



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

MiWok Ranger District

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File Code: 1950-1

Date: December 21, 2007

Dear Interested Public:

The MiWok Ranger District of the Stanislaus National Forest is in the process of preparing an environmental analysis for the ***Phase II Fuel Reduction, Forest Health and Road Management Stewardship Project***. This project is located on the Mi-Wok Ranger District of the Stanislaus National Forest, roughly between the North Fork of the Tuolumne River and the first prominent ridge east of Dodge ridge, encompassing portions of the Wrights Creek, Hull Creek and Rush Creek drainages. The project area stretches from the District boundary to the north, and is bounded by Basin Creek to the south. Treatment activities are proposed on approximately 5,500 acres of the 17,700 acre planning area. The project lies entirely within Tuolumne County. The objectives of the project are to: 1) thin the forest stands to reduce the fire danger and improve forest health, 2) create a shaded fuelbreak system, 3) reduce the brush by prescribe burning, shredding and/or goat browsing, and 4) close or obliterate roads and trails that are in poor condition and are unneeded for management access.

Our goal is to move this area toward a condition that would be less susceptible to damage from wildfires or drought, with a road and trail system that is in good condition. Due to the large size and scope of this project, we are enclosing just a brief description and general map of the project area for your information.

For more maps and more details about the project, please visit our website (<http://www.fs.fed.us/r5/stanislaus/projects/index.shtml>) or stop by our District office, 24695 Highway 108 in Mi-Wuk Village. You can also request hard copies of the information by contacting the Mi-Wok District, P.O. Box 100, MiWuk Village, CA 95346 [209 586-3234].

We are sending you this letter because you have expressed interest in the proposal, you own property within or adjacent to the project area, or are operating under permit in the vicinity of the proposed project. We wanted you to be aware of the proposed project, and provide you with the opportunity to comment on the proposal. We would like comments by January 25th so that we can identify issues and concerns, develop alternatives, and finalize proposed prescriptions. We expect to have an Environmental Assessment (EA) documenting the analysis for review in April. We encourage you to respond to this early so that we can work with you to develop alternatives that meet the purpose and need of the project. Also, we ask that you please respond if you would like to continue to receive information regarding this project. Alternatives will be evaluated, with the final decision documenting the rationale for its selection. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

/s/ Ann L. Denton

ANN L. DENTON
District Ranger

Enclosure



Proposed Action—Scoping

Phase II Fuel Reduction, Forest Health and Road Management Stewardship

12/21/2007

Project Location

The Phase II Fuel Reduction, Forest Health and Road Management Stewardship project is located on the Mi-Wok Ranger District of the Stanislaus National Forest, roughly between the North Fork of the Tuolumne River and the first prominent ridge east of Dodge Ridge, encompassing portions of the Wrights Creek, Hull Creek and Rush Creek drainages. The project area stretches from the District boundary to the north, and is bounded by Basin Creek to the south. Treatment activities are proposed on approximately 5,500 acres of the 17,700 acre planning area. Approximately 4,900 of those treatment acres are located within the WUI defense and threat zones. The project lies entirely within Tuolumne County. The legal description of the project area is: Sections 12, 13, 24, 25, 36, T2N, R 16E; Sections 2, 5, 7, 8, 17, 18, 30, T2N, R17E; Sections 13, 21-28, 32-35, T3N, R17E; Sections 4-8, 17-20, 30, T3N R18E; and sections 31-33, T4N, R18E. Maps of the project area are enclosed.

Purpose and Need for Project

The purpose of this project is to protect lives, property and resources (including habitat) from catastrophic wildfire, and improve forest health within the planning area by: 1) reducing the spread and intensity of fire burning on the landscape, 2) decreasing stand densities, 3) moving species composition and stand structure toward those that were thought to be present prior to logging and fire suppression, 4) Closing roads/routes that are determined to be unnecessary or are causing unacceptable resource damage.

