

ENCLOSURE 1

Lake of the Woods Community Defense Zone Project

Introduction

In collaboration with Kern County Fire Department and private property owners, the Forest Service proposes the **Lake of the Woods Community Defense Zone (CDZ)** project located around the community of Lake of the Woods. The purpose of the CDZ is to lower the risk of wildfire damage to homes and properties adjacent to the forest boundary. The project is comprised of four categories of actions: 1) conversion of vegetation to a less flammable condition to increase defensible space and firefighter safety (Forest Plan S7) on National Forest system lands within 300 feet of dwellings and occupied structures; 2) construct a 300-500 foot wide fuelbreak about 1.5 miles long (90 acres) located above the southern boundary of town; 3) disposal of accumulations of cut plant materials; and 4) vegetation treatments to maintain the effectiveness of the CDZ over time. The Lake of the Woods CDZ project is located on the Mount Pinos Ranger District of the Los Padres National Forest, and may be implemented as early as summer 2006. Legal locations are: Sections 33 and 34, Township 9 North, Range 20 West; and Sections 3 and 4, Township 8 North, Range 20 West.

Purpose and Need for Action

Background

Fires occur periodically around Lake of the Woods and due to the dry nature of the landscape, can move quickly to threaten homes. Since 1916, there have been about 43 fire starts within one mile of Lake of the Woods. The Frazier Mountain Fire, (1,323 acres, 1928) came within 0.1 miles east of the community. The Chuchupate Fire (2,370 acres, 1947) came within 0.5 miles south of Lake of the Woods. The Lakewood Fire (100 acres, early 1990s) occurred just above the community.

Effective fire suppression over the past 80 years has kept most fires small but has allowed dead and decadent shrubs and woody material (fuels) to accumulate on hillsides around the community. Fuels become more continuous as vegetation grows and matures over time, increasing fire rate-of-spread. Heavier fuels, combined with weather patterns typical of southern California climates, contribute greatly to intensity and severity of wildfires, potentially causing greater resource and property damage, and posing greater danger for firefighters and the public.

The number of homes and other improvements in close proximity to National Forest system lands (an area known as the wildland urban interface, or WUI) has also grown over time, along with an associated increase in potential for human-caused fire starts. This places valuable development in close proximity with hazardous fuels and increases concern for fire moving both off and onto National Forest and private properties.

Desired Future Condition

The Los Padres National Forest Land Management Plan (Forest Plan) (USDA 2005) expresses a desire to have vegetation treated to enhance community protection and reduce the risk of loss of human life, structures, improvements, and natural resources from wildland fire. Firefighters will have improved opportunities for tactical operations and safety. This project would be part of a larger system of vegetation treatments designed to meet goals described in the 10-Year Comprehensive Wildland Fire Strategy (USDA/USDI 2001) for using a collaborative approach to reduce wildland fire risks to communities.

The project area is in the “Mt. Pinos” Place as described in the Forest Plan (USDA 2005), where a desired condition pertinent to this project is to maintain the natural appearing backdrop to rural communities (USDA 2005). The program emphasis includes active management of vegetation to maintain healthy conifer stands and protect communities.

Project Goals

The goals of the Lake of the Woods CDZ project are to:

- Reduce wildfire risk to homes and properties in the urban interface of the Lake of the Woods community.
- Create safer conditions for the public and firefighters during a wildfire.
- Coordinate with fuel hazard reduction occurring on adjacent private property in collaboration with Kern County Fire Department and the Mount Pinos Communities Fire Safe Council.

Proposed Action

The Lake of the Woods CDZ project proposes to accomplish goals described above by implementing four categories of actions: 1) conversion of vegetation to a less flammable condition to increase defensible space and firefighter safety (Forest Plan S7) on National Forest system lands within 300 feet of dwellings and occupied structures; 2) construct a 300-500 foot wide fuelbreak about 1.5 miles long (90 acres) located above the southern boundary of town; 3) disposal of accumulations of cut plant materials; and 4) vegetation treatments to maintain the effectiveness of the CDZ over time.

Defensible Space

The Forest Service and/or adjacent landowners or other cooperators would be authorized to reduce the amount of dead and standing vegetation within a variable width strip (not to exceed 300 feet) of National Forest System land along the boundary adjacent to the community (see **Enclosure 2** – Project Area Map). Authorized treatments would be prescribed according to plant community to reduce fire spread and achieve desired

conditions as described in **Table 1**. Individual property owners will not be authorized to fall conifers because of the need to apply Sporax to cut stumps in a timely manner to prevent annosus root disease.

