Specialist Report

for

Recreation, Roadless, Visual Resources and Wilderness

Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest, California Integrated Weed Management Strategy.

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Introduction:

This specialist report has been prepared to provide analysis of potential affects to recreation, roadless, wilderness and visual resources from implementation of an Integrated Pest Management System to treat invasive weeds in the California portion of the Humboldt – Toiyabe National Forest

Proposed Action

The proposed action includes the development and implementation of an Integrated Pest Management System (IPMS) to treat noxious and invasive weeds on Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest System Lands in California. The IPMS will include the use of a variety of methods to treat noxious and invasive weeds including prevention, mechanical, manual (hand-pulling), chemical, and biological controls. Treatments would involve integrated prescriptions that generally combine the use of multiple types of methods over several years. Weed control in wilderness areas will be limited to prevention and hand pulling. In unique circumstances where the use of herbicides is determined to be the best method for control (e.g. a fire that results in broad scale weed infestations), a site specific Minimum Requirements Analysis would be completed and provided to the Regional Office for approval before herbicides would be used in the wilderness. The California IPMS will also include a monitoring strategy to validate treatment effectiveness, adapt future treatment techniques, and determine the effect of treatments on non-target organisms.

Purpose and Need

The purpose of this project is to implement an Integrated Pest Management Strategy (IPMS) approach to eradicate and/ or control infestations of invasive plants on the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest that occur in California, using manual, mechanical, biological, and chemical control measures. The purpose is also to establish criteria, under which an Early Detection Rapid Response approach would be implemented, thereby allowing for rapid treatment of newly discovered target invasive plants**.**

Design Features:

1. The public will be notified about upcoming herbicide treatments via the Forest Service website, fliers, individual notification, and posting signs. Signs regarding herbicide use will be placed at treatment areas and access points to treatment areas prior to initiating treatment. Signs will list herbicides to be used, effective dates, and name and phone number of the Forest contact.

2. Treatments at special use sites, along Forest Service trails, at developed recreation sites and areas of concentrated public use will avoid holidays and weekends, and will be scheduled to avoid high use periods of the day. Permittees and District Resource or Recreation Managers will be notified prior to treatments so that treatments can be scheduled to minimize conflicts.

3. Special Use Permit holders with wells or domestic water sources within 500 feet of proposed treatment areas will be notified prior to annual treatments and diversion points will be marked on the ground prior to treatments.

4. The Forest Service will coordinate with the Pacific Crest Trail Association (PCTA) during the annual implementation process if new treatments other than hand pulling are proposed within the viewshed of the Pacific Crest Trail. Temporary interpretive signing would be used (outside of Wilderness) if the trail's viewshed is altered by treatment activities. Herbicide spot applications will not occur within 100 feet of the Pacific Crest Trail unless hand pulling will not meet weed treatment objectives.

5. Weed control in wilderness areas will be limited to prevention and hand pulling, unless other methods are determined necessary to preserve wilderness character and treatment methods do not detract from wilderness character. A case by case Minimum Requirements Analysis will determine the minimum necessary activity if other than hand pulling is proposed. The recommended wilderness adjacent to the Hoover Wilderness will be managed in the same manner.

Affected Environment

The California portion of the Humboldt – Toiyabe National Forest is heavily utilized for recreation. There are many developed campgrounds and developed trailheads, but most of the visitation occurs in dispersed recreation areas, less developed trailheads, and on the extensive system of trails. The project area contains portions of three wilderness areas, the Hoover, Carson Iceberg and the Mokelumne as well 13 Inventoried Roadless Areas (IRA) totaling 50,460 acres on the Carson Ranger District and 21 IRAs totaling 204,800 acres on the Bridgeport Ranger District. Additionally there is an area of recommended wilderness adjacent to the Hoover Wilderness Area.

Environmental Consequences

No Action Alternative

Recreation

Under the No Action alternative invasive plant infestations would not be sufficiently controlled and would expand in areas of concentrated public use such as along roads, trails or developed / dispersed recreation areas. Invasive plant infestations in areas that the public uses for recreating could have an adverse effect to native vegetation and other resources that contribute to the natural character and visitor experience.