In June 2002, the Stanislaus National Forest completed and released the Central Stanislaus Watershed Analysis (CSWA). One of the determinations made in that analysis was that there was a high risk of fire occurrence in the wildland/urban interface area surrounding the communities of Cold Springs, Peter Pam, Long Barn, Sierra Village, Mi-Wuk Village, Sugar Pine, Confidence and Ponderosa Hills. Most of this area was determined to be in Fire Regime Condition Class 3, which is defined as having been substantially altered from the natural (historical) range of vegetation characteristics, fuel composition, and fire frequency, severity and pattern. On June 10, 2005, Forest Supervisor Tom Quinn signed the Decision Notice and Finding of No Significant Impact for the South 108 Fuel Reduction, Forest Health and Road Management Project (#1694). That decision authorized a variety of treatments, including various combinations of mechanical and hand thinning, mastication, prescribed burning, and goat browsing on approximately 4,840 acres along the Highway 108 corridor. That project is currently being implemented, with thinning operations expected to be completed sometime next year.

The South 108 project focused primarily on the Wildland-Urban intermix (WUI) defense zone, bound to the east by the North Fork of the Tuolumne River. The Phase II Stewardship

project would primarily focus on the WUI threat zone, picking up where the South 108 project left off.

Approximately 2,700 acres of plantation lie within the planning area. These were planted in an effort to restock the area following large fires (most notably the Wrights Creek and Flora fires, 1950 & 1960 respectively), clear cuts, and group selection thinning. We are proposing to treat 1,960 acres of plantation. Many of the older plantations (planted 20-50 years ago) that were thinned during the 1990s are beginning to close in, creating a even, continuous canopy. Many of the plantations lack diversity, both in structure and species composition. Where plantations were thinned more heavily, such as for fuel breaks, crown spacing is not bad; however many areas contain tall dense brush which would most likely result in flame lengths and fireline intensity outside our desired conditions for the area.

Most of the natural stands in the area have escaped fire for many decades. Lack of fire, along with past logging activities (most notably railroad logging at the turn of the century and insect salvage and sanitation harvests in the later part of the last century) have shifted vegetation away from a more open pine forest type to a denser, less fire resistant/resilient forest with higher proportions of shade tolerant species. Many of these stands are near or above the threshold for increased drought- and insect-related mortality. Additionally, heavy surface fuel loads and the presence of dense thickets of small fir and incense cedar put much of these areas at risk to stand replacing fire. Much of these stands are Northern goshawk and/or California spotted owl protected activity centers (PACs), or spotted owl home range core areas (HRCAs), providing habitat for species dependent on mature forest. The Phase II Stewardship project would treat a small portion of these stands to interrupt fire spread and allow for increased suppression capabilities and/or reduced fire intensities should fire burn through treatment areas into those areas left untreated.

Finally, there is also a need to stop or reduce resource damage occurring due to the use of some roads and Off Highway Vehicles (OHV) trails. The Stanislaus National Forest is currently in the process of designating roads and trails open for motorized use. That process, however, does not provide the site specific analysis necessary to physically close and decommission roads and routes. For those roads and trails not covered under that process, this project would serve to close routes and roads considered unnecessary and /or causing resource damage.

Proposed Action

The Proposed Action is to conduct fuels and fire hazard reduction treatments and improve forest health in the wildland/urban interface and adjacent areas from the North Fork of the Tuolumne River to the Hull Creek sub-watershed (near Hulls Meadow). In addition, there are some roads and unauthorized Off-Highway-Vehicle (OHV) trails in the analysis area that are proposed for closure or decommissioning due to resource damage. All proposals are consistent with the Stanislaus National Forest's Travel Management Plan proposed action except as noted in the summary of activities.

