DECISION MEMO

SGR BACKBONE FUEL BREAK
FUELS AND VEGETATION MANAGEMENT ACTIVITIES
FUELBREAKS

USDA FOREST SERVICE
SAN GABRIEL RIVER RANGER DISTRICT
ANGELES NATIONAL FOREST
LOS ANGELES COUNTY, CALIFORNIA

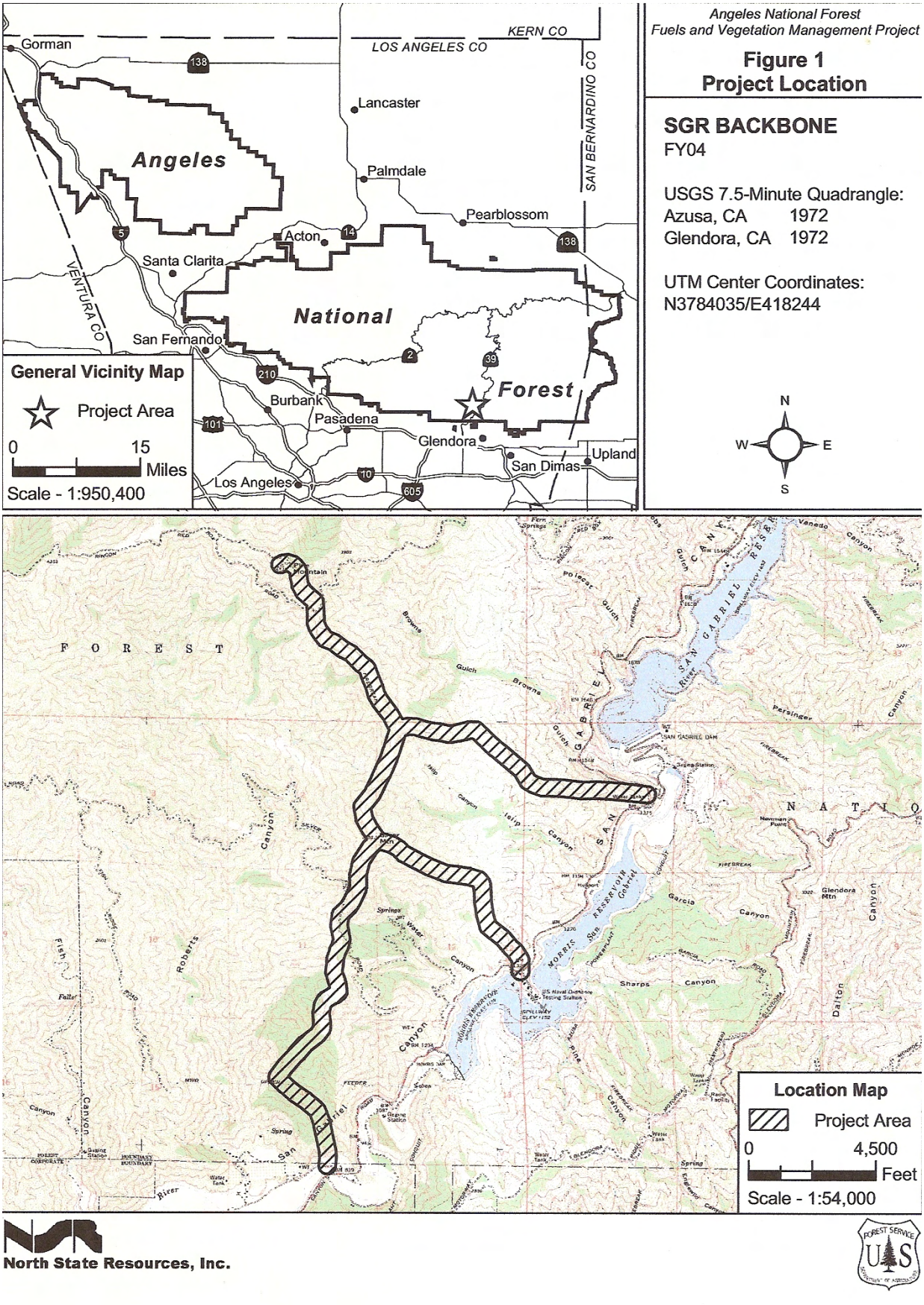
BACKGROUND

The project is designed to re-establish an existing fuel break system in accordance with the Angeles National Forest Land Management Plan. The project is the primary line of defense for the western portion of the San Gabriel River RD. During past fires, this fuelbreak was used successfully during suppression actions. Characteristics of the project site are summarized in Table 1 and the location of the project site is illustrated in Figure 1.

Table 1. Characteristics of the Project Site

Project Name	Location	Acreage	Elevation Range
SGR Backbone Fuel Break	Township 2N, Range 12W, Sections 26, 35 and 36, and Township 1N, Range 10W, Sections 1, 2, 11, 12, 14, and 23, of the *Azusa, California* U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) 7.5 minute topographic quadrangle; and Township 1N, Range 9W, Sections 6 and 7, of the *Glendora, California* USGS 7.5 minute topographic quadrangle	600.8± acres	790 to 4,528 feet

Purpose and Need: The San Gabriel Backbone fuelbreak represents a strategic series of ridgelines separating backcountry areas on the San Gabriel River Ranger District from the wildland urban interface of Azusa and State Highway 39. The area was burned in several fires between 1997 and 2000, and over time brush has begun to establish back on the fuelbreak reducing its potential effectiveness. There is a need for maintenance of the fuelbreak to assure the viability of this wildland fire control feature to; provide for firefighter safety through use of the fuelbreak as a strategic and tactical barrier to fire spread; and reduce the potential of catastrophic fire spreading from the interface into the Forest, as well as limit fires spreading out of the Forest into the developed interface areas of the front country.


