

Tule Ridge/South Portal Canyon Fuels Reduction Project

Purpose and Need/Proposed Action/Decision to be Made
Santa Clara/Mojave Rivers Ranger District, Angeles National Forest
Los Angeles County, California
June 1, 2009

Purpose and Need

Why: The Tule Ridge/South Portal project area is located in an area classified as Backcountry and Developed Area Interface by the Angeles National Forest. Under the National Fire Plan and the Healthy Forest Initiative, emphasis is placed on reducing the risk of wildfire within the urban interface around communities at risk. The fuel condition found on the majority of the project area can be characterized as being supportive of high intensity surface fire with a high resistance to control.

The assessment area is classified as Condition Class Two. This Condition Class is characterized as a forest containing a tree/shrub structure where any fire today would burn with a higher intensity than it would have prior to settlement. The neighboring community of Green Valley is at risk to wildfire in part because of the condition of the vegetation within the project area.

There was one fire of 230 acres in 2008 within the project area that threatened the community of Green Valley. This community was threatened twice during the 2002 fire season and again in the 2007 fire season. There has been some vegetation management on the nearby Leona Divide ridge, with discing of a portion of the fuelbreak occurring in 2005 and crushing portions of the fuelbreak in 2007 and 2009. Firelines in preparation for a proposed prescribed burn adjacent to the discing have been constructed, but no burning has been completed as of this date.

In addition, the Angeles National Forest has experienced an extreme drought in recent years, the effects of which are still evident. Some drought and freeze related mortality is evident within the project area. This drought mortality adds dead fuels to the landscape and promotes a more rapidly spreading and intense wildfire activity.

The purpose of this project is to provide community protection for Green Valley, re-establish the effectiveness of a primary fuelbreak and reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire on the environment.

Proposed Action

Who: The Santa Clara Mojave Rivers Ranger District, Angeles National Forest proposes to reduce the fire risk on and adjacent to the Tule Ridge/South Portal project area.

What: A map displaying the proposed treatments is attached. Proposed activities would consist of brush crushing, mastication, hand cutting and piling and prescribed fire. No new roads will be constructed as a result of this proposed action. The goal of the proposed action is to attain a desired ecological condition, providing community protection and enhance fire suppression operations in the future. The proposed treatments are tools that will be used to achieve the

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desired conditions. The total assessment area consists of 2,972 acres. Acres by treatment are displayed in the table below.

Acres by Treatment	
Treatment	Acres
Masticate, Crush, Cut & Pile	2398
Masticate, Cut & Pile	579
Burning	All Acres
Total	2972

Specific Actions

Crush Units: The Los Angeles County Fire Department “brush crusher” is proposed for use in the identified areas. A 4 or 10 ton rolling cylinder is lowered from ridgetops through the use of a cable system onto the slopes below, crushing the standing vegetation. The dozer operating the “crusher” will operate from the ridgetop locations only. The crusher is most effective on slopes greater than 35% but may operate on flatter areas to gain access to steep slopes. A maximum of 80% of the standing brush will be treated in the units. A buffer of standing vegetation will be maintained along the road system to discourage illegal off-highway vehicle access. Untreated pockets no smaller than ¼ acre in size will be retained in the masticated units. Tree-form oaks within the units will be retained where possible. Where feasible, manzanita and ceanothus species will be favored in the retained pockets. The crushed brush might be burned at a later date to eliminate the dead fuel from the project site. Crushing creates a fuelbed situation where a prescribed fire can be conducted when adjacent fuel conditions will not allow the fire to spread through uncrushed material. This treatment strategy reduces the risk of an escape from the burning activities, while still allowing for the consumption of the crushed vegetation. Firelines to isolate the crushed material from the standing vegetation may be constructed, but are not required. Fire backing into standing brush from the crushed areas is acceptable.

