



DECISION NOTICE/FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT
INVASIVE PLANT TREATMENT PROJECT
SAN GABRIEL RIVER RANGER DISTRICT, ANGELES NATIONAL FOREST
AND
SAN DIMAS EXPERIMENTAL FOREST, PACIFIC SOUTHWEST RESEARCH STATION
U.S. FOREST SERVICE

PORTIONS OF T1N, R8W, R9W, R10W, AND R11W; T2N, R8W, R9W, R10W, AND R11W;
AND T3N, R8W, R9W, AND R10W, SBM

LOS ANGELES AND SAN BERNARDINO COUNTIES, CALIFORNIA

DECISION

Based upon our review of the analysis, comments from the public, and other documents provided for the Invasive Plant Treatment Project Environmental Assessment (EA), it is our decision to implement the Proposed Action (Alternative 2). The design features for the Proposed Action described in the EA will be implemented. The Proposed Action includes the eradication, control, containment, and/or suppression of existing and new infestations of invasive plant species that are undesirable, noxious, harmful, injurious, or poisonous, including but not limited to State listed high priority noxious weeds in the San Gabriel, Big and Little Dalton, and San Dimas canyon drainages from the Forest boundary to their headwaters. The width of the project area will include these channels and average 100 to 350 feet from the edge of the high water mark (with a few areas that go beyond a quarter mile from the edge of the high water mark). Treatment areas will include non-National Forest System lands if the landowners/managers would like to enter into an agreement authorized under the Wyden Amendment.

The term for this project is 15 years with the intent to review and, if needed, update the project, effects analysis, and possibly purpose and need after 15 years of implementation. In general, the proposed action will cap the maximum treatment of the invasive plant species populations and future expansions of these species to 200 miles and/or 4,100 acres annually, depending on funding and staffing. High priority for treatment would be: arundo (*Arundo donax*), tamarisk (*Tamarix* spp.) and tree-of-heaven (*Ailanthus altissima*). Moderate priority invasive plants would be bigleaf periwinkle (*Vinca major*), cape-ivy (*Delairea odorata*), castorbean (*Ricinus communis*), crimson fountaingrass (*Pennisetum setaceum*), Eutopary (*Ageratina adenophora*), English ivy, Algerian ivy (*Hedera* sp.), fennel (*Foeniculum vulgare*), French broom (*Genista monspessulana*), gorse (*Ulex europaeus*), Himalaya blackberry (*Rubus armeniacus*), Italian ryegrass (*Lolium multiflorum*), pampas grass (*Cortaderia* sp.), purple veldtgrass (*Ehrharta calycina*), Scotch broom (*Cytisus scoparius*), Spanish broom (*Spartium junceum*), spotted knapweed (*Centaurea maculosa*), tree tobacco (*Nicotiana glauca*) and yellow starthistle (*Centaurea solstitialis*).

The Proposed Action incorporates an adaptive management strategy that allows the project to be modified based on invasive plant expansion, new infestations of invasive plants in the project area, and new and more effective treatment methods.

Prescriptions for treatment will follow integrated weed management (IWM) for each treatment site. Proposed treatment methods include biological control (e.g. insects, pathogens), manual/mechanical, fire-wilting, and herbicide. Depending on the size of the treated material (invasive plants), additional treatment of this activity-generated material (biomass) could be required.

Monitoring and restoration are also key components to the proposed action. There will be two main types of monitoring: implementation monitoring and effectiveness monitoring. All monitoring would be similar to the information already compiled through Forest Service Activity Tracking System (FACTS) and National Resource Information System (NRIS) data collection. Monitoring is intended to compare baseline information with post treatment information, determine the effectiveness of treatment, and possibly provide adaptive management based on unanticipated effects, and monitor the restoration of treated sites. To ensure treated areas are not re-colonized with invasive plant species, restoration activities may be required. All surveys/monitoring will be documented in the project files.

No new permanent or temporary roads are being proposed with this action. Any access would be by foot or by vehicles using existing roads. Helicopters may be used for transportation in remote areas where access is difficult, including possibly the wilderness with the appropriate authorization.

Based on consultation with US Fish and Wildlife Service, design features were added and modified from the preliminary EA to provide additional protection measures to species.

