



File Code: 1950
Date: April 1, 2016

Dear Interested Party,

The Sierra National Forest (Forest) began seeing large groups of pine mortality on the forest in 2015. Initially, this occurred primarily within the ponderosa pine on the Forest at 3,000 to 6,000 feet in elevation. Over the course of the last year, tree mortality has spread to many other areas on the forest, leaving the Forest as the highest impacted area among the National Forests in California. In response to this serious and on-going forest health epidemic, the Forest staff is focusing ecological restoration efforts on addressing human health and safety by felling and to the maximum extent possible, removing hazard trees from alongside roads, in high visitation areas by the public and Forest staff, as well as fuel breaks, to resist the spread of potential wildfires to populated areas.

Through this notice the Forest would like to inform the public about our completed, near-term planned projects and what we plan to do in the future to address the tree mortality problem.

The Forest would also like to provide a scoping opportunity for some of the near-term projects where environmental analysis is still occurring to help us determine if there are any potential significant environmental impacts, that may result from the actions we are planning to take.

Projects Currently Identified to Address the Tree Mortality Situation

Some projects have lent themselves to us moving swiftly to address tree mortality related hazards. The Forest and our partners have already completed the following projects:

- Removal of hazard trees around Blue Canyon, Clover Meadow, Clearwater Station, North Fork Compound, Jerseydale Station, Batterson Station, Westfall Station, Minarets and Mountain Rest administrative sites.
- Felling of hazard trees along PG&E transmission and distribution lines.
- Felling of hazard trees along Road 274 by the County of Madera with removal of the wood through public free use.
- Felling of hazard trees around special use facilities in the Bass Lake area with removal of the wood through public free use.
- Felling of hazard trees in the Browns Ditch/007 parking, Forks Resort parking and Kamook staging areas.



- Felling of hazard trees at various trail heads and campgrounds including Shadow of the Giants, Mammoth, Isberg, Frenandez, Norris, McCreary, South Fork, Cassidy, Playu Dome, Hells Half Acre and Bullbuck trailheads; Forks, Granite Creek, Bowler, Little Jackass, Clover Meadow, Jerseydale and Whiskey Falls campgrounds as well as Bass Lake Vista.
- Felling of hazard trees around the Ross Cabin and Bass Lake boat launch.
- Felling of hazard trees in along roads 5S12, 8S41Y, 7S07, 8S27 and Cedar Valley community Deer Run Trail Road.
- Felling of hazard trees in the Cowboy Trail Bass Lake Range holding area.
- Felling of hazard trees in the Courtney Fire area.
- Felling of hazard trees in the Ponderosa Fuel breaks
- Felling of hazard trees at Cascadel Point and Cascadel Woods Community Protection.

Some road hazard tree removal will be done as soon as the environmental analysis is complete which is expected to occur in FY16:

- Hazard tree reduction along Highways 41, 49 and 168. (Environmental analysis and hazard tree removal work to be done by Cal Trans.)
- Hazard tree reduction along County (Fresno, Madera and Mariposa Counties) and Forest Service roads without existing NEPA. (Work on county roads to be done by the counties.)

Other projects have environmental analysis complete and are anticipated to be implemented as resources allow. The Forest is actively pursuing the needed resources to complete these projects in FY16:

- Removal of dead trees and flammable vegetation to re-establish interagency fuelbreak with CAL FIRE across private and Forest Service lands along Acorn and Sugarloaf Roads connecting the Lerona Fuelbreak to the Meadow Lakes Fuelbreak.
- Maintaining other High Sierra Ranger District fuelbreaks to proper functioning including Beal, Vincent, Burrough, Lerona, Powerhouse and Shaver Springs/Upper Sycamore fuelbreaks.
- Felling and removal of hazard trees within campgrounds, day use and administrative facilities within the Bass Lake Basin area which includes 10 campgrounds/day use sites.
- Hazard tree felling and removal along main Forest System (FS) roadways focused on Sky Ranch Road, Road 4S81, and Road 5S07 (the Minarets Scenic Byway).
- Hazard tree felling and possible removal along existing Bass Lake Ranger District fuelbreaks (including Ponderosa Fuelbreak) and level 2 and 3 FS roads needed for firefighting access.
- Hazard tree felling and removal within the Crane Valley FERC boundary;

- Felling of hazard trees and removing them from around Forest administrative sites including Dinkey Mill.