Angeles National Forest
Fuels and Vegetation Management Project
Figure 1
Project Location
SGR BACKBONE
FY04
USGS 7.5-Minute Quadrangle:
Azusa, CA 1972
Glendora, CA 1972
UTM Center Coordinates:
N3784035/E418244
General Vicinity Map
Project Area
0 15 Miles
Scale - 1:950,400
KERN CO
LOS ANGELES CO
SAN BERNARDINO CO
VENTURA CO
Gorman
Lancaster
Palmdale
Pearblossom
Acton
Santa Clarita
San Fernando
Angeles
National
Forest
Burbank
Pasadena
Glendora
San Dimas
Upland
Los Angeles
N
W
E
S
Location Map
Project Area
0 4,500 Feet
Scale - 1:54,000
North State Resources, Inc.

DECISION

It is my decision to proceed with the San Gabriel Backbone Fuel Break Project. This project re-establishes an existing fuel break system and with no adverse environmental effects.

Project Description

The purpose of the project is to re-establish an existing fuel break. Project is located on the primary ridge running south from Pine Mountain to the mouth of San Gabriel Canyon. Ridges running to the east on both sides of Islip Canyon are also included in the project. These ridges are designated as Islip Spur on the north and Silver Spur on the south. Vegetation would be removed for 300 feet on each side of the center of the ridge, leaving less than 2 tons of flammable fuel per acre. A combination of treatments are prescribed, to include crushing, masticating, drum chopping, mechanical chainsaw cutting, chipping, and prescribed fire, and discing. Hand crews will use chainsaws in areas inaccessible by dozer, and for prescribed fire preparation. Crews will hand ignite fuels from the ridgeline allowing fire to back downslope through the disced and thinned areas. The fuel break will be maintained on a 5-year cycle.

