FINAL DECISION NOTICE AND FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT
WILDCAT FUELS REDUCTION AND VEGETATION MANAGEMENT PROJECT
U.S. FOREST SERVICE, PLUMAS NATIONAL FOREST,
MT. HOUGH RANGER DISTRICT
PLUMAS COUNTY, CA

DECISION

I have read the Wildcat Fuels Reduction and Vegetation Management Project (Wildcat Project) Environmental Assessment (EA), reviewed the analysis in the project record including documents incorporated by reference, and fully understand the environmental effects disclosed therein. Since the publication of the final EA an errata has been written addressing minor grammatical errors and adopting the final language from the USFWS final Biological Opinion for the Sierra Nevada yellow-legged frog. The errata is part of the project record. Based upon my review of all the alternatives and the comments received from the public for this project, I have decided to implement Alternative A. Alternative A is described fully in Chapter 2 of the Wildcat Project EA (pages 21-39).

This decision will apply prescribed burning in fire-adapted ecosystems along with strategically placed mechanical and hand fuels reduction and vegetation management treatments, totaling approximately 3,053 acres of primary treatments; control of invasive plants using herbicides and manual treatments totaling up to 30 acres each treatment year; watershed condition restoration treatments at approximately 18 sites along National Forest System (NFS) roads; and decommissioning a total of 6.1 miles of existing non-system and 0.72 miles of NFS roads.

Table 1. Summary of vegetation management treatments and acres for Alternative A (all acres are approximate).

Primary Treatment Acres		Potential Secondary Treatments Acres	
		Biomass Removal ^¥	Prescribed Burn ^
Mechanical Thin			
Forest Health	2,433	2,433	2,433
Visual Quality Objective (VQO)	51	51	51
Subtotal	*2,587**	*2,587*	*2,587*
Aspen Enhancement			
Mechanical with Endline	287	287	286
Mechanical with Endline (VQO)	20	20	20
Hand Thin Only	10	0	10
Subtotal	*317*	*307*	*316*
Hand Thin/Pile			
With Potential Biomass Removal	145	42	103
Onsite Biomass Treatment	7	0	4
Subtotal	*49*	*42*	*4*
Prescribed Fire Only			
Prescribed Fire Only	102	0	102
Total Acres	**3,057**	**2,936 ^**	**3,009 ^**

^These treatments are potential secondary treatments that occur within the same footprint as the primary treatment. Therefore, these acres are not considered additional footprint. The largest extent of the project treatment area is 3,057 acres.
¥If biomass removal is not feasible, smaller diameter material on these sites may also be treated by machine grapple pile, hand thinning and piling and/or pile burning.
*Actual acres of mechanical thin may be lower due to RCA mitigation measures. Hand thinning and piling, endlining and/or lop and scatter treatments are allowed within RCAs.

Decision Rationale

Currently, the Wildcat Project area landscape is comprised of over-stocked stands that are at elevated risks of loss to uncharacteristic wildfire, insects and diseases. Many of the historic east-side pine type stands in this historically drier ecosystem are now dominated by drought intolerant true fir and have become homogenized in both forest structure and species composition. Aspen stands are also at risk as continuing conifer encroachment threatens to replace aspen. Invasive plants including Canada thistle (Cirsium arvense), medusahead (Elymus caput-medusae) and jointed goatgrass (Aegilops cylindrica) have increased in number since the Moonlight Fire and are capable of migrating, establishing, and spreading rapidly and unpredictably. Watershed resources such as water quality and habitat for riparian and aquatic resources are also being negatively impacted by over-stocked, homogenous stands as well as sedimentation from nearby forest roads. Such resource conditions will most likely continue, if not worsen over time. The application of natural resource management is the most appropriate tool to shifting the current trajectory in the Wildcat Project.