Wilderness and Recommended Wilderness

There would be no direct effect to Wilderness areas at this time from the No Action Alternative because there are minimal infestations in the Hoover, Carson Iceberg and Mokelumne Wildernesses and therefore can be addressed by hand pulling. However, with the No Action alternative, known invasive plants on other NFS land would not be substantially controlled and as infestations expand, there would be an increased likelihood they would spread into Wilderness areas. If invasive plant infestations are found in Wilderness in the future and are not sufficiently controlled or eradicated, there could be an adverse impact to the natural quality of wilderness character.

Inventoried Roadless Areas

Under the No Action Alternative invasive plant infestations would not be substantially controlled within the IRAs and other areas of the Forest, so would continue to expand, increasing the probability of infestations within IRAs. Of the 34 IRAs in the project area, 12 of them are large or contiguous with Wilderness areas and possess a high degree of roadless character and wilderness attributes. With this alternative there would be an increased likelihood that multiple roadless characteristics could be compromised over the long term. In particular there would be a risk that the IRAs would not function as biological strongholds for populations of threatened and endangered species, would not provide large, relatively undisturbed landscapes that are important to biological diversity and the long-term survival of many at risk species. IRAs provide reference areas for study and research, and if affected by the spread of invasive species, this quality may be diminished. There would likely be indirect adverse effects to roadless characteristics and wilderness attributes in some IRAs.

Visual Resources

Under the No Action Alternative, activities for the control or eradication of invasive plant infestations would not be sufficient to reduce the existing occurrences, prevent the expansion of those occurrences or prevent new occurrences within sensitive viewsheds. The visual character in areas of existing invasive plant occurrences would remain degraded and in some areas would not meet desired objectives. There would not be the opportunity to rehabilitate and restore the visual character of these areas to meet Visual Quality Objectives (VQO). Infestations that are small and not currently impacting the visual quality would continue to expand and over time would become more pronounced on the landscape. Expanding and new occurrences of invasive plants could change the form, texture, line, color and overall characteristic landscape.

Proposed Action

Recreation

Some treatments under the proposed action would have a short term (one season or less) effect on visitor use, primarily in developed sites and concentrated visitor use areas. Visitors might avoid areas when workers are present and where chemical treatments have been implemented during the posted effective time, or the entire growing season if dead vegetation is obvious. Any impacts would be minor inconveniences that would be for a limited time period and a small portion of any recreation use area. Design Features would reduce impacts to Forest visitors by providing public information prior to and at the time of treatments, to assist visitors in avoiding treatment areas, and by scheduling treatments to avoid high visitor use periods. Treatment of invasive species will promote maintaining native vegetation and the natural character of the landscape, which is a key component of why recreationists visit the Carson and Bridgeport Ranger Districts.

Cumulative effects to Recreation:

There are no known past, present or reasonably foreseeable future projects within these areas that when considered with the proposed action would contribute to any potential effects to recreation.

Wilderness and Recommended Wilderness

The project area contains portions of three congressionally designated wilderness areas; Hoover Wilderness, Carson Iceberg Wilderness and Mokelumne Wilderness as well as recommended wilderness adjacent to the Hoover Wilderness. These areas are managed to maintain and protect wilderness values.

Any future infestations in Wilderness would be treated with non-chemical methods unless additional analysis determines that other methods are needed to preserve wilderness character. A minimum requirements analysis would be conducted for Regional Forester approval to determine the minimum necessary activity to preserve wilderness character. It is likely that newly discovered infestations in these Wilderness areas and the associated treatments would be small scale. Anticipated impacts from manual treatments in Wilderness would be minor, generally beneficial, short term and of minimal consequence. Visitors might notice signs of activity such as pulled weeds left to dry or small areas of bare ground. The Proposed Action alternative would have a beneficial effect to natural quality of wilderness character by providing effective control of any future infestations of invasive plants and protecting Wilderness values. Control or eradication of invasive plant infestations on other areas of NFS land would reduce the likelihood of spread to Wilderness. Any management activity in Wilderness including treating of invasive plants is a trammeling and could affect the untrammeled quality of wilderness character. In the case of treating invasive plants, especially with hand pulling, the benefits of preserving natural character and improving ecological conditions outweigh the short term trammeling of treatment activities.