The fuels reduction and forest health improvement objectives would be accomplished through the use of thinning, biomass, hand thinning and pruning, shredding, shaded fuelbreak establishment, and prescribed burning. Following are descriptions of these proposed treatments:

Thinning treatments in natural stands would consist of harvesting trees to remove fuel ladders and reduce crown density. Trees selected for removal would be no larger than 30" diameter at breast height (dbh). Mechanical treatments would be prohibited within a 500-foot radius buffer around California spotted owl activity centers. The majority of the trees removed would be in the understory, in the suppressed and intermediate crown classes. Removal of the trees would be accomplished using timber sale contracts or service contracts.

Thinning in plantations would consist of harvesting merchantable and submerchantable trees to reduce crown continuity and increase species diversity. A variety of spacing prescriptions will be employed to decrease the probability of crown fire initiation and spread, increase stand heterogeneity and accelerate the development of large trees, while keeping stand densities below the threshold for increased susceptibility to drought and insect related mortality for a period of 20 years.

Biomass treatments would entail the mechanical removal of unmerchantable trees and trees between 4" and 10" dbh. These trees would be removed as pulpwood or biomass fuel for electric co-generation plants, or decked and left on site for public firewood cutting. The biomass treatments would be conducted at the same time as the thinning treatments. Hand thinning and pruning will be used to accomplish this removal where the use of mechanical treatments is not feasible or desirable due to other resource concerns.

Shredding treatments consist of the mastication of brush, small trees and woody debris lying on the ground. The shredded material generated would be left on site. This treatment would be conducted in areas that are currently predominantly brush or small plantations, as well as a follow-up to thinning and biomass treatments in some areas. The predominantly brush areas would be shredded in 2009 and 2010, while the remainder of the areas would be shredded after the thinning and biomass activities were completed.

Fuelbreaks are forested stands and non-forested that have been thinned to a wider spacing than the surrounding area. Many of the proposed fuelbreaks are naturally open areas, requiring only shredding and/or hand cutting of brush with incidental thinning of small trees. Some portions of the fuelbreaks proposed have been thinned as a fuel break already, requiring only minor thinning along with the treatment of brush and other ladder fuels. Small areas along the fuel breaks occur in areas where the surrounding vegetation is as dense as the area proposed for fuel break construction. The intent of establishing and maintaining these areas is to provide a strategic location to conduct fire suppression activities (such as backburning and fire retardant drops) safely and effectively. The fuelbreaks are approximately 300 feet in width, with variations tailored to fit with the topography, roads and private property boundaries.

Prescribe burning is the intentional burning of vegetation under controlled conditions, to reduce the fire hazard. These treatments would be conducted after the other treatments have been completed. Conducting the mechanical treatments first, including the establishment of shaded fuelbreaks, would help ensure that the burning could be conducted with minimal risk to the adjacent private property.

The activities described above will be accomplished using a combination of mechanical, manual and thermal (fire) treatments. Trees larger than approximately 10" dbh will be sold as sawlogs. Most smaller diameter trees (biomass) will be chipped and transported off-site for power generation, or left on site for public firewood. Some small material will remain on site

for soil protection. Snags and downed logs will be retained as needed to meet SNFPA requirements.

Mechanical treatments will be done using ground-based equipment (i.e., shredding equipment, tractors, feller-bunchers and rubber-tired skidders) and cable machines and/or helicopters. Manual and thermal treatments include hand-cutting, burning concentrations of small woody material, and prescribe burning larger areas.

The proposed action will meet all the applicable desired conditions and management requirements in the SNFPA Record of Decision, as well as other state, federal and local legal and/or policy considerations that apply to this project. Resource protection measures will be described in detail in the EA.

