

Detailed Project Description Narrative

Title: Weed Treatment on the Westside of the Tahoe National Forest

Project Summary: This project is located on the westside of the Tahoe National Forest (TNF) in about twenty five different locations. Weed treatment sites are located on two different ranger districts in 4 counties. All treatment sites are high priority because they have high public visitation and a high risk spreading weeds to new areas. All weed treatment sites are considered outliers –small patches of weeds that are in areas considered generally weed free. All sites are considered small enough to treat using hand removal. The purpose of the project is to manually treat non-native invasive plant occurrences (weeds) to keep them from expanding within forest areas and/or into adjacent forest and reducing the health of the forest. The project goals include reduction of fuels on 120 acres, increased resilience of the forest through elimination of weeds, and improved habitat conditions for native plants and animals in terrestrial and riparian areas. An addition goal is to increase the health of the forest so it is more resilient in light of predicted climate change. Forest health will be promoted by improving the health of trees through site specific reduction of ladder and surface fuels, promoting biodiversity through improving rare plant/fungi habitat, and weed removal. This project will also contribute to the SNC mission by implementing a project that improves the environmental and economic well-being in the project area. It is estimated that over 110 days of work will be created to implement this project.

This project is designed to improve forest health and prevent forest health reduction. Weed infestation is one of the greatest threats to maintaining or improving the health of the NFS lands. Climate changes are predicted to provide opportunities for replacement of native species with undesirable invasives. Heavily infested weed areas are known to have: reduced biological diversity, changed disturbance regimes (including wildfire), reduction in quality of wildlife habitat, can have reduced soil cover and a loss of soil carbon storage, decreased forest productivity, and reduced recreational opportunities (Mack et al. 2000, Di Antonio et al. 2004). Research has shown that sites dominated by weeds have increased rates of soil erosion and runoff causing degradation of habitat for wildlife and native vegetation.

Outcomes include improved forest health and increased biodiversity through reduction of non-native invasive plants (weeds). Outcomes also include reduced fire hazard through reduction of flashy surface fuels and/or ladder fuels within and adjacent to forested areas. Performance measures include 120 acres treated for fuel reduction, 120 acres treated for invasive weeds, 15 acres of rare species habitat improvement, and 1 mile of streambank habitat improvement.

Environmental Setting Narrative: All sites are located in mixed conifer forest in openings between and/or adjacent to trees. Current land uses for the sites include: transportation, administrative, recreational, and/or rare species habitat. Forests adjacent to weed sites are managed to provide for: wildlife, water infiltration, and recreation. No land use changes are proposed.

Project Description: About 120 acres of weeds will be manually pulled. Pulled weeds will be piled for burning and/or scattered in place if not in seed or able to resprout. Information about weed infestation impacts will be posed at 5 sites on existing posting boards. Treatments will be

documented and put into the database of record – FACTS. Three sites contain rare plants: *Clarkia biloba* ssp. *brandegeae*, *Allium sanbornii* ssp. *sanbornii* and/or *Fritillaria eastwoodiae* - Region 5 Regional Forester’s sensitive plants and/or Tahoe National Forest (TNF) watchlist species. Care will be taken to avoid disturbance to the rare plants while pulling weeds. Two sites are areas that contain *Phaeocollybia olivacea* a sensitive fungus that is mycorrhizal and dependent on trees as host species. Weeds will be pulled at these sites (about 10 acres) to promote the growth and vigor of the trees by removing Scotchbroom. Scotchbroom does not form mycorrhizal relationships. Habitat improvement (15 acres) at the rare species sites will be documented in the WFRP database. Three sites are located on the banks of perennial water – the Middle Yuba River, Oregon Creek and Skunk Canyon. Weeds will be pulled along one mile of stream bank being careful to avoid disturbance of native riparian vegetation at these sites. Weeds are considered surface or ladder fuels. Removal of weeds will result in 120 acres of fuel reduction.

Workplan and Schedule Narrative: Weed treatment will begin after the grant agreement is in place (estimated July 2012) and in the months indicated. Treatment of perennial weeds is best accomplished while soils are somewhat moist to facilitate root removal versus the weed breaking off at the stem when pulled. Treatment of annual weeds (such as yellow starthistle) is best accomplished before seed set. Temporary workforce hiring usually occurs in the spring with start dates (weather dependent) as early as April. Therefore a small amount of work may occur in August of 2012 but the majority of work would occur during the field season of 2013. Treatment documentation is continual occurring daily. Database entry occurs toward the end of the fiscal year roughly September.