DECISION RATIONALE

Our decision to implement the Proposed Action considered existing conditions, environmental effects and public comments. Our conclusion is based on a review of the record that shows a thorough analysis using the best available science. We also considered direction provided in the Forest Plan, National Environmental Policy Act, Endangered Species Act, Clean Water Act, and related regulations and policies. Based on the Environmental Assessment, we believe the Proposed Action best meets the purpose and needs for action. This alternative allows for the eradication, control, containment, and suppression of existing and new infestations of invasive plant species with a wide variety of treatment options through integrated weed management, including an adaptive management strategy (EA, pp. 8-10). The alternative focuses treatment on priority invasive plant species (Table 1 on pp. 10-11 in the EA lists the high and moderate priority species that would be treated). The alternative also allows for the cooperation with state and county agencies and private landowners in managing invasive plants on non-National Forest System lands through a cost-share agreement authorized under the Wyden Amendment (EA, p. 6). Treatment of invasive plants located in riparian habitat (e.g. arundo, tamarisk) that are difficult to control without the use of herbicides will improve riparian habitat, aquatic conditions, and overall quality and quantity of water by eradicating or controlling these quick invaders from these areas (EA, p. 10). As noted in the EA, dense stands of tamarisk and arundo can reduce streamflow by direct water usage and can affect stream morphology by unnaturally stabilizing stream banks, islands, sandbars and floodplains. Tamarisk can increase salt buildup in soils, reducing soil productivity (p. 83). Treating these species (which also change fire regimes) will also reduce the risk of increased fire severity and frequency of damaging fires in these drainages (EA, pp. 47) which would have indirect effects to native riparian vegetation and riparian habitat (EA, p. 83). Numerous design features are incorporated into the alternative to minimize direct adverse impacts to populations of threatened, endangered and or Forest Service sensitive plant and wildlife species (EA, chapter 2, design features 1-3 ,8-13, 16-30). Other design features are included to minimize impacts to the native riparian vegetation within the project

area (EA, Chapter 2, design features 1-3, 11, 13, 15, 48-49, 56) and provide for health and safety to humans (EA, Chapter 2, design features 4-7, 13, 58, 62-65, 72, 83-86).

This alternative proposes an integrated weed management approach in which herbicide use is an option but is not intended to be the key treatment for all invasive plants. Figure 2 in the EA (pp. 8-10) is a decision key that is intended to have the implementers look at the various options for treatment. Step 1A indicates that non-herbicide treatments are the first consideration.

Based on the project design (including the numerous design features), the impacts to resources were minimized (chapter 3 of the EA). The Invasive Plant Treatment Project EA documents the environmental analysis and conclusions upon which this decision is based.

OTHER ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

Alternative 1 is the no action alternative. Under this alternative, invasive plants would not be treated. This alternative represents the existing condition and expected future conditions against which other alternatives were compared. This alternative was considered in the decision but was not chosen. No action would not meet the purposes of and needs for the project and would allow the existing and future invasive plant species to expand in and beyond the project area.

Alternative 3 was designed based on scoping comments concerning the use of herbicides. This alternative is the same as alternative 2 but does not allow the use of herbicides as a treatment option. This alternative was considered in the decision but was not chosen for the following reasons:

1. The priority species (arundo, tamarisk, and tree-of-heaven) are difficult to control without the use of herbicides and this alternative will be less effective. Because of this, treatment strategies would be for control not eradication.
2. Monitoring of the treatment areas will be critical to success and the areas will likely require more entries to gain control of the invasive plant(s). Time and costs to complete this work will likely reduce the ability to treat species other than the three high priority species.
3. Physical treatments of the high priority species will cause more ground disturbance and may require more restoration activities than alternative 2.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

This action was originally listed as a proposal on the Angeles National Forest Schedule of Proposed Actions and updated periodically during the analysis. As noted in the EA, a scoping letter was sent out to approximately 240 agencies, groups and individuals on May 15, 2009; a legal notice was published May 15, 2009 in the *Inland Valley Daily Bulletin* and the project website was made available on May 15, 2009 that included the proposed action, map of the project area, and scoping letter. People were also invited to review and comment on the preliminary EA. Approximately 260 notices and 4 copies of the preliminary EA were mailed on September 24, 2010, a legal notice was published September 27, 2010, and the project website was modified to include the preliminary EA, map, letter and legal notice wording on September 27, 2010. The EA lists agencies and people consulted on pages 101. Appendix A in the EA provides a summary of comments received during scoping and Appendix D provides response to comments on the preliminary EA.

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

In reaching our determination under 40 CFR 1508.27 that preparation of an environmental impact statement is not needed, we considered the following factors and information developed during the

analysis of the proposal disclosed in the Invasive Plant Treatment EA. These factors are found as a section in the EA under chapter 3 (pp. 95-101).

