



United States Department of Agriculture

Wildfire Crisis Strategy Trinity Landscape

Six Rivers Hazardous Fuels and Fire Management

Lower Trinity Ranger District Project Final Review File Letter

Responsible Official:

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Forest
Service

Region 5
Pacific Southwest

Six Rivers
National Forest

Lower Trinity
Ranger District

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Introduction

The *Six Rivers Hazardous Fuels and Fire Management Project (Fire & Fuels Project)* will apply pyrosilvicultural treatments including tribal cultural burns, and manual and mechanical treatments on National Forest System (NFS) lands administered by the Six Rivers National Forest (SRNF or forest)—*before* and *after* wildfires. Rather than apply traditional management approaches, the responsible official (Forest Supervisor), guided by best available science¹, elected to pursue pyrosilvicultural treatments as they are informed by inherent ecological systems, and traditional ecological knowledge (TEK). The intent is to reestablish desired wildfire patterns to promote wildfire resilience and biodiversity across the forest landscape.

The first project being implemented under the *Six Rivers Hazardous Fuels and Fire Management Environmental Assessment (EA)* is in the Lower Trinity Ranger District, which is within the Trinity Landscape (Wildfire Crisis Strategy Landscape). **The Lower Trinity District Ranger will be the responsible official for the project.**

A brief overview of Stage 1 (Public Involvement) and Stage 2 (Federal Decision & Forest Plan Consistency) is provided, prior to discussing Stage 3 (Final Review). Stage 3 is the final stage of project planning before Stage 4 (Implementation), followed by Stage 5 (Monitoring).

Stage 1: Public Involvement & Administrative Review Opportunities

On March 31, 2023, the Forest Service initiated the 45-day objection period on the draft decision pursuant to 36 CFR 218 Subparts A and B. No objections were received during the objection period.

On September 7, 2023, the Six Rivers Hazardous Fuels and Fire Management Environmental Assessment (Fire & Fuels EA) was approved by Six Rivers National Forest, Forest Supervisor, Ted McArthur.

On November 08, 2023, the first annual Fire & Fuels public meeting was held in person in Willow Creek, CA with a virtual option for attendance as well.

On November 14, 2024, the second annual Fire & Fuels meeting was held virtually.

Stage 2: Federal Decision & Forest Plan Consistency

On February 2024, a Project Manager was assigned to the project.

On March 2024, the proposed action for treatment of approximately 2860-acres on the Lower

^[1] Best available knowledge and science systems incorporates western science with traditional ecological knowledge (TEK).

Trinity Ranger District was provided to an Interdisciplinary Team (IDT) of Resource Specialists for Forest plan consistency analysis.

August-September 2024, the IDT Resource Specialists completed Forest Plan Consistency checklists, required by the EA.

September-October 2024, the IDT GIS Specialists and Project Manager created Unit Cards to aid project implementation. This effort included final review of checklists to ensure PDFs listed within checklists were captured on the Unit Cards utilized during implementation.

The State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO)/Tribal Historical Preservation Office (THPO), Regional State Water Resources Control Board (State Water Board), and United States Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS)/National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) were consulted, and approve the proposed action, with USFWS being the final letter of concurrence to the file, dated December 9, 2024.

Stage 3: Package Project for Final Review

Objective

Finalized Line Officer review of planned implementation activity(s) prior to initiating operations. This is the final opportunity for tribes, collaborators, cooperating agencies and Forest Service personnel to ensure consistency with the *Fire & Fuels Project* DN/FONSI and to ensure all design criteria have been identified prior to implementation.

The Line Officer reviews the final implementation packages and identifies the following positions responsible for oversight (e.g., contracting officer representative, Forest Service burn boss):

FS Responsible Official: District Ranger, Erin Rentz
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FS Contracting Officer Representative/Implementation Specialist: Alex Miyagishima
alex.miyagishima@usda.gov

FS Burn Boss: Ben Hendricks
benjamin.hendricks1@usda.gov

FS Monitoring Lead: Maryjane Heckel
maryjane.heckel@usda.gov

^[1] Best available knowledge and science systems incorporates western science with traditional ecological knowledge (TEK).

Outcome

Implementation activity(s), which are approved and ready to implement, as described in the Lower Trinity Fire & Fuels Proposed Action (Exhibit A). A Project Map can be found herein as Figure 1 as well as within the Proposed Action (Exhibit A).