The benefits of selecting Alternative A include reducing the risk of wildfires, improving forest health, protecting valuable wildlife habitat, reducing invasive plants and enhancing watersheds. In selecting Alternative A, I have determined that my decision is consistent with all laws, regulations and Agency

policy. I have considered resource specific issues, potential cumulative effects with past, present and foreseeable activities, environmental consequences, and best available science. I believe my decision responds to the purpose and need for action, social issues and public comments while complying with the Plumas National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (PNF LRMP) (USDA 1988a) as amended by the Sierra Nevada Forest Plan Amendment (SNFPA) Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (FSEIS) and Record of Decision (ROD) (USDA 2004a, 2004b). The Wildcat Project EA and specialist addenda document the environmental analysis and conclusions upon which this decision is based.

The Proposed Action (Alternative A), was designed to best meet the multiple purposes and needs of the Wildcat Project area. I understand that in order to realize the long term benefits of implementing the proposed treatments, there will be short term effects that must be understood and accepted. When implementing this project, the Plumas National Forest will adhere to standards and guidelines to protect important wildlife habitat features and sensitive riparian areas, ensuring that any disturbance is eliminated or minimized and mitigated. The project specific design criteria and mitigations are meant to minimize any short term negative effects from the proposed action. Design criteria, best management practices (BMPs), and standard management requirements (SMRs) are incorporated into Alternative A (EA, Chapter 2, pages 21-39 and Appendix C). In Chapter 2 of the Wildcat Project EA, Tables 2 – 6 display design criteria including riparian conservation areas (RCAs), invasive plants, access and transportation, and watershed improvements. The criteria identified in these tables include logging systems requirements, snag retention levels, burn constraints, treatment of stumps, and residual species preferences. Appendix B includes Riparian Management Objectives (RMOs) and provides justification for treating RCAs. Appendix C includes SMRs for several resources including wildlife and fisheries, hydrology and soils, botanical resources and noxious weeds, heritage resources, and treatment implementation as it relates to access. The SMRs include items such as limited operating periods, BMPs, water drafting plan, and monitoring recommendations. Means to avoid or minimize environmental harm from this decision have been adopted. As described in the Wildcat Project EA and specialist reports, the long term benefits to human safety and ecological resources outweigh the short term effects of this project.

My decision allows for treatments that will have beneficial effects, with consideration for any potential negative resource impacts. Many variables were considered in developing the proposed action and associated treatment unit specific prescriptions including purpose and need; California Wildlife Habitat Relationship (CWHR) type, size, and density classes; land allocation; Visual Quality Objectives; and guidance from the General Technical Report PSW-GTR-220, *An Ecosystem Management Strategy for Sierran Mixed-Conifer Forests* (USDA 2009) and the General Technical Report PSW-GTR-237, *Managing Sierra Nevada Forests*. Unit specific prescriptions (Appendix B) address Riparian Conservation Areas (RCA), CWHR system specific canopy cover (CC), and general retention size for trees.

The Wildcat interdisciplinary (ID) team worked with the public and consulted with local tribal government representatives. During scoping the public expressed different concerns in comments

including concerns about motorized and non-motorized access, silvicultural prescriptions and tree marking guidelines, economic feasibility and desired forest health conditions.

During the EA comment period, the public expressed various concerns and observations about the Wildcat Project and specialist analyses. Comments regarding fuel reduction included concerns about the fire ecology and history of the project area, whether the proposed silvicultural prescription was appropriate, and whether fuel reduction was an appropriate project objective. Also received were comments regarding forest health and the effectiveness of the proposed silvicultural prescription, concerns regarding insects and disease and the role that various logging systems have in forest restoration. Comments pertaining to wildlife included the introduction of potentially new scientific information and concern regarding the effects of fuel reduction and forest health treatments to various wildlife species. Additional concerns were expressed in the interest of water quality enhancement treatments and the potential effects to water quality as a result of fuel reduction and forest health activities.