CONTEXT

This project is located in the eastern portion of the Angeles National Forest. This Forest is an urban forest with large population centers nearby (e.g. Los Angeles). Though this project covers 22,000 acres, the entire project area will not be treated by the proposed action since the density of invasive plants in the project area at this time are scattered, in small pockets, or individuals. The proposed action will not have a significant affect to society locally or regionally, short-term or long-term.

INTENSITY

The intensity of effects was considered in terms of the following:

1. **Impacts may be both beneficial and adverse. A significant effect may exist even if the Federal agency believes that, on balance, the effect will be beneficial.** Consideration of the intensity of environmental effects is not biased by beneficial effects of the action. Table 8 in the EA (pp. 44-45) provides a summary of effects to a variety of resources; chapter 3 of the EA is the analysis of effects (pp. 46-95); and a list of beneficial and adverse effects is provided on pages 96-97 in the EA.
2. **The degree to which the proposed action affects public health or safety.** One of the objectives for this project is to provide for health and safety during implementation of the project (EA, p. 3). As noted in the human health and safety section in chapter 3 of the EA, health and safety are broken into three main groups: fire and fuels; non-herbicide activities; and herbicide use. Greatest risk to humans is from the use of triclopyr. Design features are included in the proposed action to reduce potential health and safety risks from the use of this herbicide along with other potential health and safety risks from the implementation of this project. Based on the proposed action, including the design features, there will be no significant effects on public health and safety (See EA pages 47-58 and 97).
3. **Unique characteristics of the geographic area, such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas.** Unique characteristics for this project are defined as: proximity to historical or cultural sites, wilderness areas (including recommended), research natural areas, eligible wild and scenic rivers and critical biological land use zone. Design features were incorporated into the project action to minimize adverse effects to these resources. The impacts are determined to be less than significant. The summary of effects to these resources is noted in chapter 3, pages 97 and 98.
4. **The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial.** One commenter during scoping and the 30-day comment period on the proposed action is concerned about the use of herbicides on national forest lands. The EA focuses on potential effects to human health and wildlife from the use of the 5 herbicides based on the scoping comments, and appendix D in the EA responds to the comments provided during the 30-day comment period. Based on the analysis, the effects on the quality of the human environment are not likely to be highly controversial. In addition, over 240 notices were mailed during scoping and 260 notices were mailed during the 30-day comment period. Notices were mailed to potentially interested individuals, groups, and government agencies, including Native American groups and individuals, adjacent landowners, permit holders, environmental groups, and local community, state, and federal government agencies.

Six individuals provided comments during scoping with two concerned with the use of herbicides. Two individuals provided comments during the 30-day comment period. Based on the level of outreach and the response, it is unlikely the effects to the human environment from this project are highly controversial. Activities were designed to minimize or eliminate potential effects on the human environment.

5. **The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.** The Agency has considerable experience with actions like the one proposed. As noted on pages 98 and 99, the analysis for herbicide use focused on the SERA risk assessments and potential effects are noted in chapter 3 of the EA. Because all five herbicides have been approved by US EPA and are certified for use by the State, it is unlikely the risks are highly uncertain or involve unknown risk. In addition, numerous design features have been incorporated into alternative 2 to reduce potential risks to the environment caused by the use of herbicides (e.g. reduce risks for spill, reduce the potential for drift, implement safety plans [including the need for personal protective equipment], allowing only aquatically registered labeled herbicides formulations of glyphosate, imazapyr, and triclopyr, and low-risk aquatically approved surfactants within 100 feet of the banks of rivers and streams, comply with federal, state, and local laws including complying with label instructions). The analysis shows the effects are not uncertain, and do not involve unique or unknown risk.
6. **The degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects, or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration.** Alternative 2 is project-specific and does not establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects. Any future actions not covered by this proposal would need to consider all relevant scientific, site-specific information available at that time, and an independent environmental analysis of environmental consequences. The project does not involve future connected actions.
7. **Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts.** Based on the cumulative effects analysis addressed for each resource in chapter 3 of the EA, there would be no significant cumulative effects. The analysis determined alternative 2, when combined with other actions in the project area, would likely have beneficial cumulative effects related to reducing the spread of invasive plant species by either expanding the capacity of the other actions for control and eradication efforts or by mitigating their potential for increasing invasive plant distribution and abundance in the project area.
8. **The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed , or eligible for listing, in the National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources.** As noted in the third intensity factor above, alternatives 2, including the implementation of the heritage resource design features (pp. 39-40 in the EA), are not expected to have direct or indirect adverse effects to cultural resource sites. By implementing the design features, which include pre-treatment surveying, flag and avoidance, and monitoring protection measures effectiveness, alternative 2 would have a less than significant effect to cultural and historic resources)
9. **The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered**

Species Act of 1973. One of the purposes (objectives) for this project is to minimize adverse impacts from the project to populations of threatened or endangered species. As noted earlier, numerous design features were included in the projects design to minimize risk and potential effects to these species and their habitat. Effects to these species are located on pages 68, 74 and 75 of the EA.