Mastication Units: The forest ASV skid steer with masticating head will be used in these units. The brush will be masticated to a depth not to exceed six inches in these units. The masticated material will remain on site to provide a barrier to the noxious weed invasion into the treated areas. A maximum of 80% of the standing brush will be treated in the units. The masticator will not be working in areas greater than 35% slope. All tree-form oaks within the units will be retained. Untreated pockets no smaller than ¼ acre in size will be retained in the masticated units. Where feasible, manzanita and ceanothus species will be favored in the retained pockets.

Cut and Pile/Chip: This treatment will be used in addition to the mechanical treatments. A buffer of standing vegetation will be maintained along the road system to discourage illegal off-highway vehicle access. In areas where neither the crusher nor masticator can accomplish the treatment objective, crews will cut standing brush with chainsaws and hand pile the cut brush. These piles will be burned or chipped at a later date to eliminate the fuel from the treatment area. Tree-form oaks will not be removed from these hand treated areas, but will be limbed to a height not to exceed 10' or ½ of the live tree crown.

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The following mitigations would assure that treatments meet other needs as defined in the Forest Plan. These are not all inclusive. Mitigations, as necessary, will be added as needed following additional environmental analyses.

Riparian Conservation Area (RCA):

- Perennial Stream = 100' buffer; Intermittent Stream = 100' buffer
- No mechanized equipment allowed.
- No take of riparian species, i.e. willow, maple etc.
- Retain or re-establish ground cover to 60-70%, consisting of litter, duff, slash, grass.
- In to be identified RCAs, there will be no treat within stream inner gorge (from channel bottom to major break in slope).
- Any ground-based units that have a high degree of existing soil quality impairment (as identified by hydrologist/soils specialist) will require mitigations so as not to exceed threshold standards for detrimental disturbance.

Additional design features:

- Any heavy equipment staging areas and access points will be rehabilitated and blocked after project completion. Rehabilitation would include returning the ground to natural contours, implementing decompaction and erosion control measures as needed, and covering bare soil with slash, chips, pine needles, or cut brush as necessary.
- A combination of natural barriers (rocks, logs, etc.), screening, fencing, etc. may be used to prevent/discourage illegal vehicle activity during and after the project treatment. Fire Prevention Technicians and other staff would monitor the area, and if/when problem areas arise, remedial and preventative actions would be taken as appropriate. Coordination with adjacent landowners, public education, and signing would be used as appropriate.
- All mechanized equipment mobilized to the project area will be “washed down” to prevent to transportation of noxious weed sources to the project area. The wash down of equipment will occur to standards required in, use equipment cleaning contract provisions WO-C/CT 6.36
- All prescribed fire activity will occur only with approvals from the South Coast Air Quality Management District and under conditions established an approved Prescribed Fire Burn Plan.

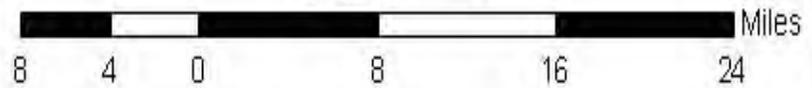
Decision To Be Made

The decision to be made is whether to implement this project as proposed, modify the project to address any unresolved conflicts, or to not implement this project at all. Public concerns and comments regarding this proposed action are important. All issues and concerns to refine the proposed action will be considered. All public concerns will be taken into consideration when making a final decision.

This proposed project would be consistent with the Angeles National Forest Land Management Plan and Record of Decision.