Forest Service Responsibilities

- Review monitoring framework, identify and/or develop focal monitoring components relevant to implementation activity(s), and incorporate *Implementation Checklist*, as needed. **Finalize and sign the *Implementation Checklists: Resource Specialists and Line Officer***
- Write, review, advertise, and award contracts, as needed: Alex Miyagishima
- Write or revise, review, and approve *Burn Checklist*, as needed: Alex Miyagishima
- Notify tribes, cooperating agencies and the public of final implementation activity(s) and schedule – Erin Rentz/Karla Knapek

Implementation & Maintenance Timeframe

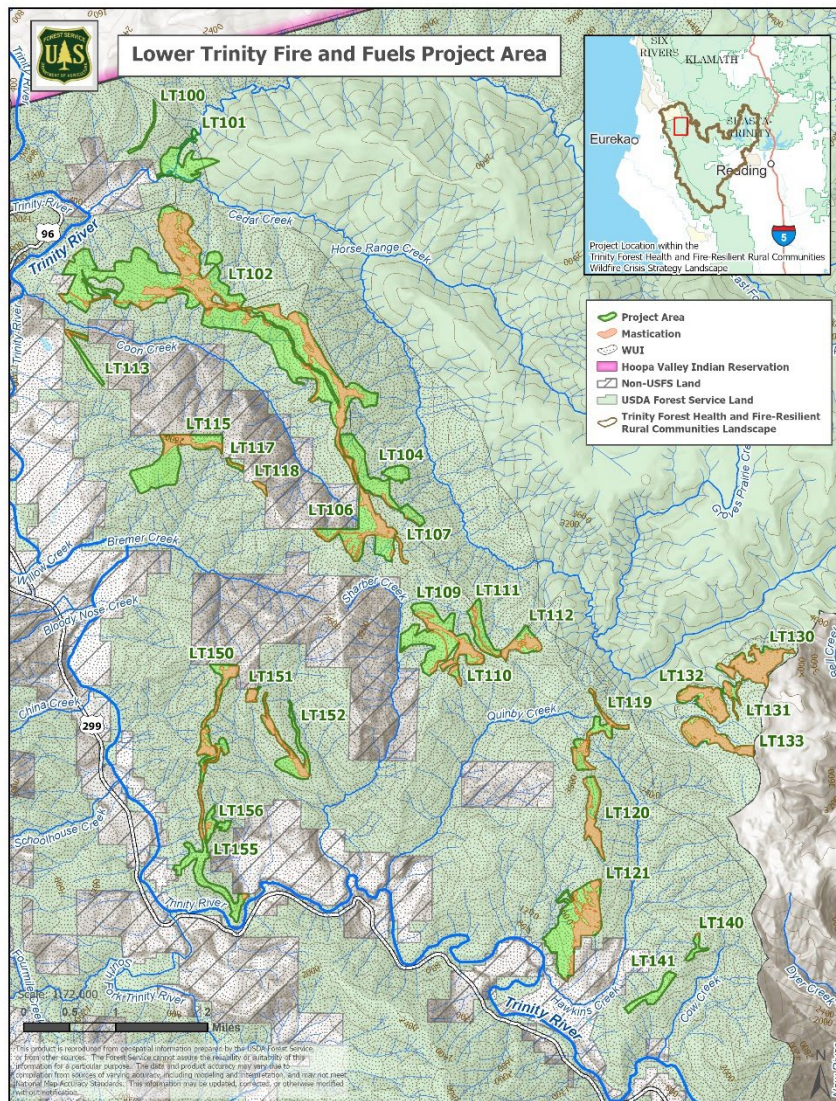
Implementation of the Lower Trinity Fire & Fuels Project is planned to commence the beginning of spring 2025.

The proposed maintenance schedule (Table 1) is subject to change pending resource availability (staff) and funding availability. Maintenance efforts will primarily focus on linear Potential Operational Delineations (POD) features.

