

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Forest Service
Pacific-Southwest Region

DECISION MEMO

**Kibbie Fire Salvage
G080497 / 6310**

Groveland Ranger District
Stanislaus National Forest
Tuolumne County, California



The Groveland Ranger District of the Stanislaus National Forest proposes to salvage harvest dead and dying trees on 241 acres within the 2003 Kibbie Fire. The majority of the project is classified as General Forest; 22 acres are designated Old Forest Emphasis Area. The project is located in Sections 16, 21, 22, 27, and 28 Township 2 North, Range 19 East.

BACKGROUND

The 2003 Kibbie Fire, ignited by lightning and detected on July 21, started in the wilderness of Yosemite National Park (YNP), near the Stanislaus National Forest (STF). The Park Service managed the fire for several weeks before it reached the STF boundary where it continued to be managed as “Fire Use” as it continued to meet resource objectives. By late September, after burning for nearly 2 months, there was a marked change in weather conditions which caused fire activity and smoke emissions to increase. On September 22, 2003 suppression tactics were initiated in response to concerns expressed by the public and county Air Pollution Control Officers.

The analysis area for the Kibbie Fire Salvage Project is within the portion of the Kibbie Fire that burned during full suppression efforts.

PURPOSE AND NEED

The Proposed Action is designed to respond to the need to capture the economic value of dead and dying trees caused by the 2003 Kibbie Complex Fire on the Stanislaus National Forest.

PROPOSED ACTION

Within the 250 acre area initially considered, dead and dying trees will be removed from the 241 acre analysis area. Tree harvest will utilize conventional, ground-based logging methods, consistent with direction, standards and guidelines in the Stanislaus National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP), as amended. Approximately 1.3 MMBF of timber would be removed. Incidental removal of live or dead trees would occur for landings, skid trails, road maintenance, and safety. Additional trees which die or exhibit crown fade consistent with the silvicultural prescription and Forest Plan Standards and Guidelines may also be harvested. Transportation needs for timber removal would be limited to road maintenance and construction of not more than one half mile of temporary road. Road restoration would occur on some roads after the harvest has been completed. No permanent new roads will be built.

Timber Prescription

- Remove all dead conifer trees (no green foliage) 12 inches diameter at breast height (DBH) and greater, with the exception of retaining four of the largest snags to meet snag dependent wildlife needs.
- Remove all dying conifer trees, 12 inches dbh and greater that meet the criteria of having less than 35% live crown remaining, after the wildlife snag retention of the four of the largest dead or dying trees are designated.

- Trees with no green needles will be designated by description. Trees that have green needles that meet the guidelines for dying will be marked.

Proposed Road Actions

The proposed action includes road work such as blading and shaping, maintenance and improvement of drainage features, clearing and dust abatement on approximately 6.5 miles of roads including Roads 1N04, 1N04D and 1N04E and 1N18Y.

Roads currently closed will be re-closed after the project and roads currently open will be left open with the exception of about 400 feet of Road 1N04D which was not maintained and was impassable prior to the Kibbie Fire, and will be closed after the project.

Management Requirements and Mitigations

Fire/Fuels

1. Within 100 feet on either side of all roads within the project area, pile and burn activity slash.
2. In all other areas, lop and scatter activity slash to a height of 18” above the ground.

Botany

Sensitive Plants

1. For all Sensitive Plant species: Heavy equipment will not access work areas through or conduct project work within known or newly discovered Sensitive Plant occurrences. End-lining will not occur in Sensitive Plant occurrences.
2. Suitable habitat for *Mimulus filicaulis* and *Mimulus pulchellus* will be protected in the following ways unless surveys during the appropriate identification period can prove absence of these species:
 - a) If timber harvest is implemented between approximately December 1 through July 15, suitable habitat will be flagged and avoided.
 - b) During the dry non-growing period (approximately July 16 through November 30), timber harvesting may be conducted in suitable habitat for *Mimulus filicaulis* and *Mimulus pulchellus* without avoiding the habitat. However, no slash or debris will be piled, lopped and scattered or otherwise placed within suitable habitat for these Sensitive Plants.
 - c) New skid trails and temporary roads will not be constructed through suitable habitat for *Mimulus filicaulis* and *Mimulus pulchellus*. Existing skid trails and temporary roads in suitable habitat for *Mimulus filicaulis* and *Mimulus pulchellus* may be used during the dry non-growing period.
3. Confirmed occurrences of *Cypripedium montanum* will be protected from all ground disturbing activities with directional felling and avoidance.