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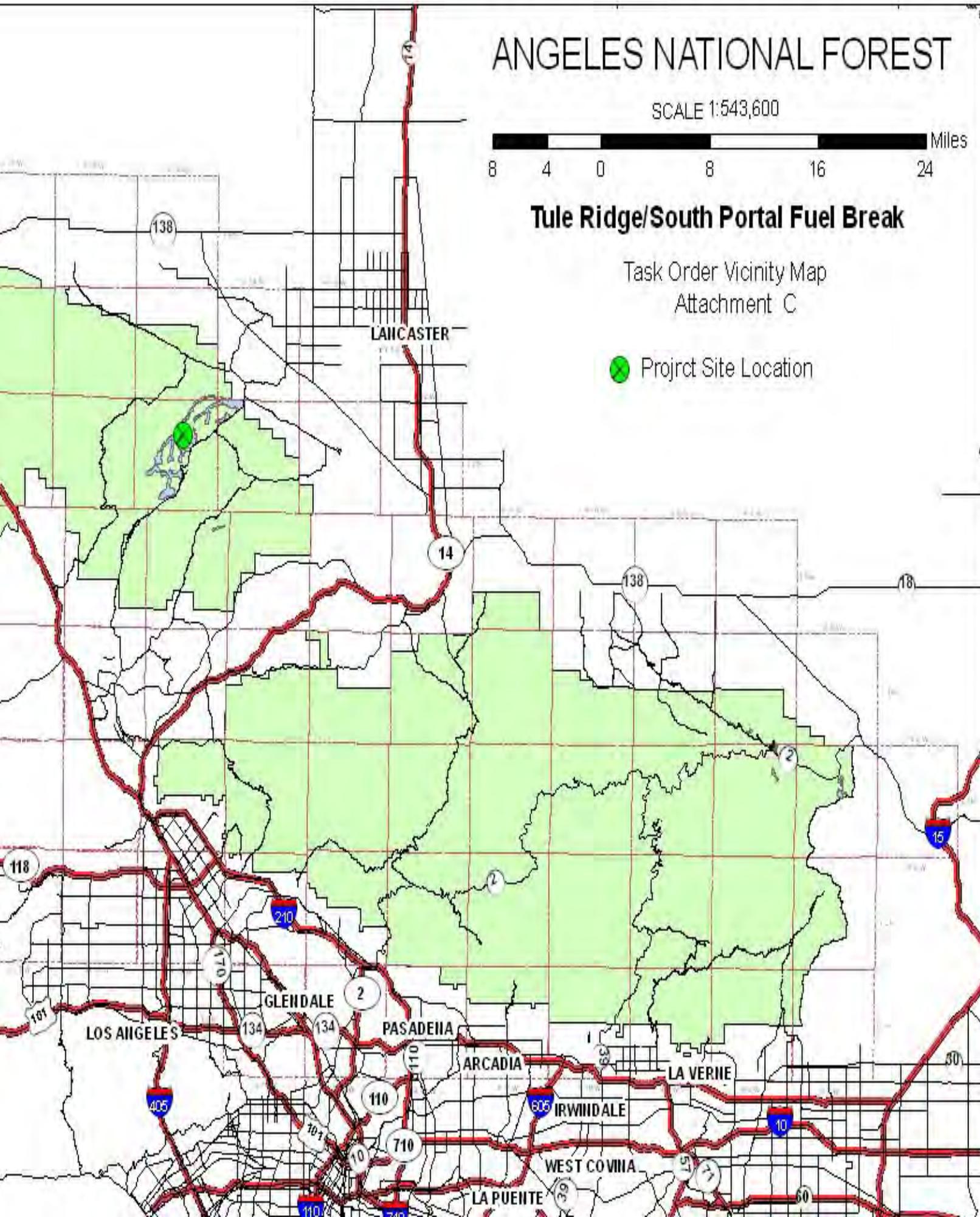
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Tule Ridge/South Portal Fuel Break

