



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

Lake Tahoe Basin Management
Unit

35 College Drive
South Lake Tahoe, CA 96150
(530) 543-2600

File Code: 1950

Date: March 26, 2009

Dear Interested Citizen:

The Draft Environmental Impact Statement/Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIS/DEIR) for the South Shore Fuel Reduction and Healthy Forest Restoration (South Shore) project has been completed and is available for public review and comment. The project is located on the Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit (LTBMU). The South Shore project area extends from Cascade Lake on the northwest to the Heavenly Mountain Resort Special Use Permit boundary and the Nevada State line on the northeast, and from Lake Tahoe on the north to the LTBMU boundary on the south, all within El Dorado County, California.

The LTBMU proposes to reduce the risk of high intensity wildfire on National Forest Lands in the wildland urban intermix (WUI). The project would include thinning activities to reduce unnatural forest densities and ladder fuels that contribute to high intensity crown fires, followed by surface fuels treatments. Removing surface and ladder fuels in the WUI would provide space for an oncoming crown fire to drop to a surface fire where deployment of hand crews could be expected to succeed in controlling the spread of the fire. Thinning to achieve forest density more resistant to drought, insects, and disease is included in the action alternatives, along with removal of encroaching conifers in riparian areas, aspen stands, and meadows. Retention of the larger, more fire resistant trees and retention of the more fire and drought-resistant pine species would also improve the vegetative species distribution over the long term. The action alternatives are in compliance with, and would implement the direction in the LTBMU Forest Plan, including amendments.

The Responsible Official for this project is the Forest Supervisor, Terri Marceron. Based on the analysis presented in the DEIS/DEIR, the Forest Supervisor will choose an alternative for implementation that best meets the purpose and need for the proposal and addresses the issues considered in the analysis. The three alternatives developed, 1, 2, and 3, consider a full range of reasonable management options, including the No Action and Proposed Action Alternatives. The DEIS/DEIR analyzes in detail the No Action Alternative, the Proposed Action Alternative, and Alternative #3.

In **Alternative 1**, the No-Action Alternative, no vegetative treatments would take place and ladder and surface fuel loads would continue to increase. The Forest within the South Shore WUI would continue to be at risk for high-intensity wildfire.

In **Alternative 2**, the Proposed Action, vegetative treatments to reduce hazardous fuels on 10,671 acres would. Most of the South Shore project area will require activities extending over a period of three to seven years to attain fuel reduction conditions that would remain within desired condition for a period of 15 to 20 years post treatment. Most areas would require two connected treatments, the first to remove trees and the second to reduce surface fuels.

Providing wildlife habitat and restoration of a forest structure with increased resistance to drought, disease, and insects are objectives that also reduce hazardous fuels. The South Shore project includes objectives for tree spacing and basal area to increase overall tree vigor and forest health while retaining larger trees and emphasizing retention of Jeffrey, Ponderosa, and sugar pine species. Restoration and maintenance of meadows and aspen stands would be accomplished by removal of encroaching conifers, mainly lodgepole pine and white fir.

In **Alternative 3**, vegetative treatments to reduce hazardous fuels on 10,112 acres would occur. This alternative was developed to address the issues raised in public scoping concerning watershed and



wildlife effects. Short-term watershed disturbance is potentially significant because project activities would increase cumulative watershed effects, including effects to watersheds that are currently over their threshold of concern due to existing development. Disturbance to the protected activity centers of northern goshawk and California spotted owl have potential for short-term significant effects, although fuel reduction would increase the stability of their preferred habitat over the long-term.

This alternative also responds to the CEQA requirement for an action alternative that mitigates or reduces environmental effects to an extent consistent with concerns for public health and safety. Alternative 3 reduces some impacts while meeting the purpose and need to effectively reduce fire risk by reducing fuels in the WUI. In Alternative 3, the following features were incorporated to reduce effects:

- Field review determined the units and portions of units to change treatment methods from mechanical to hand thinning to reduce watershed impacts.
- Scheduling of units for fuel treatments was refined to provide recovery time for watershed effects and refuge areas for CA spotted owls and northern goshawks.
- Modeling fire behavior for wildlife protected activity centers (PACs) provided individual stands that would resist crown fire if fire moving into the stand were a surface fire. These stands were removed from treatment or changed to hand treatments. Surrounding stands remained in the schedule for fuel treatments.
- There is a reduction in mechanical treatment units, a reduction in whole-tree mechanical units, and increase in cut-to-length units, an increase in hand thinning units, and an overall reduction in total acres compared to Alternative 2.

The South Shore project was designed in compliance with the Healthy Forest Restoration Act of 2003 (HFRA), which authorizes projects on federal lands to reduce fuel loads and increase or maintain healthy forest conditions. It provides a foundation to work collaboratively with at-risk communities to reduce wildfire hazards caused by fuel loads within the wildland urban intermix (WUI) that exceed desired conditions as defined by the Forest Plan. The Act requires federal agencies to consider recommendations made by at-risk communities that have developed community wildfire protection plans (CWPPs, 16 USC section 6511(3)). The LTBMU collaborated with the South Lake Tahoe Fire Department, Lake Valley and Fallen Leaf Fire Protection Districts along with the Tahoe Basin Fire Safe Council to design fuel reduction activities that coordinate with the CWPPs and provide defensible space identified in the CWPPs where it occurs on National Forest System land.