Fuelbreak Construction

A 300-500 foot wide fuelbreak, approximately 1.5 miles long, would be constructed by the Forest Service on the hillside south of the community of Lake of the Woods to facilitate fire suppression efforts in the event of a wildfire (see **Enclosure 2**). The location of the fuelbreak was designed to tie in with existing openings and county brush reduction projects. The prescription for vegetation removal will vary according to plant community as described in **Table 1**. Vegetation removal would be applied in a non-linear pattern leaving some islands and uneven or scalloped edges to blend in with the surrounding landscape.

Table 1 – Desired Conditions and Prescribed Treatments by Plant Community	
Plant Community	Desired Conditions and Prescribed Treatments
Forest	The desired condition is to create a shaded fuelbreak with no more than 40% canopy cover (Forest Plan S4) to prevent fire from moving through tree crowns. Cut selected trees with chainsaw or shred with a masticator. Borax (registered as Sporax) would be applied to freshly cut stumps for control of annosus root rot disease (Forest Plan S5). Leave trees would represent a diversity of age and size classes, to the extent possible. Understory accumulations of shrubs, dead material, and lower dead branches on leave trees (ladder fuels) would be cut to retard the spread of fire across the ground and up trees into the canopy.
Sagebrush/rabbit brush/scrub oak Flannel bush	The desired condition is to leave no more than 5% of the area in standing brush.
Canyon live oak	The desired condition is to prune the lower branches as not to carry fire from the ground to the crown of the tree.

Disposal of Cut Plant Materials

Accumulations of cut plant materials would be shredded and left in place as ground cover, stacked in piles and burned by the Forest Service, or removed from site.

Community Defense Zone Maintenance

The fuelbreak and defense zones adjacent to structures would be maintained over time to retain effectiveness as per Appendix K in the Land Management Plan – Guidelines for Development and Maintenance of WUI Defense and Threat Zones (USDA 2005). Maintenance in forest and scrub oak communities would consist of cutting or masticating understory vegetation every three to ten years to maintain a shaded fuelbreak. Sage/rabbit brush communities resprout more readily, so maintenance would consist of cutting or masticating shrubs every few years to maintain effectiveness. CDZ maintenance would include hand or mechanical treatments of invasive and non-native plant species, as needed.

Project Standards and Design Features

The following standards and design features are incorporated in the Proposed Action to reduce or eliminate potential for resource impacts.

- Weed prevention measures will be used to minimize the introduction and spread of noxious weeds as per Appendix M of the Land Management Plan (USDA 2005). Noxious weed assessment will be done prior to project implementation, and if present, noxious weeds will be pretreated to reduce abundance by hand pulling, grubbing, or torching. As needed, weed prevention measures will include cleaning equipment, vehicles, tires, and footwear prior to entering the project area. Where work occurs in areas of known weed infestation, personnel will apply the above measures to reduce the risk of transporting weed seed into uninfested areas.
- If occurrences of noxious weeds are detected after project implementation, non-chemical control measures will be initiated immediately to eradicate any incipient infestations.
- Treatments near roads will maintain strategic residual vegetation to discourage unauthorized off-highway vehicle use (Forest Plan S37).
- Riparian Conservation Areas (RCAs) will be established 100 feet slope distance, along each side of stream channels (Forest Plan S47). The following project specific design features have been established for RCAs.
 - Brush reduction will be allowed within the RCAs, but all live riparian vegetation (willow) and stream shade levels will be maintained.
 - Soil cover (living plants, litter, slash, and duff) will not be reduced below 60% within RCAs.
 - Snags and downed logs will be retained unless they are identified as a threat to life, property, or sustainability of the RCA (Forest Plan S15).
 - Heavy equipment will not be allowed within 50 feet of stream channels. A masticator arm may reach into this zone of equipment exclusion as needed. Hazardous accumulations of dead material may be hand cut with chainsaw anywhere within the RCAs.
 - Pile burning may be conducted within the RCA.
- All applicable Best Management Practices for water quality protection will be adhered to (USDA 2000).
- Region 5 Soil Quality Standards (FSH R5 Supplement 2509.18-95-1, 1995) will be met. Fine organic matter (plant litter, duff, and woody material less than 3 inches in diameter) will be maintained over at least 50 percent of the area outside RCAs. Heavy equipment will not be operated on wet soils (BMP 5.6).
- If a raptor nest is encountered during project implementation, the tree where the nest is found will be maintained and necessary buffers or adjustments in management activities will be established by a qualified biologist (Forest Plan S18).

LITERATURE CITED:

USDA 2005. Land Management Plan, Part 1: Southern California National Forests Vision (R5-MB-075), Part 2: Los Padres National Forest Strategy (R5-MB-078) and Part 3: Design Criteria for the Southern California National forests (R5-MB-080). Pacific Southwest Region.

USDI/USDA 2001. A Collaborative Approach for Reducing Wildland Fire Risks to Communities and the Environment, 10-Year Comprehensive Strategy. August 2001. <http://www.fireplan.gov/reports/7-19-en.pdf>.