I carefully considered the public's comments on the project (see Public Involvement and Appendix F) and feel that my selection of Alternative A addresses their concerns and is the best course of action to promote and restore resiliency in the project area while reducing the fire behavior, promoting forest health, and protecting wildlife, and rare plants and the aquatic habitat among other ecosystem concerns in the project area. I believe selection of Alternative A is a step toward achieving an ecologically resilient landscape, recognizing the uncertainty of climate change and risk of future disturbances.

After considering the best available science, including science cited by commenters, I believe the scientific research analyzed for this project area was adequate for assessing the impacts of the action alternative to the environment. The project design features and mitigations will assure no significant environmental impact (see FONSI).

My rationale for deciding to implement Alternative A is based on a review of the Wildcat Project EA including project specific design features and mitigations and project record that reveals a thorough hard look at scientific information, consideration of public input, and opposing viewpoints, and the ability to meet the purpose and need for action, substantially improving resource conditions in the project area.

Achievement of Purpose and Need

Reduce Hazardous Fuels Accumulation

This project will modify fire behavior within the project area by reducing high fuel loading, in turn reducing risks to people, structures, property, and resources. For example, the Wildcat Project area is adjacent to the Antelope Lake Recreation area which has campgrounds, trails, day use facilities and the Forest Service Boulder Creek Work Station. The town of Janesville, CA is over the ridge from Wildcat Project and was at risk during the 2007 Moonlight Fire. This community will benefit from implementing Alternative A.

Within the last ten years there have been multiple fires in the adjacent area including the Stream Fire (2001), Boulder Complex (2006) and Moonlight Fire (2007). The Wildcat Project area has not experienced any recent high severity fire. However, with a historical fire return interval ranging from 6 to 15 years, it is only a matter of time before the Wildcat Project area experiences a wildfire. My decision will reduce hazardous fuel accumulation by creating conditions that will provide for a surface rather than crown fire, reduce basal area predicted level of mortality for residual trees by more than 50 percent, and allow for flame lengths ranging from approximately 1 to ten feet in mechanical thin areas.

In contrast, not treating any stands within the Wildcat Project area will leave the stands at an elevated risk during a wildfire of over 75 percent basal area mortality, nearly 30 foot flame lengths and generally higher potential for a crown fire. The no action alternative will also allow stands to *continue to develop* under the influence of the legacy of past management practices and fire suppression.

I realize from some of the public comments submitted on the draft EA that there is opposition to using mechanical thinning as a means of reducing forest fuels (see Appendix F). As stated in the Wildcat Project EA (Fire and Fuels Analysis pages 35-47), the application of prescribed fire has a substantial effect on reducing fire behavior, but the use of fire can be difficult. Currently, there is a backlog of acres to be treated with fire. Mechanical thinning is an effective tool at reducing forest fuels and facilitates a safer and more expedient re-introduction of prescribed fire. The actions proposed in Alternative A will meet the purpose and need of reducing fuels and the risk of high severity fire in the Wildcat Project area.

Improve Forest Health

Current high stand densities in the Wildcat Project area range from 61 percent to 74 percent of relative stand density index (rSDI), leading to mortality from drought, insects and at an elevated risk to high severity fire. Much of the forested landscape is relatively homogenous and comprised of close canopy stands. Often, these stands are dominated by smaller diameter trees composed of shade-tolerant conifers.

With the decision to implement Alternative A, stand density in the Wildcat Project area will be reduced to approximately 33 to 40 percent of maximum stand density. There will be a corresponding increase in average stand diameter as many of the small trees will be removed. The distribution of percent of shade-intolerant conifers will be increased from approximately one third to nearly one half (by basal area) as a result of project implementation. Under all treatment types, conditions will better meet the establishment, growth, and development of shade-intolerant tree species.

I understand that there is concern from commenters regarding the removal of forest resources as a commercial product. There is also concern that the Wildcat Project is trying to "go back in time" and re-create a historical forest condition. Still, others think that the Proposed Action does not remove enough material and will not meet our restoration goal.

