



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

Los Padres
National Forest

Santa Lucia Ranger District
1616 Carlotti Drive
Santa Maria, CA 93454
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File Code: 1950

Date: March 31, 2006

Dear Planning Participant:

The Santa Lucia Ranger District of the Los Padres National Forest in partnership with Santa Barbara County Fire Department is proposing to implement a hazardous fuels reduction project referred to as the **Tepusquet Fuels Treatment Project**. This project is located about 12 air miles east of the community of Santa Maria, California and would take place on National Forest system lands and other ownerships where activities are authorized. Fuels treatments would consist of mechanical treatments and prescribed burning that would be applied over the next ten years starting fall of 2006.

You are invited to participate in the planning process by letting us know if you have any comments, suggestions, or concerns about this proposal. To encourage your informed participation, please see attached project description (Enclosure 1) and map (Enclosure 2).

This project has been proposed because fire history for the Tepusquet area indicates severe fire can be expected in the future. The Tepusquet Fuels Treatment Project is strategically located adjacent to the Brookshire Prescribed Burn Project (October 2002) that is currently being implemented. Past efforts to seek public input on the management of this area included public meetings for the Sisquoc Watershed Analysis, the Brookshire Prescribed Burn Project, the Tepusquet Homeowner's Fire Prevention meeting, and the Forest Plan Revision. During these meetings, many members of the public expressed strong desire for fuels treatment within the Tepusquet area. Use of prescribed fire to break up fuel continuity across the analysis area was rated as high priority by the public (Sisquoc Watershed Analysis Page 6-13, Management Opportunity 85a).

Open House scheduled for
April 25, 2006
5:00 to 7:00 pm
Blochman Elementary
School Cafeteria

This project will be designed in a manner consistent with direction from the 2005 Los Padres National Forest Land Management Plan and federal requirements to consider threatened, endangered, and sensitive plants and animals, heritage resources, and other resource issues. Riparian conservation areas will be managed to protect water quality and riparian conditions.

We have hired Forest Service environmental planning specialists located in Happy Camp, California to work closely with local specialists to develop the project and produce necessary documents. If you would like additional information please contact one of the following people:



Names	Phone	Email	Address	Fax
Annie Buma	530-493-1725	abuma@fs.fed.us	ACT2 Enterprise Unit	530-493-1775
Judy Hahn	530-493-1721	jhahn@fs.fed.us	P.O. Box 377	
Fran Smith	530-493-1788	fjsmith@fs.fed.us	Happy Camp, CA 96039	

For this project to result in the best possible outcome for people and the environment please provide them with issues, concerns, suggestions, or information you may have regarding this project by May 5, 2006. This will allow time to consider your input during project development. You may also send comments by e-mail to:

comments-pacificsouthwest-los-padres-santa-lucia@fs.fed.us

Comments are a matter of public record and as such may be provided to interested parties upon request.

You are also invited to provide comments at an Open House scheduled for Tuesday, April 25, 2006 from 5:00 to 7:00 pm at the Blochman Elementary School Cafeteria, located at the townsite of Sisquoc, California (4949 Foxen Canyon Road, Santa Maria, California). Additional information will be on display and specialists working on the project will be available for discussion. Hope to see you there. As always, Santa Lucia Ranger District personnel are happy to work with you. Your local contacts for this project are Melody Fountain (extension 214), and Mark Nunez (extension 222), or myself (extension 229).

Thank you for your participation in this process.

Sincerely,



KATHLEEN PHELPS
District Ranger

Attachments

ATTACHMENT 1

Tepusquet Fuels Treatment Project

Background

Fire history of the Tepusquet area indicates that severe fire can be expected in the future. Hazardous fuel conditions have developed as chaparral vegetation types have grown and matured for 50 years since the last major fire in the 1950s. The Tepusquet project area is in or adjacent to the Wildland/Urban Interface (WUI) as described in the *Healthy Forests Restoration Act* of 2003. WUI (as defined by the Act) is a variable width area up to 1.5 miles from communities at risk from wildfire or as defined in a Community Wildfire Protection Plan. Many homes have been built in the WUI in the last 20 years. There is only one road through Tepusquet Canyon. In the event of a wildfire in the canyon, there is only one evacuation route for all residents. This is a concern for both public and firefighter safety.

Past efforts to seek public input on the management of this area include public meetings for the Sisquoc Watershed Analysis, the Brookshire Prescribed Burn Project, the Tepusquet Canyon Homeowners Fire Prevention meeting, and the Forest Plan Revision. During these meetings, many members of the public expressed strong desire for fuels treatment within the Tepusquet area. Use of prescribed fire to break up fuel continuity across the analysis area was rated as high priority by the public (Sisquoc Watershed Analysis Page 6-13, Management Opportunity 85a).

Fuels treatments can effectively reduce risk to communities by reducing flame height, radiant heat, and rate of fire spread. Treating fuels under controlled conditions can also reduce risk of more severe wildfire damaging riparian areas, wildlife habitats, recreation facilities, and other valuable forest resources.

The Tepusquet Fuels Treatment project is strategically located adjacent to the Brookshire Prescribed Burn project (October 16, 2002) that is currently being implemented. The combination of these projects and others across the Forest will establish a network of treated areas, increasing effectiveness of each individual project and maintaining a mosaic of discontinuous fuels over the landscape.