Cumulative Affects to Wilderness:

There are no known past, present or reasonably foreseeable future projects within these areas that when considered with the proposed action would contribute to any degradation of wilderness character.

Inventoried Roadless Areas

Forest Service direction for management of Inventoried Roadless Areas (IRA) is to provide lasting protection for IRAs and to maintain the roadless characteristics which consist of 1) high quality or undisturbed soil, water, and air; 2) sources of public drinking water; 3) diversity of plant and animal communities; 4) habitat for threatened, endangered, proposed, candidate, and sensitive species and for those species dependent on large, undisturbed areas of land; 5) primitive, semi-primitive non-motorized and semi-primitive motorized classes of dispersed recreation; 6) reference landscapes; 7) natural appearing landscapes with high scenic quality; 8) traditional cultural properties and sacred sites; and 9) other locally identified unique characteristics.

The proposed project area contains 34 IRAs totaling 255,260 acres, much of which offers high quality roadless characteristics and wilderness attributes.

The Proposed Action alternative would have a beneficial effect on IRAs by providing effective control of existing infestations and control or eradication of any future infestations to protect roadless characteristics and protect wilderness attributes. Control or eradication of invasive plant infestations on other areas of NFS land would reduce the likelihood of expansion into IRAs. There could be short term minimal adverse effects associated with the sights, sounds and

evidence of treatment or motorized access to treat areas, but over time, the beneficial effects of returning these areas to a more natural condition and improving or preserving roadless characteristics and wilderness attributes, outweighs any potential short term effects.

Cumulative effects to IRAs:

There are no known past, present or reasonably foreseeable future projects within these areas that when considered with treatment of potential infested area and projected new infestations as described in the proposed action would contribute to cumulative adverse impacts.

Visual Resources

The Toiyabe LRMP states that the forest uses the visual management system to deal with its visual resources. Forest landscapes are mapped by measurable standards for visual resource management known as Visual Quality Objectives (VQO). VQOs include five levels of objectives (Preservation, Retention, Partial Retention, Modification, Maximum Modification). The natural appearance and diversity of the landscape is altered when invasive plant infestations replace native vegetation. Invasive species out-compete native vegetation and create large monoculture areas that contrast with the diversity that makes up the characteristic landscape. Invasive plant infestations, as well as proposed treatments to control infestations, have the potential to affect VQOs. Invasive plant occurrences are concentrated along roads, trails and in areas of concentrated public use. These areas may overlap with areas of VQOs of Preservation, Retention, Partial Retention and viewsheds that receive high public use and importance to visitor visual quality experience.

The proposed action alternative would have an overall beneficial effect on visual resources by reducing or eliminating existing invasive species infestations and restoring areas currently degraded and not meeting VQOs to the appropriate desired conditions identified in the LRMP.

There could be short term effects to visual quality in treatment areas associated with the sights and disturbance of treatments. However, implementation of the proposed action would have long term beneficial effects, by removing invasive species and bring areas back to a more natural condition. Short term impacts from chemical treatments could include indictor dye, potentially visible for approximately one week, and browning vegetation that could be visible for the season. Most species are low profile herbaceous plants that would have little contrast or noticeable change in color or form; however, brooms are shrubs up to 7’ tall with a light green color and have taken over areas in the forest floor. Brooms repetition creates a solid form of color and fine texture making the change noticeable. The short term change in color and form from treatment would be replaced by the long term beneficial effect of enhancing and restoring the diversity of texture and color in the characteristic landscape in areas occupied by broom. Control of existing infestations and control of new infestations would reduce the likelihood that infestations would increase in size or number and adversely affect visual resource in areas that currently meet the VQOs.

References:

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