4. Slash or debris will not be piled or lopped and scattered within confirmed Sensitive Plant occurrences.
5. Foot traffic by contractors, forest workers or work inspectors will not be allowed within or through occurrences of Sensitive Plants.
6. Any new occurrences of Sensitive Plants discovered in the project area will be evaluated for possible effects from project activities and protective measures will be implemented to prevent loss of these new occurrences.
7. Implement the noxious weed management requirements found in the Kibbie Fire Salvage Timber Sale Noxious Weed Risk Assessment, on file at the Groveland Ranger District Office, to prevent new infestations of noxious weeds and prevent the spread of existing infestations of noxious and invasive, non-native pest plants into or through Sensitive Plant occurrences.

Monitoring

1. Monitoring will take place during project activities and directly after project activities culminate in the vicinity of Sensitive Plants to ensure that protective measures are sufficient. This monitoring can be conducted by the Forest Service project inspector concurrently with project inspections. Any occurrences or suitable habitat areas which are impacted other than as allowed in the management requirements shall be reported immediately to the District Botanist or her representative.
2. Monitoring of *Cypripedium montanum* occurrences impacted during the non-growing period will take place every year for five years to determine whether impacts will have lasting adverse effects. Monitoring of other Sensitive Plant occurrences impacted during the non-growing period will take place every two years for six years to determine whether impacts will have lasting adverse effects.
3. Monitoring of occurrences impacted during the growing period will take place yearly for five years to determine whether or not the occurrences are still extant (have not been extirpated) and to determine whether impacts will have lasting adverse effects.

Noxious Weeds

1. All off-road logging equipment should be free of soil, mud (wet or dried), seeds, vegetative matter or other debris that could contain seeds in order to prevent new infestations of noxious weeds in the project area. Dust or very light dirt which would not contain weed seed is not a concern.
2. Where possible, keep all on- or off-road logging equipment out of sites infested with noxious weeds.
3. Where it is not possible to keep heavy equipment out of sites infested with noxious weeds, clean heavy equipment so that it is free of soil, seeds, vegetative matter or other debris prior to being moved from infested sites to uninfested sites and prior to being transported out of the project area.

4. In 2005, monitor for noxious weeds in the project area. Hand pull any infestations discovered. Assess the need for a long-term eradication strategy.

Wildlife

1. Retain four of the largest snags per acre, averaged over 10 acres except where snag availability does not provide sufficient snags to meet this goal. Snags outside, but adjacent to, the project boundary can be counted toward total snag retention numbers. In addition:
 - Snags will be clumped where possible and distributed irregularly across the project area.
 - Approximately 75% of retained snags will be from within the project boundary.
 - Retained snags should typically be over 30" dbh to reflect the largest average trees, but smaller trees may be included; trees under 15" will not be included.
 - Retained snags will reflect the species diversity in the area.
 - Snags designated for retention will not be located near roads or trails.
 - Snags may be retained to meet multiple objectives by advantageously retaining snags located in or near old forest emphasis areas, archaeological sites, project boundaries, green trees, and along drainages.
 - All hardwood snags will be retained except where they present a safety hazard. Hardwood snags do not count toward snag retention totals.
 - Three of the four snags within the Bald Eagle Management Area should be hard (decay class 1 and 2) for longer-term retention. Other areas should include a diversity of decay classes, where available.
2. Beginning with the largest downed logs, pieces of downed wood will be sequentially retained to achieve at least 10 tons per acre, averaged over 10 acres. This requirement does not apply where downed wood levels are not available.
 - Do not include pieces smaller than 12 inches diameter at the small end or shorter than 10 feet in length.
 - Do not exceed downed wood retention of 20 tons per acre; if downed wood levels exceed 20 tons per acre, recent downed logs can be marked for removal.
3. If threatened, endangered, proposed, or sensitive species, including spotted owls, great gray owls, or northern goshawks are discovered in or within ½-mile of the project area outside the designated PACs prior to or during project activities, activities must comply with the appropriate LOPs and the district wildlife biologist will be notified immediately.

Heritage

Archeological sites have been identified and will be protected by flagging and avoidance.

