee, and fire fighter safety by reducing the fuel loading and arrangement of fuels at the East Fork Administrative Site Defensible Space project site. The project will follow the National Fire Plan (see <http://www.fireplan.gov/>) for defensible space.

A combination of treatments will be used which can include mechanical crushing, masticating, drum chopping, chainsaws, and prescribed fire. The project will generate brush/slash piles that



may be chipped or burned. The perimeter of these treatment areas may include handline constructed with tools and chainsaws. The project may require up to 100% ground disturbance

The project will include primary and secondary buffers. The primary buffer is defined as an area up to 100 feet from all structures or improvements. Within the primary buffer, vegetation removal will reduce canopy cover and ladder fuels from structures. Chaparral vegetation will be removed to ground level. In areas where trees are present, canopy cover will be reduced to 40%. If tree removal is necessary, suppressed, intermediate, and co-dominate trees will be the first to be removed. All trees 20 inches in diameter or greater will remain unless canopy cover is compromised; however, no tree larger than 24 inches in diameter will be removed. A minimum of 70 trees per acre will be left, where possible to maintain the 40% canopy cover. Residual trees will be pruned to a height of 10 feet from ground level. Any snags within the primary buffer will be removed.

The width of the secondary buffer will be variable depending on terrain and vegetation type. The secondary buffer will begin at the edge of the primary buffer and may extend to the project site boundaries. Within the secondary buffer, canopy cover will be reduced to 50-70%. Oak and conifer stands will be thinned by taking suppressed, intermediate, and co-dominate trees first. Most of the understory will be removed. Dominant and large trees over 20 inches in diameter will remain. The amount of residual trees can vary from 90-100 trees per acre. No snags or downed dead logs will be left within 300 feet of improvements. Otherwise, no more than two snags per acre, and no more than two to three downed dead logs greater than 20 inches in diameter will be allowed. Chaparral vegetation will be thinned by reducing the volume of leaf area to at least 50%. Any dead woody material will be cut from the remaining chaparral vegetation.

Fomes annosus (Heterobasidion annosum) is a fungus that attacks a wide range of woody plants causing a decay of roots and butt and the death of sapwood and cambium. All conifer species in California are susceptible to the fungus. To reduce the risk of fomes annosus infestation, Sporax will be applied to freshly cut stumps. The active ingredient in Sporax is borax, a naturally occurring mineral made of sodium, boron, oxygen, and water. Sporax would be applied in localized treatments, has low toxicity, and would not be used near water or during rain events.

Avoidance and Minimization Measures

The avoidance and mitigation measures included in Appendix A are incorporated into my decision, and are mandatory conditions of the authorization of this project.

REASONS FOR CATEGORICALLY EXCLUDING THE PROPOSED ACTION

The proposed action falls under the following categories of actions that may be excluded from documentation in an environmental impact statement (EIS) or environmental assessment (EA) and normally does not individually or cumulatively have a significant effect on the human environment:

Categorical Exclusion(31.12 (#3)) (FSH 1909.15): “Repair and maintenance of administrative sites” and (31.2 (#6)) (FSH 1909.15): “Timber stand and/or wildlife habitat improvement activities which do not include the use of herbicides or do not require more than one mile of low standards road construction.”

The environmental analysis conducted for the proposed action determined that there were no extraordinary circumstances or conditions that would result in significant adverse effects. Extraordinary circumstances include, but are not limited to, the following:

1. Threatened and Endangered Species or Their Critical Habitat

It is my determination that project activities will not affect Braunton’s milk-vetch, Nevin’s barberry, thread-leaved brodiaea, southwestern willow flycatcher, least Bell’s vireo, arroyo southwestern toad, California red-legged frog, mountain yellow-legged frog, or any other threatened, endangered, proposed, or candidate species. Project activities will not affect designated or proposed critical habitat for any listed species (ANF, 2006).

2. Forest Service Sensitive Species

It is my determination that project activities will not affect Plummer’s mariposa lily, San Gabriel bedstray, Hall’s monardella, rock monardella, or short-joint beavertail. It is my determination that project activities may affect pallid bat, Townsend’s big-eared bat, and San Diego horned lizard; but will not result in a loss of viability or a trend toward federal listing for these species (ANF, 2006).

3. Flood Plains, Wetlands, or Municipal Watersheds

The project area occurs within the flood plain of the San Antonio Canyon Creek. This creek is designated a seasonally flowing / intermittent stream. Any activities conducted within the Riparian Conservation Area of the creek, defined as 98 feet on each side of the stream as measured from the bank full edge, must be consistent with the riparian management objectives of the Land Management Plan (USDA Forest Service 2005).