Following is a summary of the proposed fuels reduction and forest health improvement treatments:

Treatment Activity	Acres
Thin/Biomass/Shred (Natural Stand)	2,045
Thin/Biomass/Shred (Plantation)	1,770
Thin/Shred (Natural Stand)	147
Thin/Shred (Plantation)	64
Thin/Hand Thin	34
Hand Thin/Pile	2
Shred – Primary Treatment	831
Hand Thin after Shred	357
Prescribe Burn after Mechanical Treatments	5,013
Prescribed Burn – Primary Treatment	601

	Miles
Fuelbreak Maintenance	10.7
Fuelbreak Establishment & Maintenance	10.4

Road reconstruction or maintenance would occur on roads, as needed, in support of treatment activities. Road reconstruction activities include one or more of the following activities: blading and shaping; reconditioning the roadway; clearing; surfacing; widening; repairing, cleaning or replacing culverts or dips; adding metal culvert end sections; installing barriers and water bars to close or re-close roads after the project; and, similar actions to make the road serviceable for the project haul trucks and resistant to erosion after the project. Road maintenance activities consist of minor actions such as blading, light clearing, dust abatement (usually watering), and cleaning culverts after project completion.

Additional road management treatments would consist of closing (blocking the road, removing culverts, no scheduled maintenance but the road could be re-opened if needed for future management), seasonally closing (installing gates to limit access to summer only) or decommissioning roads and OHV trails (blocking, tilling, making the road/trail undriveable with no intent to reuse in the future).

All road management decisions are consistent with the Stanislaus Travel Management Plan proposed Action (December 2007) with the following exceptions: One mile of road 2N93 is proposed for decommissioning, one mile of road 2N93 is proposed for closing, Routes 21613A (0.6 miles) and 21624B (0.5 miles) – currently unauthorized - are proposed for addition to the National Forest road system for fire access.

Dates

We would appreciate comments by January 25th so that we can identify issues and concerns, develop alternatives, and finalize prescription alternatives. By April we expect to have an Environmental Assessment (EA) documenting the analysis ready for review. We encourage you to respond to this early so that we can work with you to develop alternatives that meet the purpose and need of the project. Alternatives will be evaluated, with the final decision documenting the rationale for its selection.

Phase II Fuel Reduction, Forest Health and Road Management Stewardship Project

Proposed Treatment units - December, 2007

Northern Units

Unit	Acres	Treatment	Land Allocation	Harvest System	Notes
2070	22.8	Thin/biomass/shred/burn	General Forest	Tractor	Existing Fuelbreak
2071	25.1	Thin/biomass/shred/burn	WUI TZ, HRCA	Tractor	
2072	30.4	Thin/biomass/shred/burn	General Forest	Tractor	
2073	15.2	Thin/shred/burn	WUI TZ, HRCA	Cable or Helicopter	
2074	25.6	Thin/biomass/shred/burn	WUI TZ, HRCA	Tractor	
2075	9.4	Thin/biomass/shred/burn	WUI TZ, HRCA	Tractor	
2076	9.6	Shred/burn	CASO PAC	NA	
2120	160.0	Thin/biomass/shred/burn	WUI TZ, part HRCA	Tractor	Plantation mostly
2121	31.7	Thin/biomass/shred/burn	WUI TZ, Part HRCA	Tractor	Fuelbreak construction
2122	96.2	Shred/burn	WUI TZ, part HRCA	NA	
2130	67.2	Shred/handcut/pile/burn	WUI TZ	NA	Fuelbreak, part plantation
2182	41.1	Shred/handcut/pile/burn	WUI TZ, part HRCA	NA	Existing Fuelbreak
2240	23.4	Shred/handcut/pile/burn	WUI DZ/TZ, HRCA	NA	
2241	20.3	Thin/biomass/shred/burn	WUI DZ, HRCA	Tractor	Plantation
2242	43.9	Thin/biomass/shred/burn	WUI TZ, part HRCA	Tractor	
2243	20.8	Thin/biomass/shred/burn	WUI TZ, HRCA	Tractor	
2244	46.1	Thin/biomass/shred/burn	WUI TZ	Tractor	
2245	16.5	Thin/handcut/pile/burn	WUI TZ	Cable or Helicopter	
2246	17.8	Thin/handcut/pile/burn	WUI DZ/TZ, HRCA	Cable or Helicopter	
2247	7.1	Thin/shred/burn	WUI TZ, HRCA	Helicopter	Plantation
2248	58.7	Thin/biomass/shred/burn	WUI TZ, part HRCA	Tractor	Existing Fuelbreak
2249	2.6	Thin/shred/burn	WUI TZ, HRCA	Cable or Helicopter	Plantation
2249	32.2	Thin/shred/burn	WUI TZ, HRCA	Cable or Helicopter	Plantation
2250	278.7	Shred/burn	WUI DZ/TZ, part HRCA	NA	
2251	53.8	Shred/Handcut/pile/burn	WUI TZ, part HRCA	NA	Fuelbreak construction