The following Best Management Practices (BMP's) will be followed:

Hydrology / Soils

| BMP # | BMP NAME | APPLICABLE LOCATION; COMMENTS |
|----------------------|-------------------------------------|---|
| 1-1 | Timber Sale Planning Process | All units – the interdisciplinary process was used in designing project to meet water quality objectives. |
| 1-2 | Unit Design | All units – the interdisciplinary process was used in designing project to meet water quality objectives. |
| 1-3 1-9 | Erosion Hazard Tractor Ground | All units – erosion control measures will be implemented. These measures are specified in various locations in this BMP table, and include such items as water barring skid trails, and subsoiling. |
| 1-4 | Sale Area Map | All units – designates protected Riparian Conservation Areas (RCO's). |
| 1-5 1-13 | Operating Period Erosion Control | All units - operations will be conducted only when soil moisture has sufficient strength to prevent or mitigate compaction. |
| 1-6 | Protection of Unstable Lands | Recent and historic landslides are evident in the area between the upper and lower 1N04 road extending from 600 feet south to 1700 feet north of Shingle Springs Creek. Use of mechanized equipment shall be limited to existing skid trails in this area. |
| 1-8 1-19 | SMZ Designation SMZ Protection | Riparian Conservation Areas (RCA's) have been designated along all applicable stream courses. Soil compaction in RCA's shall not exceed 15%. Use preventive or mitigative techniques as needed to meet this standard. |
| 1-10 | Skidding Design | All units - To minimize soil compaction, erosion and sedimentation in RCA's the use of mechanized equipment will be restricted. Along Shingle Springs Creek, the exclusion zone for mechanized equipment shall extend out 100 feet from the creek bank or up to the slope break, whichever is less. Mitigative practices (subsoiling) will be employed where needed to meet RCA standard and guidelines of less than 15% detrimental soil compaction. Skid trail stream crossings will be limited and designated by the Sale Administrator in coordination with the appointed watershed specialist. |
| 1-12 1-16 | Log Landings | All units – Landing location and erosion control is designed to prevent and minimize stream sedimentation. Reuse existing landings. Subsoil as needed at the conclusion of the project. |
| 1-17 1-20 1-21 | Erosion Control Practices | All units – water bars will be installed as prescribed in the Sale Administration Handbook, and maintained during the project. |

Road Management

| BMP # | BMP NAME | APPLICABLE LOCATION; COMMENTS |
|-------|-------------------------------------|--|
| 2-1 | Road Location and Design | The transportation system needed for this project has been designed to maximize use of existing roads and minimize road construction. Road reconstruction will occur on portions of existing roads. This will minimize sedimentation by rocking sensitive areas and improving the function of numerous drainage structures. The sum of this design, in combination with the design of skid trails and any temporary roads, is intended to minimize erosion and sedimentation from the transportation system to the maximum extent practicable. |
| 2-2 | Erosion Control Plan | All roads |
| 2-3 | Construction Timing | All roads |
| 2-4 | Road Stabilization | All roads |
| 2-5 | | |
| 2-7 | Road Drainage | All roads |
| 2-12 | Servicing/refueling of Equipment | RCA's – fuel storage and equipment refueling and servicing will be conducted outside of RCA's. |
| 2-16 | Stream Crossings on Temporary Roads | If a crossing is needed on 1N04 at Shingle Springs, design and construction will be conducted in coordination with the project hydrologist in order to minimize sediment input and stream channel disturbance. The crossing of Shingle Springs on 1N04D will be removed following project implementation to eliminate potential future crossing fill erosion. |
| 2-21 | Water Source Locations | All roads – utilize existing permanent water source locations. Install screens on water intake lines to prevent entrainment of aquatic biota. |
| 2-22 | Road Maintenance | All roads – maintain roads during the life of the project. Keep drainage structures functional and roadbeds maintained to prevent unavoidable loss of surfacing. |
| 2-23 | Road Surfacing | All roads – apply dust abatement as needed to keep road surface intact. Apply spot rocking as needed in wet areas. |
| 2-24 | Traffic Control During Wet Periods | All roads – prevent use of roads when damage will occur to minimize sediment from reaching watercourses. Regrade any damaged road and repair drainage structures as needed. |

Vegetation Manipulation

| BMP # | BMP NAME | APPLICABLE LOCATION; COMMENTS |
|-------|---|--|
| 5-2 | Slope Limitations for Equipment Operation | All units – Limit tractor use to less than 35% slopes, except for short pitches up to 45% as outlined in the LRMP. |
| 5-3 | Tractor Operation in Wetlands | The project watershed specialists have flagged the extent of a wet seep area located NE of the end of the 1N04E spur. Tractor operations shall be excluded in this area. |

| | | |
|-----|--|---|
| | | End lining of timber from this area shall be allowed. |
| 5-5 | Disposal of Organic Debris | All units – Logging slash shall be distributed by lop and scatter to 18” above the ground to provide additional ground cover. Activity slash will be piled and burned within 100 feet of all roads. |
| 5-6 | Soil Moisture Limitations for Equipment Operations | All units – operations will be conducted only when soil moisture has sufficient strength to prevent or minimize compaction. |