The following projects have been specifically identified and are expected to occur beyond FY 16 (after October 1, 2016) due to resource constraints and/or the need to do in-depth additional environmental analysis:

- Reducing dead trees and live tree density around homes in Huntington Basin.
- Felling hazard trees within Crane Valley zone where life or property could be threatened with follow up treatment to reduce hazardous fuels.
- Site prep and planting for areas affected by tree mortality.
- Coordinate and complete a fuelbreak by removing dead trees and flammable fuels on the east side of the communities of Shaver Lake.
- Hazard tree reduction along County and Forest Service roads with existing NEPA.

An additional project has environmental analysis underway but has already been scoped through a separate process:

- Removal of dead trees in the Shaver/Wishon Project area including along the McKinley Grove Road and the Dinkey/Shaver Road.
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Projects for Which Scoping Input is Requested

The Forest requests your assistance in identifying issues or new information that may exist within the two projects listed below to be addressed in the environmental analysis. If you have information or are aware of issues regarding potential effects of either of these projects, please send those issues in writing to the address listed at the close of this letter. Although we will consider all comments received, comments submitted by April 15, 2016 will be guaranteed to be considered prior to the projects commencing, while still allowing the projects to move forward on schedule. Please identify which project your scoping comments are related to using the underlined Project names below.

- Bass Lake Recreation Reforestation and Pre-commercial Thinning Project

The Project entails follow-up treatments to the hazard tree removal already planned to begin soon (and mentioned above) on 164 acres within the boundaries of the Bass Lake Basin area recreation sites including the ten campgrounds/day use sites. Pre-commercial thinning will be used to thin understory vegetation and trees in preparation for seedling planting to reforest area.

- The State and County Road Abatement Project

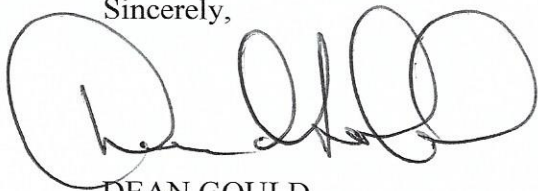
The Project is to fell dead standing trees and remove the hazardous fuels along 53 miles of County and State Highways on NFS lands to create a 400 foot wide hazard reduction zone (200 feet on either side of the road) for the safe access and egress for public and firefighters safety in the WUI. The project covers NFS lands that are not covered by State and County road right-of-ways.

Additional Participation Opportunity; Future Projects

The need to address tree mortality across the Forest is currently outpacing the Forest's resources to fully address the problem. The Forest is continuing to identify areas of concern and projects and resources to address those areas. The Forest is interested in hearing from the public to assist in addressing these areas of concern. What should we be considering in developing our next steps in addressing the tree mortality issue? Please identify this input with the title: "Future Projects" to differentiate this input with the scoping input requested above. Large/Landscape scale comments as well as input for smaller projects are welcome.

Thank you for your interest in the Sierra National Forest, and playing a vital role in sustaining its future. Please provide comments by close of business April 15, 2016 to: Sierra National Forest, 1600 Tollhouse Road, Clovis CA. 93611, Attention: Dean Gould, Forest Supervisor, c/o Judi Tapia, Forest Planning Staff Officer. Input may also be submitted via email to comments-pacificsouthwest-sierra@fs.fed.us. Please use the appropriate underlined project name or Future Projects in the subject line. If you have questions on either of these projects please call Judi Tapia, Forest Planning Officer at 559 – 297-0706 extension 4938 or at jetapia@fs.fed.us.

Sincerely,



DEAN GOULD
Forest Supervisor

cc: Steve Osojta, Iveth Hernandez