Middle Units

Unit	Acres	Treatment	Land Allocation	Harvest System	Notes
3040	36.8	Shred/burn	General Forest, CAR	NA	Plantation
3170	40.1	Thin/biomass/shred/burn	HRCA, CAR	Tractor	
3190	235.5	Thin/biomass/shred/burn	part WUI TZ, Part HRCA, CAR	Tractor	
3191	14.8	Thin/biomass/shred/burn	HRCA, CAR	Tractor	Hull Creek campground unit
3193	53.7	Thin/biomass/shred/burn	WUI TZ, CAR	Tractor	Plantation
3194	9.7	Thin/biomass/shred/burn	WUI TA, part HRCA, CAR	Tractor	Plantation
3195	2.2	Handcut/pile/burn	WUI TZ, HRCA, CAR	NA	No mechanized equipment
3210	21.6	Thin/shred/burn	WUI TZ, HRCA, OFEA	Cable or Helicopter	
3211	21.3	Thin/biomass/shred/burn	WUI TZ, HRCA, OFEA	Tractor	
3221	15.4	Thin/biomass/shred/burn	WUI TZ, part HRCA, part OFEA	Tractor	mostly plantation
3222	41.0	Thin/biomass/shred/burn	WUI TZ	Tractor	Plantation, Existing Fuelbreak
3230	302.0	Thin/biomass/shred/burn	WUI TZ	Tractor	
3231	24.2	Thin/biomass/shred/burn	WUI TZ, HRCA	Tractor	Plantation
3232	11.3	Rx burn	WUI TZ, CASO PAC	NA	
3240	275.3	Rx burn	part WUI TZ, CAR	NA	Part Plantation
3241	16.9	Thin/biomass/shred/burn	HRCA	Tractor	
3250	74.8	Thin/biomass/shred/burn	WUI TZ, CAR	Tractor	
3260	333.3	Thin/biomass/shred/burn	WUI TZ, CAR	Tractor	Plantation
3270	160.6	Rx burn	WUI TZ, part HRCA, Part OFEA	NA	
3271	306.7	Thin/biomass/shred/burn	WUI TZ, part OFEA	Tractor	Plantation
3280	52.9	Shred/burn	WUI TZ, Part OFEA	NA	Plantation
3281	84.1	Shred/handcut/pile/burn	WUI TZ, part HRCA, part OFEA	NA	
3282	67.8	Thin/biomass/shred/burn	WUI TZ, OFEA	Tractor	Plantation
3283	178.5	Thin/biomass/shred/burn	WUI TZ, HRCA, OFEA	Tractor	Plantation
3300	39.9	Thin/biomass/shred/burn	HRCA, CAR	Tractor	
3301	7.7	Thin/biomass/shred/burn	part General Forest/part HRCA, CAR	Tractor	
3320	237.2	Thin/biomass/shred/burn	WUI TZ, part HRCA	Tractor	Plantation
3340	22.6	Thin/biomass/shred/burn	WUI TZ, Part HRCA	Tractor	Plantation
3341	123.3	Thin/biomass/shred/burn	WUI TZ	Tractor	Plantation
3342	76.5	Thin/biomass/shred/burn	WUI TZ, HRCA	Tractor	Plantation
3350	53.0	Thin/biomass/shred/burn	WUI DZ, CAR	Tractor	
3351	80.6	Thin/biomass/shred/burn	WUI DZ, CASO PAC, CAR	Tractor	12" dbh limit
3352	20.4	Shred/handcut/pile/burn	WUI DZ, CAR	NA	Scattered Plantations