Commercial sawlogs are a by-product of meeting project objectives and not necessarily a goal. Timber is a potential, indirect result of moving towards our desired condition. As indicated in the Wildcat Project EA, other activities besides mechanical thinning are proposed to help meet restoration objectives

including the use of prescribed fire, grapple piling and hand thin and piling. In addition, I am prepared to use stewardship contracting authority to help treat areas where there may not be enough volume for restoration activities to pay for themselves. The use of stewardship contracts will also enable me to provide jobs to the local community. The desired post-treatment condition is based upon historical average precipitation and historical Wieslander vegetation maps from the 1930's of the project area. It was determined that historical stands in the Wildcat Project were likely of the eastside pine type. It is noted that there might be inclusions of dry mixed conifer and true fir due to topographical, elevational or other microsite characteristics and silvicultural prescriptions in the Wildcat Project EA reflect this. The objective of the Wildcat Project is not to "go back in time" for a specific forest condition, but rather to use the past as a reference for a healthy and resilient forest. Improving forest health will be achieved by implementing Alternative A of the Wildcat Project.

Control Invasive Plants

There are multiple sites within the Wildcat Project area that contain invasive plant species including Canada thistle, medusahead and jointed goatgrass. These infested sites range from a few square feet to several acres and are capable of dispersing rapidly and unpredictably to establish populations at new sites. By implementing the Proposed Action, the Wildcat Project will effectively treat these invasive plants through a combination of chemical and manual hand treatment methods. Chemical treatment will use direct spray methods such as a backpack-type sprayer. No aerial application is proposed. Herbicide application will follow all project design features as well as manufacturer protocols to greatly minimize risks to human health and safety as well as other resources such as sensitive plants and animals and aquatic species (EA, Appendix E). Implementing the Wildcat Project Proposed Action will help control and reduce invasive plants.

Enhance Watershed Conditions Including Water Quality and Habitat for Riparian and Aquatic Species

The IDT also identified a need to enhance watershed conditions. Currently, roads are causing delivery of fine sediment to Boulder and Thompson Creeks. In addition, a legacy of unclassified roads exists.

Implementing the Wildcat Project will improve water quality and reduce non-point pollution occurring along NFS roads through upgrading water drafting sites, improving road drainage features, decommissioning classified NFS roads, obliterating unclassified roads inside Riparian Conservation Areas (RCAs).

I realize that some our public will rather have us consider adding some or all of the unclassified roads within the project area to the Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) trail system rather than obliterate them. There was also concern expressed about temporary road construction within the project area.

I did consider adding additional miles to the OHV trail system, as documented under "Enhance Outdoor Recreation" alternative considered but eliminated from detailed study. There were various reasons that I did not further consider adding more trails including it being outside the scope of the project purposes and needs and having impacts to riparian resources. Also, adding more trails will affect cultural and heritage resources and most likely violate the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) of 1966. As for concerns regarding temporary road construction and its impacts to water quality and other riparian resources, I feel that the effects of temporary road construction and use will be ephemeral in nature Roads are necessary for the implementation of the Wildcat Project. Without access, many Project Purpose and Needs will not be met. And as stated in the EA, it is required that *all* temporary roads, used or newly constructed, be subsoiled to a depth of 18 inches to restore hydrologic function and the road area be re-contoured to match slopes of the surrounding natural landscape.

In addition, the Proposed Action will enhance aquatic wildlife species habitat by restoring and enhancing Sierra Nevada yellow-legged frog (SNYLF) habitat, including proposed critical habitat, through the eradication and control of non-native vegetation, creation of basking sites, reducing fuel and increasing forest health, stand heterogeneity and disturbance resilience. With concerns regarding treatment within SNYLF habitat, the Wildcat ID team consulted extensively with the US Fish and Wildlife Service. This project was designed to minimize and not adversely affect the SNYLF or its habitat by creating mitigations such as:

a.) Equipment exclusion zones, limited operating periods in riparian conservation areas, and prescribed burning restrictions.

b.) RCA Standard Operating Procedures in compliance with Riparian Conservation Objectives will safeguard against any increased sedimentation that could have short-term effects on SNYLF.