Watershed Management

| BMP # | BMP NAME | APPLICABLE LOCATION; COMMENTS |
|-------|-------------------------------|---|
| 7-3 | Wetland Protection | Project area – Mechanized equipment exclusion zones have been identified for stream channels and wetlands in the project area. End-lining may be utilized to harvest timber from these zones. |
| 7-4 | Hazardous Material Spill Plan | Project area – a Spill Plan shall be prepared to address accidental spills of fuel or other hazardous materials associated with the project. |
| 7-6 | Water Quality Monitoring | Project area – The Regional BMP Evaluation Program (BMPEP) will be utilized to determine implementation success and effectiveness of BMP’s applicable to this project. This program randomly selects project Forest-wide for monitoring. This project will be included in the selection pool. |
| 7-8 | Cumulative Watershed Effects | Project area watershed analysis – A CWE analysis has been conducted following Forest Service protocols to address and minimize watershed impacts of this project in combination with other past, present and reasonably foreseeable future activities on public and private land. |

EFFECTS OF THE PROPOSED ACTION

Biological Evaluations (BEs), Biological Assessments (BAs), and Specialists Reports prepared for this project are available in the project file. They contain documented data, analysis, and evaluation on which the determination of no extraordinary circumstances can be made; as well as, the following determinations and conclusions:

- **Wildlife Biological Assessment**

Determination

California Red-Legged Frog

The wildlife biologist determined that the proposed Kibbie Fire Salvage Timber Sale would not affect California red-legged frogs or designated Critical Habitat. This determination is based on the lack of suitable habitat within the project area, the distance to potentially suitable habitat, and the lack of documented sightings of red-legged frogs in the project area or surrounding area. The project would not adversely affect any riparian or other important habitat components.

Bald Eagle

The wildlife biologist determined that implementation of the Kibbie Fire Salvage Timber Sale removal project may affect individuals but is not likely to adversely affect bald eagles. This determination is based on the removal of large, potentially suitable dead or dying trees, but prescribed retention of a large number of snags within the project area and the surrounding landscape. No other effects to bald eagles or important habitat components are expected to result from the proposed project.

- **Wildlife Biological Evaluation**

Determinations

Determinations are based on the potential for adverse effects, the best information currently available about species distribution and habitat requirements, and the amount of suitable habitat located within the project area.

The Kibbie Fire Salvage Timber Sale would not affect hardhead, Hell Hollow slender salamander, Townsend's big-eared bat, limestone salamander, Swainson's hawk, foothill yellow-legged frog, mountain yellow-legged frog, western pond turtle, Yosemite toad, peregrine falcon, northern goshawk, spotted owl, great gray owl, or willow flycatcher because the project area is outside of these species' elevational or geographical range and/or does not contain any suitable habitat.

The Kibbie Fire Salvage Timber Sale may affect individuals but is not likely to result in a loss of viability or a trend toward federal listing for Pacific fisher, American marten, Sierra Nevada red fox, California wolverine, pallid bat, or western red bat. This determination is based on the generally low habitat values present in the project area for these species and the subsequent low likelihood of encountering or adversely affecting these species.

- **Management Indicator Species Report**

I have considered the Management Indicator Species Analysis.

- **Botany Biological Evaluation**

Determination

The analysis, as displayed in the Biological Evaluation for Sensitive Plants, revealed that the Kibbie Fire Salvage Timber Sale may affect individual plants of *Cypripedium montanum* (mountain ladyslipper), *Mimulus filicaulis* (slender-stemmed monkeyflower), and *Mimulus pulchellus* (pansy monkeyflower), but the project is not likely to result in a trend toward Federal listing or loss of viability for these species.

- **Soils Report**

Conclusion

About 36 acres of 241 acres will be affected by ground based harvest equipment and the compaction to the soil will be mitigated. Implementation of the proposed action, while adhering to the Best Management Practices for hydrology and soils will not result in adverse impacts.

- **Fire/Fuels Report**

Conclusion

On the landscape scale, the overall fire effects of the 6,308 acre Kibbie Fire were consistent with the intent of wildland fire use for both the STF and YNP in regards to restoring the landscape to a more fire-adapted state. Throughout the entire Kibbie Fire area, the burn severity is quite variable, creating a mosaic effect of mostly unburned or low to low/moderate severity, with isolated patches of moderate/high and high severity. This variability seems consistent with historical accounts of pre-settlement fires in this fire regime.