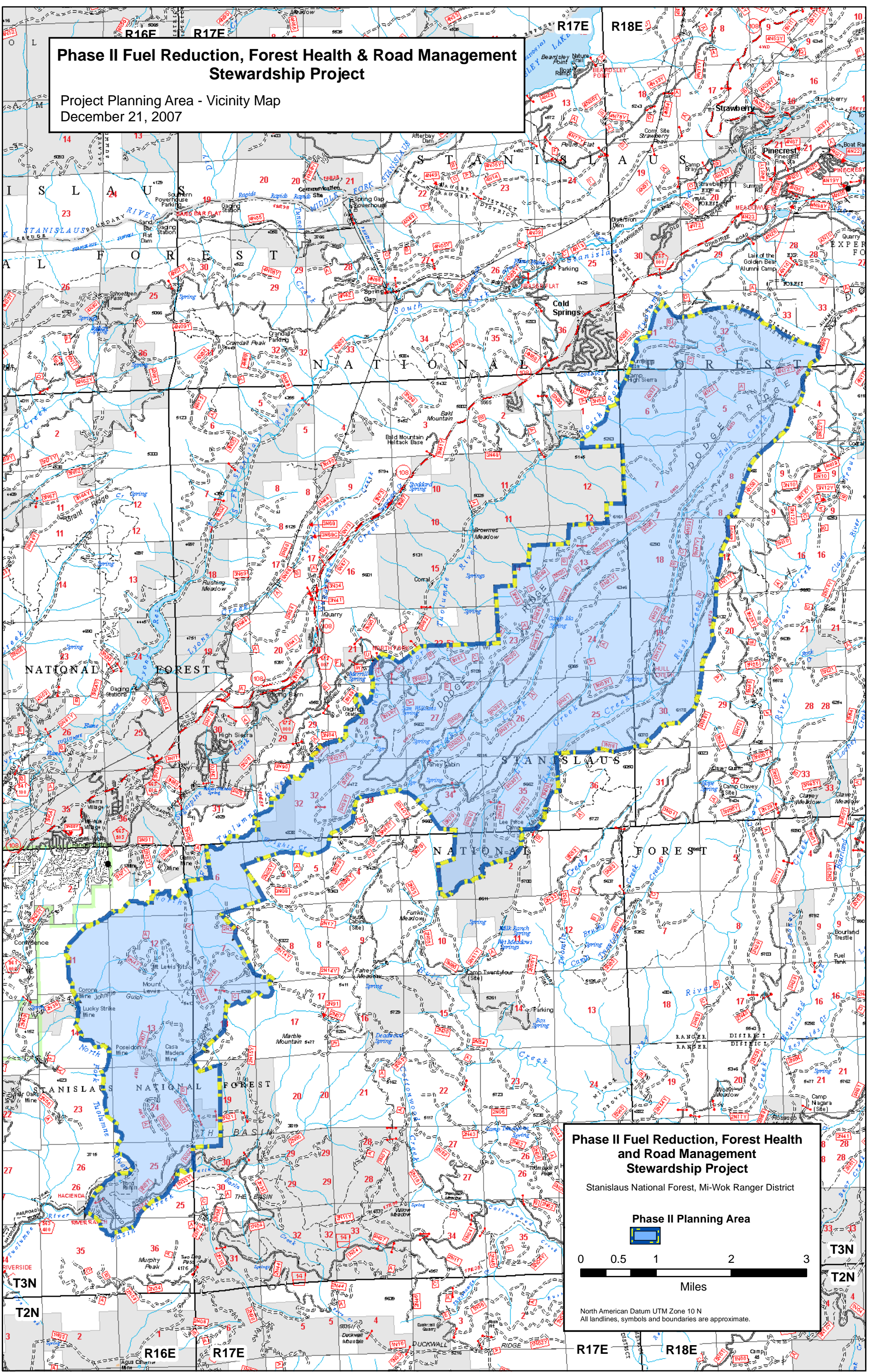
Southern Units

Unit	Acres	Treatment	Land Allocation	Harvest System	Notes
3041	25.7	Thin/biomass/shred/burn	WUI TZ, CAR	Tractor	
3042	9.1	Thin/biomass/shred/burn	General Forest, CAR	Tractor	Plantation
3043	61.5	Thin/biomass/shred/burn	part WUI TZ, HRCA	Tractor	
3044	8.5	Thin/biomass/shred/burn	WUI TZ, Part HRCA	NA	Fuelbreak construction
3060	154.1	Rx burn only	WUI DZ, CASO PAC, NG PAC	NA	
3061	138.3	Thin/biomass/shred/burn	WUI TZ, HRCA	Tractor	
3062	14.7	Thin/biomass/shred/burn	WUI TZ, HRCA	Tractor	
3063	15.1	Thin/shred/burn	WUI TZ, HRCA	Cable or helicopter	
3064	10.7	Thin/shred/burn	WUI TZ, HRCA	Cable or Helicopter	
3065	23.4	Thin/biomass/shred/burn	WUI TZ	Tractor	Existing Fuelbreak
3066	22.4	Shred/handcut/pile/burn	WUI TZ, Part HRCA	NA	Fuelbreak construction
3080	122.0	Thin/biomass/shred/burn	General Forest, CAR	Tractor	
3081	20.3	Shred/handcut/pile/burn	General Forest, CAR	NA	Plantation
3171	97.3	Thin/biomass/shred/burn	General Forest, CAR	Tractor	
3180	234.6	Thin/biomass/shred/burn	WUI TZ, Gen. Forest	Tractor	Scattered Plantations
3200	25.9	Thin/biomass/shred/burn	HRCA, CAR	Tractor	
3201	60.7	Thin/biomass/shred/burn	General Forest, CAR	Tractor	Plantation
4310	57.0	Thin/biomass/shred/burn	WUI DZ, part HRCA	Tractor	Mostly plantation