Fomes annosus (*Heterobasidion annosum*) is a fungus that attacks a wide range of woody plants causing a decay of the roots and butt and the death of sapwood and cambium. All conifer species in California are susceptible to the fungus. To reduce the risk of fomes annosus infestation, Sporax will be applied to freshly cut stumps. The active ingredient in Sporax is borax, a naturally occurring mineral made of sodium, boron, oxygen, and water. Borax is virtually nontoxic to humans, birds, fish, and to aquatic invertebrate animals. No treatment of vegetation would occur within 50-200 feet of streams; therefore, no borax is anticipated to enter the streams within the project area. Sporax would be applied in localized treatments, has low toxicity, and would not be used near water or during rain events.

REASONS FOR CATEGORICALLY EXCLUDING THE PROPOSED ACTION

The proposed action falls under the following category of actions that may be excluded from documentation in an environmental impact statement (EIS) or environmental assessment (EA) and normally does not individually or cumulatively have a significant effect on the human environment:

> ***Categorical Exclusion (31.2 (#6) (FSH 1909.15):*** *"Timber stand and/or wildlife habitat improvement activities which do not include the use of herbicides or do not require more than one mile of low standards road construction."*

The environmental analysis conducted for the proposed action determined that there were no extraordinary circumstances or conditions that would result in significant adverse effects. Extraordinary circumstances include, but are not limited to, the following:

1. Threatened and Endangered Species or Their Critical Habitat

With implementation of the Avoidance and Minimization Measures, it is my determination that project activities will not affect any threatened, endangered, proposed, or candidate species. Project activities will not affect designated or proposed critical habitat for any listed species (Angeles National Forest, 2007).

2. Forest Service Sensitive Species

It is my determination that project activities may affect individuals, but will not lead towards a trend in federal listing or loss of viability for any Forest Service sensitive species (Angeles National Forest, 2007).

3. Flood Plains, Wetlands, or Municipal Watersheds

The proposed project is not anticipated to adversely affect floodplains, wetlands, or municipal watersheds.

4. Congressionally Designated Areas, Such as Wilderness, Wilderness Study Areas, or National Recreation Areas

There are no congressionally designated areas within the project area (U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2005).

5. Inventoried Roadless Areas

The project area is not located within an inventoried roadless area (Angeles National Forest, 2000).

6. Research Natural Areas

There are no research natural areas within the project area (U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2005).

7. American Indians and Alaska Native Religious or Cultural sites

Regularly scheduled meetings and correspondence with the Native Americans on general Forest issues and mutual concerns have not identified any American Indian or Alaska Native religious or cultural sites of concern located within the treatment areas.

8. Archaeological Sites or Historic Properties or Areas

Cultural resources are located in and around the project location. Consultation with the Forest Archaeologist has determined that impacts can be mitigated with standard mitigations.

9. Clean Air Act General Conformity

The proposed action was analyzed as required under section 176(c) of the federal Clean Air Act, as amended, and 40 CFR 93.156, and was determined to conform to the applicable State Implementation Plan for the purpose of attaining and maintaining all National Ambient Air Quality Standards (Angeles National Forest, 2005b). This project does not exceed threshold levels and therefore meets federal conformity guidelines. No additional air quality analysis is required.

Therefore, I find that there are no extraordinary circumstances or conditions that might cause the action to have significant effects.

SCOPING & PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Internal scoping was conducted by the following resource specialists: Forest Biologist, Forest Botanist, Forest Archaeologist, and San Gabriel River Ranger District staff. No significant issues or extraordinary circumstances precluding the action were raised. A legal notice was published in the Los Angeles Daily News and Inland Valley Daily Bulletin on September 1, 2005. Letters requesting comments on the proposed action were mailed to interested or affected persons or organizations on September 2, 2005. This project was published in the forest Schedule of Proposed Actions (SOPA) on October 1, 2007.

FINDINGS REQUIRED BY OTHER LAWS

This proposed action is consistent with management direction (Angeles National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan), as required by the National Forest Management Act (FSM 1926.41, and FSH 1909.12); National Environmental Policy Act; Endangered Species Act; National Historic Preservation Act; Clean Water Act; Clean Air Act; and all other applicable Acts.