Overall, I feel that the watershed, water quality and riparian and aquatic species habitat will be enhanced and protected by implementing the Proposed Action.

Public Involvement

This action was originally listed as a proposal on the Plumas National Forest Schedule of Proposed Actions on April 1, 2014 and updated periodically during the analysis.

The public and local tribal government representatives were invited to review and comment on the proposal. The Forest Service met with the general public for pre-scoping open house on November 20, 2013 at the Mt. Hough Ranger District office. An announcement for the open house was published in the *Feather River Bulletin* and informational flyers were sent to key contacts, including media. During the scoping period (January 29, 2014 to March 14, 2014), the Forest Service ID team met specifically with local tribal leaders. Tribal leaders were generally enthusiastic regarding the Wildcat Project, though expressed some concerns regarding the protection of cultural sites. The public was invited to review and comment on the proposal. A scoping letter was sent out on January 23, 2014 and January 24, 2014. Five comments were received during the scoping period. Public scoping comments were reviewed for potential

issues and as a result, there was one alternative considered, but eliminated from detailed study (EA, page 31). Other scoping comments were considered minor and/or non-variable consequences, which will be avoided, partially or fully mitigated by design criteria and operating procedure applied under the proposed action. A compilation of scoping comments and a summary of the issues is in the electronic project record, and available upon request at the Mt. Hough Ranger District in Quincy, CA.

On April 28, 2015, the Forest Service mailed a letter to 19 individuals and/or organizations announcing the thirty day comment period (April 22, 2015-May 22, 2015). A legal ad was published in the *Feather River Bulletin* on April 22, 2015. Five comments were received during the thirty day comment period. There were comments submitted that expressed concerns regarding mechanical thinning, silvicultural prescriptions, fuels reduction, impacts to recreation and the general NEPA process. For a more complete list of comments on the draft EA and the corresponding responses, please see Appendix F. A complete list of agencies and people consulted can be found on page 213 of the EA.

Finding of no Significant Impact

The significance of environmental impacts must be considered in terms of context and intensity. This means that the significance of an action must be analyzed in several contexts such as society as a whole (human and national), the affected region, the affected interests, and the locality. Significance varies with the setting of the proposed action. In the case of a site-specific action, significance usually depends upon the effects in the locale rather than in the world as a whole. Intensity refers to the severity or degree of impact. (40 CFR §1508.27)

As the responsible official, I am responsible for evaluating the effects of the project relative to the definition of significance established by the CEQ Regulations (40 CFR 1508.13). I have reviewed and considered the EA and documentation included in the project record, and I have determined that the proposed action, Alternative A will not have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment. As a result, no environmental impact statement will be prepared. My rationale for this finding is as follows, organized by sub-section of the CEQ definition of significance cited above.

Context

For the proposed action and alternatives the context of the environmental effects is based on the environmental analysis in this EA.

The geographic area in which effects will occur is the Wildcat Project area, north of Antelope Lake on the Plumas National Forest (EA, Figure 1, page 2), and adjacent to several recent wildfires (EA Figure 2, page 4). Indirect and cumulative effects extend beyond the treated units, and the Wildcat ID team employed an offsite restoration strategy during project development, in which proposed and ongoing restoration activities consider the effects of the recent fires in the broader landscape. Proposed activities will focus on retaining and restoring ecological resiliency by reducing unnaturally dense stand conditions,

thus improving tree health, interrupting potential fire spread and reducing fire intensity. Treatments will also eradicate, contain or control invasive plants, and improve watershed conditions by reducing erosion and enhancing aquatic wildlife species habitat. Treatments total approximately 3,053 acres of primary treatments; control of invasive plants using herbicides and manual treatments totaling up to 30 acres; watershed condition restoration treatments at approximately 18 sites along National Forest System (NFS) roads; and decommissioning a total of 6.1 miles of existing non-system and 0.72 miles of NFS roads.