Table 1: Proposed Treatment Schedule

Est Year Interval	1:2025	2:2026	3:2027	4:2028	5:2029	6:2030	7:2031
Treatment Type	Mastication/ Chipping	Manual Cut/ Plie Thin	Pile Burn	Rx Fire	N/A	Manual Cut/ Plie Thin	Pile Burn
8:2032	9:2033	10:2034	11:2035	12:2036	13:2037	14: 2038	15:2039
N/A	Rx Fire	Mastication/ Chipping	N/A	Manual Cut/ Pile Thin	N/A	Pile Burns	Rx Fire

Manual treatment may also occur in areas in year one, followed by pile burns in year two, and understory



burn (prescribed fire) in year three, following the same schedule as above, but a year in advance. The proposed treatment schedule may need to be modified post assessment of prior treatments.

Figure 1: 2024 Lower Trinity Fire & Fuels Project Map

Stage 4: Project Implementation

Under the Proposed Action, the range of implementation activity(s) on the landscape—such as fuels reduction and prescribed burning—have been determined on a localized case-by-case basis. The selection of what implementation treatment activities or combination thereof are used, how often and when they occur would depend on the desired role of fire in specific cultural and ecological landscapes, current conditions, and an assessment of localized wildfire hazard and risk. For example, to achieve prescribed flame heights and contain flames during prescribed burns, a combination of repeated manual and mechanical treatments may be implemented on the same acre at different times of year, prior to any actual prescribed burning being ignited.

As a final product, fire management specialists have prepared burn plans for prescribed fire implementation activities. Burn plans identify—or prescribe—the best conditions under which trees and other plants would burn to get the best results in a safe manner. Burn plans include pre-burn considerations, such as weather, site preparations to address vegetative fuels conditions within and surrounding edge of the implementation site(s) where radiant heat and/or spotting could develop from high volumes of vegetation accumulations, and location of existing fire control features (i.e., firelines, contingency fire lines, drop points, water drafting site, etc.).

Implementation activities are anticipated to commence in 2025, in compliance with Limited Operating Periods (LOPs) for the Northern Spotted Owl (NSO) for habitat modification, noise, and smoke.

Northern Spotted Owl - Limited Operating Periods

The Forest Service Contracting Representative is aware LOPs for NSO (due to habitat modification, noise, and smoke) apply to all treatment areas unless surveys are completed. NSO surveys were not completed in 2024, which was the first year surveys were not conducted in many years. NSO surveys will be conducted in 2025. The survey effort may open areas (lift LOPs) in Nesting/ROUTING (N/R) habitat, but close other areas if breeding adults (Activity Centers) are found. Contact the District Biologist for information regarding NSO surveys.

All units contain, are adjacent to, or are within 0.25-miles of N/R habitat. In areas without survey clearance, implementation activities will occur outside of the NSO LOPs, as follows:

Within 0.25-miles of Activity Center (AC) or unsurveyed suitable N/R habitat, *unless otherwise stated*:

February 1 to September 15

No habitat modification (such as hand thinning and mastication).

February 1 to September 15

No activities (noise, smoke, or habitat modification) within 0.25 miles of occupied (reproducing) AC.

February 1 to July 31

No understory burning.

February 1 to July 9

No short duration or limited amount of smoke (such a pile burning).

No LOP is required for burning piles not located within N/R habitat.

Piles immediately adjacent to N/R habitat may be burned any time of year provided burning can be done under conditions that keep smoke out of N/R habitat.

February 1 to July 9

No noise above ambient levels.

Depending on the activity, LOPs may be lifted in project areas with high ambient noise (e.g. adjacent to high-use roads, campgrounds, etc.) or in areas where occupancy is unlikely, only after review and concurrence by the USFWS Level 1 Team.

Stage 5: Monitoring

Objective

Monitoring would sample implementation activities, which will vary by location, environmental conditions (e.g., wind direction and speed, soil moisture, fuel moisture), and resource availability (staff), before and after implementation.

Annual Monitoring Plan

The annual monitoring plan for this project, which is produced by the Monitoring Lead, will include a report out with the following:

Acres of implemented activities where unburned for 7-plus years, and their location by land allocation, watershed and WUI designations.

Acres of implemented activities occurring in post-fire landscapes, and their location by land allocation, watershed and WUI designations.

Finalize Environmental Compliance Review

Line Officer responsible for ensuring environmental compliance and tribal, cooperator, collaborative, and public outreach during all stages of implementation

Erin Rentz

Line Officer Name

District Ranger (detail)

Line Officer Title

Line Officer Signature

3/7/2025

Date