This action will not require a Civil Rights Impact Statement because it will not have a significant impact on the social environment.

IMPLEMENTATION DATE

Implementation may begin immediately.

ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW OR APPEAL OPPORTUNITIES

This action is not subject to notice, comment and appeal under the requirements of 36CFR 215.8 (4).

APPROVED _____ DATE 6 APRIL 2009

L'Tanga Watson
District Ranger
San Gabriel River Ranger District

REFERENCES

Angeles National Forest. 2000. Inventoried Roadless Areas Map. Roadless Area Conservation. September 15, 2000. Available: http://www.roadless.fs.fed.us/states/ca/ange.pdf.

Angeles National Forest. 2005. Clean Air Act – Air Quality General Conformity Report for San Gabriel Canyon Backbone. Prepared by Earth Matters, Inc., December 16, 2005.

Angeles National Forest. 2007. Biological Evaluation/Biological Assessment for SGR Backbone. Prepared by North State Resources, Inc., May 2007.

U.S. Department of Agriculture 2005. Land Management Plan – Part 2 Angeles National Forest Strategy. Pacific Southwest Region R5-MB-076. September 2005.

Appendix A

Avoidance and Minimization Measures

Avoidance and Minimization Measures

The following avoidance and minimization measures shall be implemented to avoid the potential for significant adverse effects to sensitive environmental resources. These measures are mandatory conditions of project authorization:

1. All materials, wastes, and equipment will be removed from the project site(s) at the completion of the project.
2. Vehicles will not be driven off of designated access roads and fuelbreaks during the course of project implementation.
3. Where feasible, safety zones and escape routes will consist of the existing roads and trails.
4. Where feasible, snags and down wood will be left in place.
5. To the extent feasible, rock outcrops should be excluded from hand treatments and mechanical equipment.
6. In order to minimize potential disturbance impacts, work crews should be trained about ANF special status species.
7. Work crews must immediately notify the ANF District Biologist of any sightings of TEPCS species and of any injured/sick/abandoned animals.
8. Where feasible, burning and removal of trees and other vegetation will be conducted outside of the general nesting season for migratory birds (approximately April 1st –September 1st).
9. For treatments within 500 feet of suitable southwestern willow flycatcher habitat, noise generating activities that require the use of large equipment or mechanized equipment such as chain saws will be scheduled to occur outside of April 1 to August 31. Beyond the 500 foot buffer, no seasonal restriction is recommended for the flycatcher. Noise generating activities can proceed during this timeframe if surveys during the current breeding season have determined that southwestern willow flycatchers are not present in the project area.
10. If suitable nesting habitat for the California spotted owl is present in the project site or within ¼ mile of the project site, limited operating periods may apply. Limited Operating Period Guidelines from the June 2004 *Conservation Strategy for the California Spotted Owl (Strix occidentalis occidentalis) on the National Forests of Southern California* will be in place, unless surveys confirm that spotted owls are not nesting in the proximity of the project. If protocol surveys determine that spotted owls are nesting within 0.25 mile of the project area or nesting owls Protected Activity Center (PAC) is within 0.25 mile of the project area, project activities in this area may not occur from February 1st - August 15th.
11. Fuel Management Guidelines prescribed in the June 2004 *Conservation Strategy for the California Spotted Owl (Strix occidentalis occidentalis) on the National Forests of Southern California* will also be in place to protect Nest Stands, PACs, and Home Range Cores (HRCs). This includes indirect fuel management, monitoring, vegetation treatments designed to improve spotted owl habitat, and the application of guidelines described in Table 2 of the June 2004 conservation strategy.
12. TEPCS plants observed within the project area will be flagged and treatments will be designed to minimize negative impacts. For example, Plummer's mariposa lily (*Calochortus plummerae*) occurs in close proximity to the project site. Populations of this species will be flagged and avoided.