INTENSITY

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

Intensity is a measure of the severity, extent, or quantity of effects, and is based on information from the effects analysis of this EA and the references in the project record. The effects of this project have been appropriately and thoroughly considered with an analysis that is responsive to concerns and issues raised by the public (EA, pages 14-33). The agency has taken a hard look at the environmental effects using relevant scientific information and knowledge of site-specific conditions gained from field visits. My finding of no significant impact is based on the context of the project and intensity of effects using the ten factors identified in 40 CFR 1508.27(b).

1. **Impacts that 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 the environmental effects of this project has not been biased by the beneficial effects of the action. All analyses prepared in support of this document considered both the beneficial and adverse effects of the proposed action; however, the beneficial effects of improving stand health and ecological resiliency, eradicating or controlling invasive species, and improving watershed conditions, were not used to offset or compensate for the potential adverse effects of the proposed treatments. The impacts associated with the proposed action have been considered separately from the beneficial effects, and the beneficial and adverse impacts are not significant (EA, Chapter 3).

2. **The degree to which the proposed action affects public health or safety.**

There will be no significant effects on public health and safety due to fuels reduction, prescribed burning, or herbicide application operations because of project specific design features and mitigations (EA, Table 2, Table 4, and Appendix E).

Access and harvest operations will involve use of mechanical equipment; falling of trees; hauling of harvest products on National Forest System (NFS) roads, County roads, and State highways; and use of prescribed fire, all of which potentially pose risks to workers and to the public. Such risks will be reduced because the public will be alerted to active harvest areas, and haul routes on NFS roads will be clearly signed and monitored as required in contract provisions to warn the public of potential hazards during project activities. Roads and trails within the project area may be closed to the recreating public on a short-term temporary basis for safety reasons.

To protect air quality, a burn plan will be submitted to and approved by the Northern Sierra Air Quality Management District (NSAQMD) prior to any prescribed fire ignitions that are part of this alternative. All burning activities will adhere to the burn plan and any other NSAQMD requirements, including a mandatory smoke management plan, and require daily coordination among local fire management officials. These mitigations will make it unlikely that emissions caused by the project will exceed California Air Quality Standards for the NSAQMD. Smoke direction and dispersal will be continually monitored during burning operations and ignition will be halted if poor conditions develop. Fugitive dust from fuel reduction and hauling operations will be mitigated by standard operating procedures and contract requirements for road watering or other dust abatement techniques (EA, pages 51-52).

The Human Health Risk Assessment (Appendix E) for this project describes in detail the potential for adverse health effects in workers and members of the public from the use of the proposed herbicides. The risk assessment examines the potential heath effect on all groups of people who might be exposed to any of the herbicides proposed for use. The analysis indicates there will be no significant effects on public health and safety. All appropriate laws, policies, and regulations governing the use of herbicide, as required by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (US EPA), the California Department of Pesticide Regulation (CA DPR), and the Forest Service Policy pertaining to herbicide use, will be followed, and all Forest Service personnel in charge of projects involving herbicide application will be Qualified Applicator Certified by CA DPR. All contract applicators will be appropriately licensed by the state, coordination with the appropriate County Agricultural Commissioner will occur, and all required licenses and permits will be obtained prior to any herbicide application. Alternative A includes design criteria and mitigations which will minimize potential hazards to workers, public health and safety, and water quality (EA, Table 4 and Appendix E).

3. Unique characteristics of the geographic area such as the proximity to historical or cultural resources, parklands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas.

The Wildcat Project Environmental Assessment has analyzed the potential for impacts to unique characteristics of the geographic area. There are no parklands, prime farmlands, or designated wild and scenic rivers within the project area. The Wildcat Project will have no significant effects to historic or cultural resources because all sites will be flagged and avoided (EA, pg. 201). Wetlands will be protected by treatment buffers (EA, Table 4, Table 5, and Table 6). Ecologically critical areas include proposed critical habitat and Critical Aquatic Refuge for Sierra Nevada Yellow-legged Frogs (SNYLF), which will be protected by treatment buffers and mitigations (EA, Table 4 and Table 5, pgs. 147-149). This project will have no significant effect on the potential wilderness character of the Semi-primitive Non-motorized portion of the Thompson Peak Semi-Primitive Area that is within the project area (EA, pg. 110).