4. Congressionally Designated Areas, Such as Wilderness, Wilderness Study Areas, or National Recreation Areas

There are no congressionally designated areas within the project area (ANF, 1987).

5. Inventoried Roadless Areas

The project area is not located within an inventoried roadless area (Forest Service, 2000).

6. Research Natural Areas

There are no research natural areas within the project area (ANF, 1987).

7. American Indians and Alaska Native Religious or Cultural sites

Regularly scheduled meetings and correspondence with the Native Americans on general Forest issues and mutual concerns have not identified any American Indian or Alaska Native religious or cultural sites of concern located within the treatment areas.

8. Archaeological Sites or Historic Properties or Areas

The Forest Archaeologist has surveyed the project site. It is his determination that mechanical equipment is to be prevented from working at the southwestern corner of the former eucalyptus grove, and the historic road bed located immediately northwest of the station. Compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, has been completed for this project (04SGR47I).

9. Clean Air Act General Conformity

The proposed action has been analyzed as required under section 176(c) of the federal Clean Air Act, as amended, and 40 CFR 93.156, and has been determined to conform to the applicable State Implementation Plan for the purpose of attaining and maintaining all National Ambient Air Quality Standards (ANF, 2005). This project does not exceed threshold levels and therefore meets federal conformity guidelines. No additional air quality analysis is required.

Therefore, I find that there are no extraordinary circumstances or conditions that might cause the action to have significant effects.

SCOPING & PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Internal scoping was conducted by the following resource specialists: Forest Biologist, Forest Botanist, Forest Archaeologist, and San Gabriel River Ranger District staff. No significant issues or extraordinary circumstances precluding the action were raised. A legal notice was published in the Los Angeles Daily News and Inland Valley Daily Bulletin on September 1, 2005. Letters requesting comments on the proposed action were mailed to interested or affected persons or organizations on September 2, 2005. This project was published in the forest Schedule of Proposed Actions (SOPA) on October 1, 2007.

FINDINGS REQUIRED BY OTHER LAWS

This proposed action is consistent with management direction (Angeles National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan), as required by the National Forest Management Act (FSM 1926.41, and FSH 1909.12); National Environmental Policy Act; Endangered Species Act; National Historic Preservation Act; Clean Water Act; Clean Air Act; and all other applicable Acts.

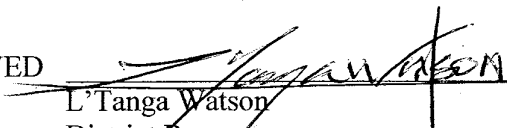
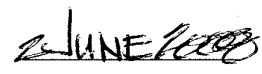
This action will not require a Civil Rights Impact Statement because it will not have a significant impact on the social environment.

IMPLEMENTATION DATE

This decision may be implemented immediately.

ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW OR APPEAL OPPORTUNITIES

This action is not subject to notice, comment and appeal under the requirements of 36_CFR 215.

APPROVED  DATE 
L'Tanga Watson
District Ranger
San Gabriel River Ranger District

REFERENCES

- [ANF] Angeles National Forest. 2006. Biological Evaluation/Biological Assessment for San Antonio. Fuels and Vegetation Management Activities; Attachment 2 – Administrative Defensible Space. Prepared by North State Resources, Inc., January 2006.
- [ANF] Angeles National Forest. 2005. Clean Air Act – Air Quality General Conformity Report for San Antonio. Fuels and Vegetation Management Activities; Attachment 2 – Administrative Defensible Space. Prepared by Earth Matters, Inc., December 2005.
- [ANF] Angeles National Forest. 2000. Inventoried Roadless Areas Map. Roadless Area Conservation. September 15, 2000. Available:
<http://www.roadless.fs.fed.us/states/ca/ange.pdf>.
- [ANF] Angeles National Forest. 1987. Map Packet: alternative maps, recreation opportunity spectrum map, visual quality objectives map, roadless area map, riparian map, ski area map, management area maps, facilities maps.

