



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

San Bernardino National Forest
San Jacinto Ranger District

P.O. Box 518
Idyllwild, CA 92549
909-659-2117 (Voice)
909-659-2107 (FAX)
909-659-5748 (TTY)

File Code: 1950

Date: April 18, 2005

Subject: Highway 243 Evacuation Route
Project Scoping Letter

Dear Interested Public:

The San Jacinto Ranger District, San Bernardino National Forest seeks public comment in relation to the Highway 243 Fuel Reduction proposal. Copies of the proposal are available for public review at the San Jacinto District office. See the enclosed packet for detailed information and maps.

Purpose and Need

The Idyllwild and Pine Cove areas have been designated as Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) communities at risk under the Healthy Forest Restoration Act (HFRA) of 2003 (Public Law 108-148). San Bernardino National Forest and surrounding areas have an extensive history of large fires, with wildfires burning an average of 7,000 acres annually. Two summers ago (2003), the combined Southern California fires, consuming over 743,000 acres, destroying 3,600 homes, and causing 22 deaths, were considered the most costly natural disaster in California history. Large scale evacuations were crucial to suppression efforts during this major event. The Highway 243 Fuel Reduction proposal will provide for safer evacuation routes, allow for suppression and protection actions in potentially defensible areas, and provide for public and firefighter safety in the event of an unforeseen wildfire for communities along State Scenic Highway 243 within the National Forest System lands. Additionally, there is a need to open and improve visual quality along State Scenic Highway 243, as well as protect adjacent tree plantations from destruction by fire and disease.

Proposed Action

Out of the three factors that affect fire, **Weather, Topography and Fuels (vegetation), Fuels is the single variable that can be influenced to reduce the threat of intense fires.** The proposed action will reduce fuel loads on approximately 1,000 acres of overgrown mixed chapparal/pine vegetation and roadside tree plantations adjacent to the highway. Design criteria will improve visual quality for travelers, by opening views both within the forest and to the valley below. Additionally, the project will improve protection of tree plantations along the route by reducing stand densities and vegetative fuel loads, allowing for healthy, vigorous, fire- and disease-resistant trees.

Opportunity to Comment

I invite you to comment on this proposal beginning on April 22, 2005. If you have any information that you feel the Forest Service may not be aware of, or feel you have issues (points of dispute, debate, or disagreement) regarding potential effects of the proposed action to the environment, please send those comments in writing to the above address c/o Ed Wieringa, I.D. team leader. While public participation in this process is welcome at any time, **Comments postmarked or otherwise received in the Idyllwild District Office by the close of business on May 23, 2005** will be especially useful in the decision making process.

Sincerely,

/s/**Laurie Rosenthal**

LAURIE ROSENTHAL

District Ranger

Enclosures