4311	22.4	Thin/biomass/shred/burn	WUI TZ, HRCA	Tractor	
4320	11.7	Thin/biomass/shred/burn	part WUI TZ	Tractor	
4321	47.2	Thin/biomass/shred/burn	General Forest	Tractor	Existing Fuelbreak
4322	16.1	Thin/biomass/shred/burn	WUI TZ	Tractor	Mostly Plantation
4323	7.1	Thin/biomass/shred/burn	General Forest	Tractor	Fuelbreak construction
4324	64.3	Thin/biomass/shred/burn	part WUI TZ	Tractor	
4325	96.6	Thin/biomass/shred/burn	HRCA	Tractor	
4326	41.7	Thin/biomass/shred/burn	WUI TZ, HRCA	Tractor	
4330	24.7	Shred/handcut/pile/burn	General Forest	NA	Fuelbreak construction

WUI - Wildland Urban Intermix ; TZ - Threat zone ; DZ - Defense Zone ; CASO PAC - California Spotted Owl Protected Activity Center ; HRCA - CASO Home Range Core Area ; NG PAC - Northern Goshawk Protected Activity Center ; OFEA - Old Forest Emphasis Area ; CAR - Critical Aquatic Refuge

Phase II Fuel Reduction, Forest Health & Road Management Stewardship Project

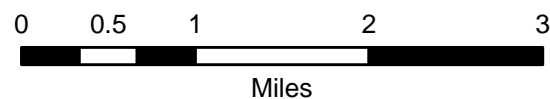
Project Planning Area - Vicinity Map
December 21, 2007



Phase II Fuel Reduction, Forest Health and Road Management Stewardship Project

Stanislaus National Forest, Mi-Wok Ranger District

Phase II Planning Area



North American Datum UTM Zone 10 N
All landlines, symbols and boundaries are approximate.

T3N
T2N

R17E R18E