Appendix A
Avoidance and Minimization Measures

Avoidance and Minimization Measures

The following avoidance and minimization measures shall be implemented to avoid the potential for significant adverse effects to sensitive environmental resources. These measures are mandatory conditions of project authorization:

1. A monitoring program shall be developed and implemented (as part of the project plan) to ensure compliance with all required measures. A written report documenting compliance with the required measures shall be provided to the District Ranger within four weeks of project completion. Any failure or inability to implement any of the required measures shall be reported immediately to the District Ranger; and appropriate remedial measures shall be implemented.
2. All materials, wastes, and equipment shall be removed from the project site at the completion of the project.
3. Vehicles shall not be driven off of designated access roads, staging areas, and fuelbreaks during the course of project implementation. Where feasible, safety zones and escape routes shall consist of the existing roads and trails. Where feasible, snags and down wood shall be left in place.
4. Work crews shall be trained to identify any federally threatened, endangered, proposed, candidate, or Forest Service sensitive species (TEPCS species) with a potential to occur within the project site (ANF, 2006). Work crews shall immediately notify the District Biologist of any sightings of TEPCS animal species and of any injured/sick/abandoned animals. All conservation measures prescribed by the District Biologist shall be implemented.
5. Where feasible, burning and removal of trees and other vegetation shall be conducted outside of the active nesting season for migratory birds (roughly April 1st –September 1st).
6. Limited Operating Period Guidelines from the June 2004 Conservation Strategy for the California Spotted Owl (*Strix occidentalis occidentalis*) on the National Forests of Southern California shall be implemented, unless it is determined that suitable nesting habitat is not present within 0.25 mile or surveys confirm that spotted owls are not nesting within 0.25 mile of the project site. If surveys determine that spotted owls are nesting within 0.25 mile of the project area or nesting owls Protected Activity Center (PAC) is within 0.25 mile of the project area, project activities may not occur from February 1st through August 15th. Fuel Management Guidelines prescribed in the June 2004 Conservation Strategy for the California Spotted Owl on the National Forests of Southern California shall be in place to protect Nest Stands, PACs, and Home Range Cores (HRCs). This includes indirect fuel management, monitoring, vegetation treatments designed to improve spotted owl habitat, and the application of guidelines described in Table 2 of the June 2004 conservation strategy.
7. If any TEPCS plants are present within the project site (ANF, 2006), their populations and appropriate buffer(s) shall be flagged and avoided. In addition, the Forest Botanist shall be consulted prior to implementation of ground-disturbing project activities, to determine whether any additional conservation measures are required.

8. To prevent the spread of noxious weeds, the following is required:

- 8a) All vehicles and equipment shall be washed before entering the project site and before leaving the project site. This includes all exterior parts of vehicles (e.g. wheels, undercarriages, bumpers, etc.) and all mechanical or hand tools (e.g. chain-saws, hand clippers, pruners, etc.). All washing must take place where rinse water is collected and disposed of in a sanitary sewer or a landfill.
- 8b) A daily written log shall be kept for every vehicle that enters and leaves the project site. The daily log shall include, but is not limited to: a description of the vehicle (e.g. license no., make, model), date and time entering and leaving, methods employed to wash the vehicle, equipment that was washed, names of personnel within the vehicle, and the signature of the driver or other personnel responsible for ensuring that the vehicle and equipment was adequately washed.
- 8c) The daily written logs shall be provided to the Forest Botanist and the District Ranger at the completion of every work week throughout the duration of project activities.

9. If any streams or riparian areas are present within the project site, the following is required:

- 9a) Riparian areas shall not be burned directly or intentionally. A burn avoidance buffer (measured from the bank full edge of the stream) shall be used around riparian zones and water sources: lighting shall be done outside the buffer. The buffer shall be 100 meters for perennial stream; 30 meters for intermittent streams. Fire creeping down into riparian zones shall be allowed to burn at low intensities.
- 9b). Barriers shall be developed to prevent vehicle encroachment in riparian habitats. The barriers shall not be removed as a result of treatments.
- 9c) Construction of firebreaks within riparian habitat shall be avoided except where handlines have to cross riparian zones. Those short lines shall be constructed and maintained with handcrews using handtools and chainsaws. The width shall be kept to a minimum and the length of handlines in riparian shall also be kept to a minimum.
- 9d) Buffer zones (also called Riparian Conservation Areas—RCAs), measured from the bank full edge of the stream, shall be established to protect riparian habitats and water quality. The buffer shall be 100 meters for perennial stream; 30 meters for intermittent streams. No direct burning or treating of vegetation within the buffer zones shall occur. Fire may enter the buffer zones by “backing” downslope, burning the understory at low intensity. But no effort shall be made to apply fire directly to the buffer zones or start a hot fire upwind that would intentionally move into the riparian buffer zones. To the extent possible, low creeping fires

shall be used near riparian areas, minimizing the burning/thinning of cottonwoods, alders, willows, and other riparian overstory.

- 9e) Waterbars or other appropriate erosion control techniques shall be used to minimize amount of erosion and reduce sedimentation flow into riparian areas.