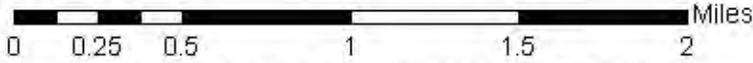
Task Order Vicinity Map
Attachment C

 Project Site Location



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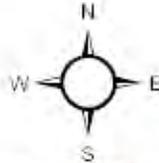
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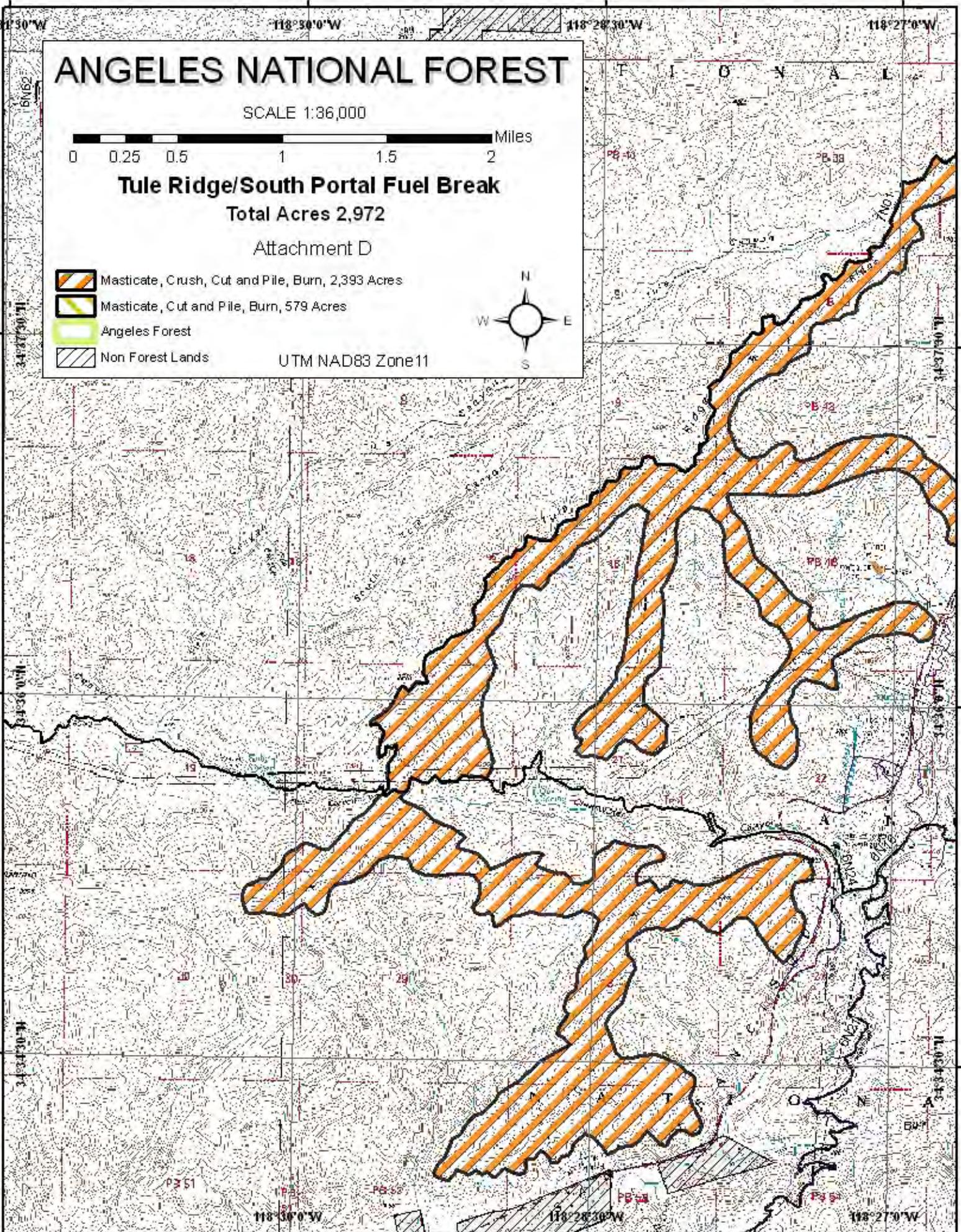
Tule Ridge/South Portal Fuel Break Total Acres 2,972