Subsequent fires could burn at high intensity in the patches of high tree mortality due to the fuel load created by the Kibbie Fire whether they are salvage logged or not. The proposed salvage harvest would reduce the fuel load, reducing the fire severity and smoke emissions.

The proposed action meets the STF Standards and Guidelines of Fire and Fuels for Salvage and Old Forest Emphasis Areas. The proposed action fulfills the intent to recover the economic value of the fire damaged (dead and dying) trees, while at the same time reducing the long term fuel load.

- **Hydrology Evaluation**

Conclusion

Implementation of the proposed action, while adhering to the BMPs listed in the above management requirements will not result in adverse impacts to project area watershed conditions. By following the BMPs, the project will maintain compliance with the applicable LMRP standards and guidelines pertaining to hydrology.

- **Noxious Weed Risk Assessment**

Anticipated Response of Noxious Weeds to Proposed Actions

The Kibbie Fire Salvage Timber Sale area already has the California noxious weed bull thistle widely scattered throughout. As a result, the Kibbie Fire Salvage Timber Sale has a high risk of spreading noxious weeds into the analysis area.

- **Cultural Resource Management Report 05-16-4243**

This report contains confidential information and is not available for public review. The Heritage Resource Specialist's determination letter states, "A NO EFFECT RECOMMENDATION" is made for the Kibbie Fire Salvage Timber Sale Project. This letter is part of the project file and is available for public review.

These BE's, BA's, and Reports are part of the planning file at the Groveland Ranger District office and will be made available upon request.

DECISION

It is my decision to implement the Kibbie Fire Salvage Project.

I reviewed and considered the most recent information, including specialist reports summarized above, the 2004 report by Beschta and others, and input from interested parties. Because of the limited scope of the project individual, animals may be affected, but these effects are not likely to result in a trend towards Federal listing. No threatened, endangered or sensitive species would be adversely affected by the proposed treatments. Cultural resources known to exist within the project area will not be affected by project implementation. All practical means to avoid or minimize environmental harm have been adopted.

The US Fish and Wildlife Service has expressed concurrence with the determination that this project, as described, may affect, but is not likely to adversely affect the bald eagle.

Based on the above information it is my determination that this activity will be of limited size, duration and degree of disturbance. I find the proposed action qualifies under provisions of the Forest Service Environmental Policy and Procedures Handbook (FSH) 1909.15, Chapter 31.2 – 13. ***Salvage of dead and/or dying trees not to exceed 250 acres, requiring no more than ½ mile of temporary road construction. The proposed action may include incidental removal of live or dead trees for landings, skid trails, and road clearing.*** Examples include: a. Harvest of fire-damaged trees.

Past experience and environmental analysis reveal that no extraordinary circumstances (FSH 1909.15, 30.3, 1. b) exist that might cause the action to have significant effects upon the human environment. This proposed action is therefore excluded from further documentation in either an environmental assessment or environmental impact statement.

SCOPING AND PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Forest Service internal scoping was performed and input was received from an interdisciplinary group comprised of specialists in timber, silviculture, fuels management, wildlife, botany, soils, hydrology, and cultural resources. Project information was posted on the Stanislaus National Forest Web page in early July, and updated as necessary. (<http://www.fs.fed.us/r5/stanislaus>)

I conducted field trips to the project with Sierra Pacific Industries, Central Sierra Environmental Resource Center, and Wilderness Society at their request.

I discussed the project with Hetch Hetchy Water and Power and Yosemite National Park.

Forest Supervisor Tom Quinn and I presented the project to the Tuolumne County Board of Supervisors, responded to questions from Board members, and heard testimony from citizens.

We consulted with the Tuolumne Band of Me-Wuk Indians.

FINDINGS REQUIRED BY OTHER LAWS

The Proposed Action tiers to and is consistent with management direction contained in the Stanislaus National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP) of 1991, as amended.

IMPLEMENTATION DATE

Implementation of this proposal may take place immediately upon my issuance of this decision.

ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW OR APPEAL OPPORTUNITIES

My decision is not subject to administrative appeal pursuant to 36 CFR 215.12 "The following decisions are not subject to appeal under this part" (f) "Decisions for actions that have been categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental assessment or environmental impact statement pursuant to FSH 1909.15, Chapter 30, section 31."

CONTACT PERSON

For further information regarding the proposed action or this decision, please contact:

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RESPONSIBLE OFFICIAL AND DATE

JOHN R. SWANSON
District Ranger

DATE