4. The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial.

The effects on the quality of the human environment are not likely to be highly controversial. There is no known credible scientific controversy over the impacts of the proposed action. The proposed project follows the management direction in the Plumas National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (USDA 1988a), as amended by the 2004 Sierra Nevada Forest Plan Amendment FSEIS and ROD (USDA 2004 a, b). Potential adverse effects are minimized through design and the incorporation of design criteria, to the point where there are few effects to draw controversy.

5. **The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.**

The USDA Forest Service has considerable experience with actions like the one proposed. The analysis shows the effects are not highly uncertain, and do not involve unique or unknown risk. Proposed activities are routine in nature, employ standard practices and protection measures, and their effects are well known as described in Chapter 3 of the EA.

6. **The degree to which the action may establish precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration.**

The action is not likely to establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects, because any future decisions will require site-specific analysis to consider all relevant scientific information available at that time. The proposed activities are in accordance with existing PNF LRMP direction, as amended and the best available science, and are applicable only to the Wildcat Project area (EA, pages 10-15).

7. **Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts. Significance exists if it is reasonable to anticipate a cumulatively significant impact on the environment. Significance cannot be avoided by terming an action temporary or by breaking it down into small component parts.**

The cumulative impacts are not significant. A cumulative effects analysis was completed for each resource area and no resource analysis found that implementation of the selected alternative will result in significant adverse cumulative effects. A summary of the past, present, and future projects considered in each cumulative effects analysis is found in Appendix D. All treatments are subject to design criteria and mitigations that ensure minimal risks of cumulative effects (EA Table 2, Table 3, Table 4, Table 5, and Table 6).

8. **The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources.**

The Proposed Action does not adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. Activities associated with the Proposed Action will comply with the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) of 1966, as amended and it's implementing regulations 36 CFR 800 and Forest Service Manual 2360. The Proposed Action complies with provisions of Stipulation 7.4 of the *Programmatic Agreement Among The USDA Forest Service,*

Pacific Southwest Region (Region 5), California State Historic Preservation Officer, Nevada State Historic Preservation Officer, And The Advisory Council On Historic Preservation Regarding The Processes For Compliance With Section 106 Of The National Historic Preservation Act For Management of Historic Properties By the National Forests Of The Pacific Southwest Region (USDA 2013a). The analysis of heritage resources in the Wildcat Project EA determined that there will be no significant adverse effect to heritage resources because all known sites will be flagged and avoided by all personnel implementing project work (EA, page 201). In the event that any previously unrecorded heritage resources are discovered during project implementation, all projects related activities in close proximity to the resource(s) must cease. Plumas National Forest Heritage Resources staff shall be immediately notified and the procedures set forth in section 800.13 of the Council's Regulations will be initiated.

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.

The endangered Sierra Nevada yellow-legged frog (SNYLF) is the only species listed under the Endangered Species Act that has critical habitat and/or known occurrences within the Wildcat Project area. Project design criteria (EA, Table 4 and Table 5) have established treatment buffers and mitigations that provide protection to individuals, suitable habitat and proposed critical habitat for SNYLF. Specifically, equipment and treatment buffers, limited operating periods and frog basking sites will maintain and enhance habitat function while minimizing disturbance to individuals (EA, Table 3, Table 4 and page 15). The project level Biological Assessment supports this. The determination for the SNYLF for the Wildcat Project is that Alternative A may affect SNYLF and is likely to adversely affect SNYLF and its habitat, but not likely to adversely affect proposed critical habitat, with multiple long term benefits to the species and its proposed critical habitat (EA, page 157).