10. **Whether the action threatens to violate Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.** The action will not violate Federal, State, and local laws or requirements for the protection of the environment. Applicable laws and regulations were considered in the EA and documented on pages 100 and 101. The action is consistent with the Angeles National Forest Land Management Plan (Forest Plan).

After considering the effects of the actions analyzed, in terms of context and intensity, I have determined that these actions will not have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment. Therefore, an environmental impact statement will not be prepared.

FINDINGS REQUIRED BY OTHER LAWS AND REGULATIONS

As noted above, this decision is consistent with the Forest Plan and does not violate Federal State, and local laws and regulations. Discussions of the various key laws and regulations are located on pages 100 and 101 of the EA.

ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW (APPEAL) OPPORTUNITIES

This decision is subject to administrative review (appeal) pursuant to 36 CFR Part 215. Individuals or organizations who provided comments or otherwise expressed interest in the proposal by the close of the comment period are eligible to appeal the decision pursuant to 36 CFR part 215 regulations. The notice of appeal must meet the appeal content requirements at 36 CFR 215.14.

This decision involves two separate administrative areas; therefore, there are two Appeal Deciding Officers. The appeal(s) must be filed (regular mail, fax, email, hand-delivery, or express delivery) with the applicable Appeal Deciding Officers:

For those lands involving the San Dimas Experimental Forest:

Acting Station Director Alexander L. Friend
Pacific Southwest Research Station
800 Buchanan Street, West Annex Building
Albany, CA 94710-0011
Fax: 510-559-6440
Email: jlhayes@fs.fed.us, with “Attn: Station Director” in subject line or text
Office hours: Monday – Friday 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. (excluding holidays)

For those lands within the project area but outside San Dimas Experimental Forest:

Forest Supervisor Thomas A. Contreras
Angeles National Forest
701 N Santa Anita Avenue
Arcadia, CA 91006
Fax: (626) 574-5235, with a subject line titled “Appeal”
Email: jseastrand@fs.fed.us
Office hours: Monday – Friday 8:00 am to 4:30 pm, excluding holidays



Electronic appeals must be submitted in a format such as an email message, plain text (.txt), rich text format (.rtf), or Word (.doc) to the email address listed above. In cases where no identifiable name is attached to an electronic message, a verification of identity will be required. A scanned signature is one way to provide verification. If emailed electronically, ensure the subject line states: "Invasive Plant Treatment Project Appeal." Appeals, including attachments, must be filed within 45 days from the publication date of the legal notice in the *Inland Valley Daily Bulletin*, the newspaper of record. Attachments received after the 45 day appeal period will not be considered. The publication date in the *Inland Valley Daily Bulletin*, newspaper of record, is the exclusive means for calculating the time to file an appeal. Those wishing to appeal this decision should not rely upon dates or timeframe information provided by any other source. Names and addresses of appellants will become part of the public record.

IMPLEMENTATION DATE

If an appeal is filed, implementation may occur on, but not before fifteen business days from the date of appeal resolution. If no appeal is filed, implementation may begin five business days from the close of the appeal period.

CONTACT

For additional information concerning this decision, contact: Interdisciplinary Team Leader Marian Kadota, Adaptive Management Services Enterprise Team, 1072 Casitas Pass Road #288, Carpinteria, CA 93013; phone: (805) 220-6388 or District Resource Officer Esmeralda Bracamonte, San Gabriel River Ranger District, 110 N. Wabash Avenue, Glendora, CA 91741; phone: (626) 335-1251 extension 238.

RESPONSIBLE OFFICIALS SIGNATURES AND DATE

 12-11

 DEBORAH J. CHAVEZ Date
 Program Manager for the Urban Ecosystems and Social Dynamics program
 Pacific Southwest Research Station – Riverside

 12-1-11

 O'DELL E. TUCKER Date
 San Gabriel River District Ranger
 Angeles National Forest

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