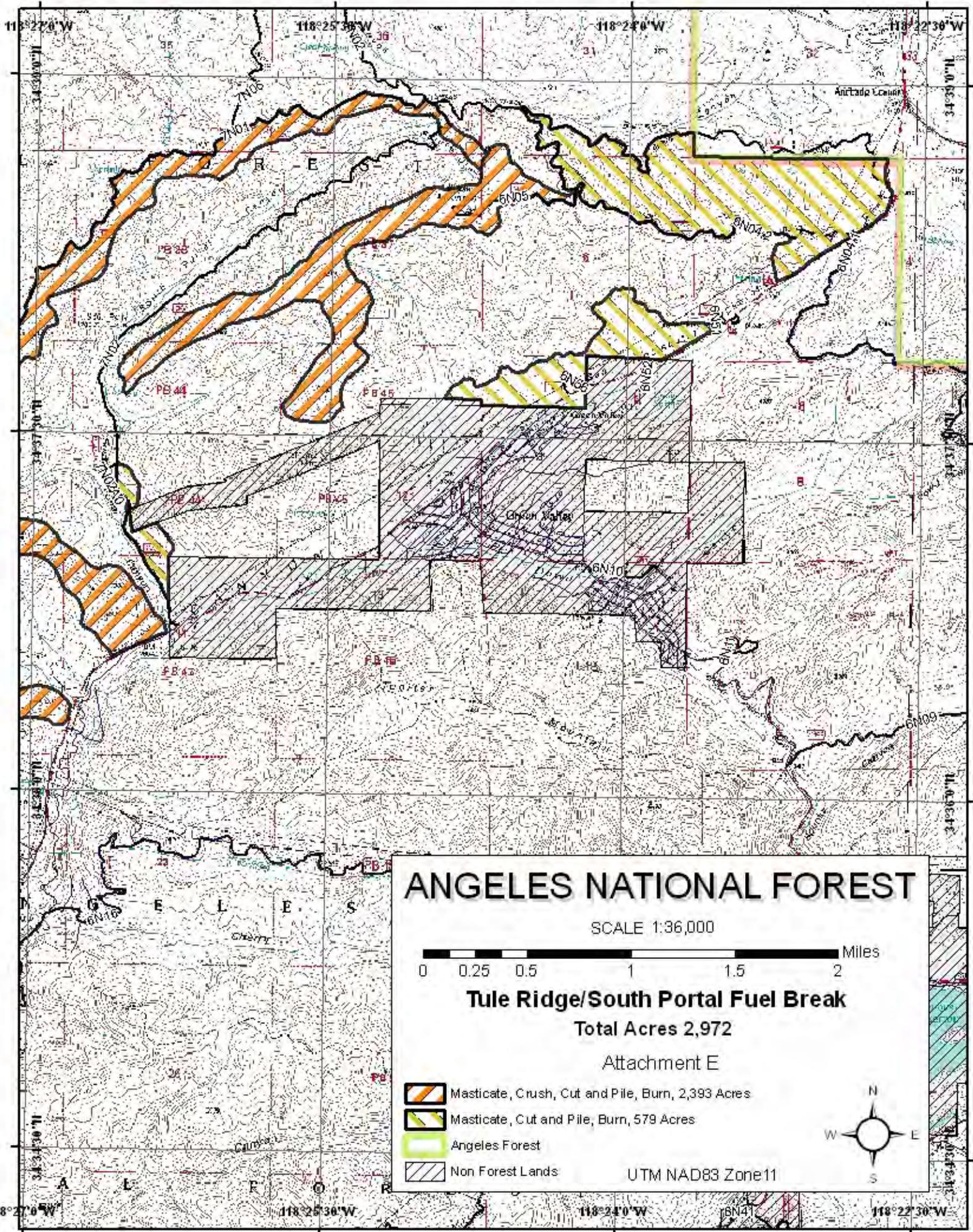
Attachment D

- Masticate, Crush, Cut and Pile, Burn, 2,393 Acres
- Masticate, Cut and Pile, Burn, 579 Acres
- Angeles Forest
- Non Forest Lands



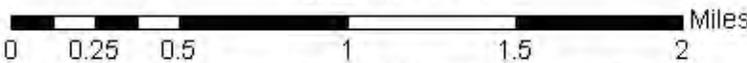
UTM NAD83 Zone 11





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Attachment E

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UTM NAD83 Zone 11