13. District staff including the district ranger, fire crews and recreation staff will be shown photographs of the sensitive plant. If necessary, staff will have an onsite visit to see Plummer's mariposa lily.

14. A monitoring plan for Plummer's mariposa lily will be developed in agreement with the Forest Botanist. The goal of the monitoring plan is to determine the success of the flag and avoid treatment option.

15. Riparian Areas:

    15a) For riparian areas, the Riparian Conservation Area (RCA) guidelines from the 2005 Forest Plan will be used (Appendix E). All treatments will be consistent with FSH 2509.22- Soil and Water Conservation Practices Handbook and Best Management Practices. This will ensure that ground disturbing activities will not contribute additional sediment to any streams or lakes. Where prescribed burns are planned, no direct burning will occur in the RCA. Fire may enter those areas by "backing" downslope, burning the understory at low intensity. However, no effort will be made to apply fire directly to those areas or start a hot fire upwind that would intentionally move into the riparian buffer zones. To the extent possible, low creeping fires would be used near riparian areas, minimizing the burning/thinning of cottonwoods, alders, willows, and other riparian overstory.

    15b) To prevent vehicle encroachment in riparian habitats, ensure that barriers to riparian areas are not removed as a result of treatments.

    15c) Construction of firebreaks within riparian habitat will be avoided except where handlines have to cross riparian zones. Those short lines will be constructed and maintained with handcrews using handtools and chainsaws. The width will be kept to a minimum and the length of handlines in riparian will also be kept to a minimum.

    15d) To the extent feasible, fuel reductions implemented in riparian areas will focus on the removal of non-native vegetation to achieve fuel hazard reduction objectives.

16. General Chaparral Habitat:

    16a) Through the use of waterbars and other erosion control techniques, minimize amount of erosion and reduce sedimentation flow into riparian areas.

    16b) Where prescribed burns are planned, the prescription objective for chaparral habitat will include creating a fire of sufficient intensity to ensure germination of cupleaf ceanothus, bigberry manzanita, and other obligate seeding species. These shrubs do not resprout from burls, but instead regenerate only from seed following fire. Seeds are apparently induced to germinate by heat. For purposes of obligate seeding species, fire intensity can be estimated by the burned-off diameters of stems: where burned stems are ¼-1" in diameter, the fire should be hot enough to induce germination.

17. To prevent the spread of noxious weeds:

    17a) Follow up noxious weed surveys will be conducted throughout the project site. For the first year following treatments weed surveys will be conducted. Ideally, surveys will be monthly between March and July.

    17b) Ideally, for years 2 to 5 following the treatments, weed surveys will be conducted bi-monthly between March and July.

17c) If any new or expanding infestation of invasive species are discovered, the Forest Botanist will be notified and the plants will be removed using the most efficient and effective method.

18. FSM 2081.03, directs the Forest Service to require all equipment be cleaned when working in a site contaminated with noxious weeds. As a result of FSM 2081.03, the following will be required at all project sites:

18a) WASH ALL EQUIPMENT AND VEHICLES: Vehicles and all equipment must be washed BEFORE AND AFTER entering all project sites. This includes wheels, undercarriages, bumpers and all parts of the vehicle. In addition, all tools such as chain-saws, hand clippers, pruners, etc must also be washed BEFORE AND AFTER entering all project sites. For example, vehicles traveling into contaminated areas are the main dispersal mechanism for yellow star-thistle. All washing must take place where rinse water is collected and disposed of in either a sanitary sewer or a landfill.

18b) KEEP WRITTEN LOGS: When vehicles and equipment are washed, a daily log must be kept, stating:

A) Location

B) Date and time

C) Methods used

D) Staff present

E) Equipment washed

F) Signature of responsible crew member

18c) TURN IN WRITTEN LOGS: These written logs will be turned in every week. Contractors should turn in written logs to the COR. Forest Service staff should turn in written logs to the project manager or to the Forest Botanist.