Purpose and Need for Action

The purpose of the Tepusquet Fuels Treatment project is to implement the *National Fire Plan* and *Forest Fuels Strategy* to achieve the following goals:

- Protect the WUI from risk of high intensity wildfire by reducing hazardous fuels around homes and evacuation routes.
- Buffer and protect the San Rafael Wilderness by reducing risk from wildfire occurring on roadsides, where fire starts are more common.

- Protect water quality and watershed values by reducing risk, severity, and extent of watershed damage from wildfire. This will reduce the potential for soil erosion and sediment delivery into streams due to wildfire and associated suppression efforts.
- Protect threatened and endangered steelhead, California red-legged frogs, and other riparian associates over the long-term by reducing the potential for aquatic and riparian habitat loss associated with wildfires.
- Improve wildlife habitat by breaking up large areas of continuous chaparral into smaller mosaic patches of cover and forage areas.
- Reduce wildfire suppression costs by strategically reducing hazardous fuels in a non-emergency situation and providing safer and more effective areas from which to suppress wildfires.
- Address high priority management opportunities identified in the Sisquoc Watershed Analysis.

Proposed Action

The Santa Lucia Ranger District and Santa Barbara County Fire Department propose fuel hazard reduction on 24,850 acres in the area northeast of the community of Santa Maria in Santa Barbara County, California. The **Tepusquet Fuels Treatment Project** consists of nine units. Mechanical treatments and prescribed burning would be applied over the next ten years starting fall of 2006. Locations of treatment units are shown on the Project Area Map (**Attachment 2**). Treatments by unit are shown in **Table 1**. Implementation of treatments outside the National Forest boundary would occur, pending coordination with landowners and Santa Barbara County. This proposal also includes maintenance of roads and trails and fuels treatments along those access routes.

Mechanical treatments would focus on enhancing defensible space within 500 feet of dwellings, occupied structures, primary access roads, and other facilities (including communications site at Tepusquet Peak). Shrubs in chaparral vegetation types would be reduced by 75%. Mechanical treatments would be designed with irregular widths, shapes, patterns, and leave islands to visually blend in with the surrounding landscape. Maintenance activities will be conducted over time to retain the effectiveness of these treatments.

Proposed treatment methods include chainsaw cutting, mechanical treatments, and prescribed burning. Chainsaw cut material would either be piled and burned or chipped. Mechanical treatments (on slopes less than 35% to 45%) include masticator or brush mower. Masticated or mowed brush would be shredded and left on site as soil cover. Where practical, small broadcast burns may be conducted in mechanical treatment areas.

Prescribed burn treatments include application of prescribed fire inside unit boundaries using hand and aerial ignition methods. Burning would be applied when moisture and air quality conditions meet prescription criteria in the Burn Plan. These conditions are most likely met after winter season rains when moisture levels limit fire severity but are still low enough to achieve desired fuel consumption.

Desired conditions for prescribed burn treatment areas are for a mosaic of burned and unburned chaparral vegetation types distributed in 50 to 100 acre patches across the landscape. The goal is to consume the following fuels within 50 to 80% of the unit:

- 100% of the 1 to 10-hour fuels (0 to 1 inches diameter);
- 70 to 80% of the 100-hour fuels (1 to 3 inches diameter); and
- 25% of standing dead and down 1000-hour fuels (over 3 inches diameter).

Most of the prescribed burning would be confined utilizing existing roads, trails, and fuelbreaks. Proposed actions include the following activities to prepare for burning:

- Reconstruction of an estimated 2.1 miles of fireline about 50 to 70 feet wide using dozer, brush rake, or masticator. These dozer lines would be temporarily reopened to contain prescribed fire activities. Vegetation would be allowed to grow back after burning operations are complete.
- Reconstruction of 1.2 miles of fireline as described above with conversion to trail long-term (shown as Dozer line/Trail on Attachment 2). Vegetation would be allowed to grow back after burning except for a two foot wide hiking trail and six foot wide clearing along the trail.
- Reconstruction of an estimated 5.3 miles of fuelbreaks up to 150 feet wide using dozer, brush rake, or masticator. These fuelbreaks would be maintained over time as fire suppression access routes for future wildfire suppression efforts.
- Cutting and piling of shrubs away from select trees, range improvements, communication site, and archaeological sites and burning or chipping of piles.

Unit Name	Total Acres	Overall Prescription
Alejandro	3,900	Apply prescribed burn treatments
Barrel	5,000	Apply prescribed burn treatments
Bone Mountain	2,600	Apply prescribed burn treatments
Cig	1,840	Apply prescribed fire, mechanical treatments around structures
Goodchild	2,260	Apply prescribed burn treatments
Hudson	4,420	Apply prescribed burn treatments
Ruiz	1,780	Apply prescribed fire, mechanical treatments around structures
Tyler	2,900	Apply prescribed burn treatments
Urban	900	Mechanical treatments with limited use of prescribed burn treatments

Road and trail use and maintenance involves approximately 23 miles of road and 15 miles of trail. Associated activities include:

- Surface conditioning by blading, grading, or scraping as needed to meet road and trail maintenance standards.
- Cutting brush using a masticator or chainsaw from within 40 feet of roads.
- Cutting brush using chainsaw from within 10 feet of trails.
- Maintenance and construction of drainage and erosion control structures.