The DEIS/DEIR is currently prepared in a format to meet both the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). The Forest Service is the lead agency for NEPA and the Lahontan Water Board is the lead agency for CEQA. The two agencies have worked together to produce the DEIS/DEIR. However, since the time the Notice of Intent was published in the Federal Register on January 8, 2008 and the Notice of Preparation was simultaneously published, there have been several events that may result in changes to the format of the Final EIS/EIR depending whether the permitting agency is the Lahontan Water Board and/or the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency (TRPA). As a result of the recommendations made by *The Emergency California-Nevada Tahoe Basin Fire Commission* in a report issued May 2008, the Forest Service, Lahontan and TRPA have worked to "streamline" the permitting process in the Lake Tahoe Basin for vegetation management projects. The TRPA and Lahontan entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on January 5 2009, which identifies TRPA as the responsible agency for project review and permitting. The MOU provides detailed guidance on the scope of projects that would be eligible. In addition, the Forest Service and TRPA have also entered into an MOU (January 15, 2009) regarding vegetation management projects on National Forest System lands.

If, based on the analysis of the environmental consequences, the South Shore Project is eligible under applicable MOUs for permitting under TRPA as the responsible local agency, then the format of the FEIS/FEIR would continue to reflect NEPA and TRPA regulations. This would not result in any

difference in the proposed action or substance and depth of the analysis. The goal of all the agencies involved continue towards reducing any unnecessary duplication in the permitting process while focusing on environmentally sound fuels reduction projects.

How to Comment and Timeframe

Comments on this DEIS/DEIR are requested from you and other reviewers. The Responsible Official LTBMU Forest Supervisor will consider all public comments before making a decision. In submitting comments, please provide specific facts along with supporting reasons that you believe should be considered by the Responsible Official in reaching a decision.

A complete DEIS/DEIR with color maps showing the alternatives and activities proposed is available for viewing and downloading on the LTBMU website at: <http://www.fs.fed.us/r5/lbmu/>; and hard copies are also available for review at the address below, at the Office of the El Dorado County Clerk, or at the South Lake Tahoe public library. To request a CD or paper copy of the draft DEIS/DEIR please contact Duncan Leao at the mailing address below, by phone 530-543-2660, or by email to dleao@fs.fed.us.

Written, facsimile, hand-delivered, oral, and electronic comments concerning this action will be accepted for 45 calendar days following publication of a Notice of Availability in the Federal Register. This comment period is anticipated to extend from April 3 to May 18, 2009. However, the publication date in the Federal Register is the exclusive means for calculating the comment period for this DEIS/DEIR. Those wishing to comment should not rely upon dates or timeframe information provided by any other source. The regulations prohibit extending the length of the comment period.

In order to retain your administrative objection rights under HFRA, you must provide timely, substantive written, oral, or electronic comments during this 45-day comment period. Comments must be postmarked or received within 45 days from the date the notice of availability (NOA) was published in the Federal Register.

In order to avoid duplicate efforts for those who wish to comment, please send all comments to the Forest Service at the address below. All comments will be shared with the Lahontan Water Board. Comments submitted to the Forest Service will fulfill requirements under both NEPA and CEQA.

Send written comments to:

Terri Marceron
South Shore Fuel Reduction and Healthy Forest Restoration
Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit
35 College Drive, South Lake Tahoe, CA 96150
Business hours are 8:00 AM – 4:30 PM for comments delivered by hand

Written comments must be postmarked by the Postal Service, e-mailed, faxed, or otherwise submitted by 11:59 p.m. on the 45th calendar day following publication in the Federal Register. Hand delivered comments must be time and date imprinted at the Forest Supervisor's office above by the close of business on the 45th calendar day following publication in the Federal Register.

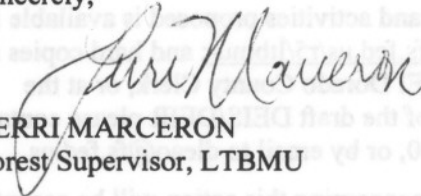
Oral comments must be provided at the Forest Supervisor's office address above during normal business hours via telephone or in person, or if during non-business hours, must be at an official agency function (such as a public meeting), which is designed to elicit public comment.

Electronic comments may be submitted to comments-pacificsouthwest-lbmu@fs.fed.us. The subject line must contain "South Shore" to designate the name of the project for submitting comments. Acceptable formats are MS Word, Word Perfect or RTF. For electronically mailed comments, the sender should normally receive an automated electronic acknowledgement from the agency as confirmation of receipt. If the sender does not receive an automated acknowledgement of the receipt of comments, it is the sender's responsibility to ensure timely receipt by other means.

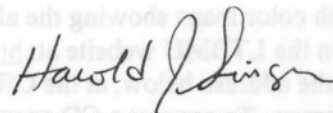
In cases where no identifiable name is attached to a comment, a verification of identity will be required for objection eligibility. If using an electronic message, a scanned signature is one way to provide verification. It is the responsibility of persons providing comments to submit them by the close of the comment period. Individuals and organizations wishing to be eligible to object must meet the information requirements of 36 CFR, section 215.6.

Comments received in response to this solicitation, including names and addresses of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record and will be available for public inspection.

Sincerely,



TERRI MARCERON
Forest Supervisor, LTBMU



HAROLD J. SINGER
Executive Officer, Lahontan Water Board