The Forest Service worked collaboratively with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to develop the Wildcat Project. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service provided technical assistance on the Wildcat Project during a site visit to the Plumas on June 4, 2014. Formal consolation on the Wildcat Fuels Reduction and Vegetation Management Project was requested on June 19, 2015. The Fish and Wildlife Service joined the Forest Service for a second site visit to the Wildcat Fuels Reduction and Vegetation Management Project area on September 23, 2015.

On August 2, 2016 the Fish and Wildlife Service issued a Biological Opinion as part of the Forest Service's request for consultation under section 7 of the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended (16 U.S.C. 1531 et seq.). Along with the Biological Opinion, the Fish and Wildlife Service also issued an Incidental Take Statement with Terms and Conditions. The Wildcat Project will comply with all Conservation Measures and Standard Guides and Best Management Practices in the Biological Opinion and Terms and Conditions identified in the Incidental Take Statement. The Wildcat Project will provide long-term protection and enhancement of aquatic breeding and non-breeding habitat and upland habitat composing the Primary Constituent Elements in proposed critical habitat for SNYLF. Although the BO indicates the proposed actions May Affect and are Likely to Adversely Affect the SNYLF, the degree to

which the proposed actions may adversely affect the SNYLF is not expected to jeopardize the continued existence of SNYLF, because:

a.) The restoration and enhancement of SNYLF habitat, including critical habitat, through the eradication and control of non-native vegetation.

b.) Actions in the project description and conservation measures will minimize the duration and intensity of adverse effects.

c.) The adverse effects upon a very small percentage of the SNYLF population is outweighed by the potential for expansion of this population in the restored and enhanced habitat.

d.) The limited areal extent and focused shorter-term application of herbicides represents a relatively small percentage of the suitable habitat for the SNYLF and its proposed critical habitat.

10. Whether the action threatens a violation of Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.

The proposed action will not violate Federal, State, and local laws or requirements for the protection of the environment. All applicable laws and regulations were considered in the EA (EA, pages 16-20, 206-213). The proposed action is consistent with the 1988 Plumas National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (USDA 1988) as amended by the Sierra Nevada Forest Plan Amendment Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement and Record of Decision (USDA 2004 a, b).

Findings Required by Other Laws and Regulations

In addition to the FONSI, I find that this project is consistent with the standards and guidelines for land management activities described in the 1988 Plumas National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (PNF LRMP) as amended by the 2004 Sierra Nevada Forest Plan Amendment (SNFPA) Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement and Record of Decision. Therefore, this project is consistent with the requirements of the National Forest Management Act of 1976. In addition, the Wildcat Project complies with the Endangered Species Act (EA, pages 199-200), the Clean Water Act (EA, pages 201), the Clean Air Act (EA, page 201), the National Historic Preservation Act (EA, pages 201-202) and other federal, state, and local laws or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment (EA, pages 199-204).

This Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) and the Final EA were considered when making my decision. I determined these actions will not have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment, and an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) will not be prepared.

Administrative Review Opportunities

This proposed project was subject to the objection process pursuant to 36 CFR 218 Subparts A and B. One objection was received and no changes to the project were made based on the objection points.

IMPLEMENTATION DATE

The objection resolution period has been completed and the requirements set forth in 36 CFR 218.12 have been satisfied, implementation may begin immediately, pursuant to 36 CFR 218 Subparts A and B.

CONTACT

The Wildcat Project Final EA and supporting documents are available for public review at the Plumas National Forest, Mt. Hough Ranger District, 39696 Highway 70, Quincy, CA 95971 and online at: http://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=43435. It is also possible to navigate to the project website via the Plumas National Forest webpage (www.fs.fed.us/r5/plumas). Select the "Land and Resources Management" tab, then select "Browse through the Forest Projects," and then find the project name. For additional information concerning this decision, contact: Kyla Sabo, Planner, Mt. Hough Ranger District, at 530-283-7619 or kylasabo@fs.fed.us.

Barbara Durlo 8/15/16

Date

for DANIEL A. LOVATO
Forest Supervisor
Plumas National Forest