Project Deliverables	Timeline
Hire 5 temporaries	January -April 2013
Develop and post weed information	Develop in July-August 2012 with posting in May-June 2013
Manually treat 120 acres of weeds and document treatment	August 2012 and April through August 2013
120 acres of fuel reduction	“
5 acres of habitat improvement for rare plants	April through July 2013
10 acres of habitat improvement for rare fungi	August 2012 and April through August 2013
1 mile of streambank habitat improvement	August 2012 and April through June 2013
Enter weed treatment and habitat improvement into databases	September of 2012 and 2013
Final report	October 2013

Restrictions, Technical/Environmental Documents and Agreements Narrative:

Restrictions/Agreements: No property restrictions/encumbrances that will adversely impact project completion. NPWMA MOU agreement attached as Attachment 2.

Regulatory Requirements: Permits are not applicable because: all projects are on National Forest System lands and the context of the proposed actions are considered limited to minor, local, short-term effects within the project area with no significant effects either long or short term, regional or societal.

California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA): CEQA complaint because it has a Negative Declaration. See below.

National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA): The TNF routinely conducts environmental analysis to do vegetative management on NFS lands using an interdisciplinary team approach which includes review by a: silviculturist, archaeologist, botanist, wildlife biologist, hydrologist, recreation planner, fuels specialist, and range conservationist. NEPA analysis documentation and district ranger concurrence is attached (refer to Small Project Concurrence Forms for Yuba River RD and American River RD Attachments 4 and 5). Interdisciplinary review showed that the project fits into a category of exclusion - 31.12 (4) – a category that does not have significant effects or require a decision memo (FSH 1909.15 – NEPA Handbook Chapter 30).

Organizational Capacity Narrative: The TNF routinely implements weed control projects and treats hundreds of acres annually. The TNF is also experienced in hiring a temporary workforce. The temporary workforce is supervised by the west zone plant ecologist/botanist; an individual who has worked in weed management for over ten years. The TNF is active with many partners in weed control including: Nevada Placer Weed Management area group (NPWMA), South Yuba River Citizens League (SYRCL), the Scotchbroom Challenge Group, California Invasive Pest Council (Cal-IPC) and others.

Cooperation and Community Support Narrative: Weed control is supported both internally within the Forest Service and externally by a variety of partners. Internal partners include silviculture, wildlife, and fuels personnel who value the benefits to forests from removal of weeds. External partners include the: NPWMA group, SYRCL, Scotchbroom Challenge Group, California Native Plant Society – Redbud Chapter, and Cal-IPC. Since the NPWMA group contains representatives of all of the other groups listed, a letter of support is provided from the NPWMA group only – refer to Attachment 3 – letter of support from the NPWMA.

Long-term Management and Sustainability Narrative: Long-term management objectives include improved forest health and biodiversity and fuel reduction through integrated weed management (IWM). Weeds can not be controlled if the weed seed stored in the soil is not exhausted and the treated site does not have desired vegetation to prevent the establishment of other weeds. New weed species arrive continually usually associated with disturbed areas such as roads and trails. Weeds are known to compete with native vegetation for soil nutrients/water/sunlight and alter ecosystem processes such as how fire burns. This project contains actions to control weeds and enhance desired plant species on National Forest System (NFS) lands. Treatment sites have been identified as priorities based on the severity of possible impacts to forest health, consideration of the ability to control those weeds using manual methods and consideration of likelihood that weeds would spread from the site to new areas. This project was developed as part of a strategy for treatment of weeds on NFS lands and adjoining lands of other ownerships. The above actions contribute to the long-term sustainability of the forest. Weed control is a long-term management action. The applicable Long-Term

Management and Sustainability Plan is the Tahoe National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan with updates including the 2004 Sierra Nevada Forest Plan Amendment. Attachment 6 provides a copy of the weed management portion of this amendment.

Performance Measures:

Number of people reached: Hundreds through posting on existing boards at 5 sites.

Number/Type of Jobs Created: About 110 temporary workforce days. When added to other funds (leveraged), temporary crews will be employed for 4-6 months versus 1-3 months.

Linear feet of stream bank protected: About 1 mile improved at 3 sites.

Number of special significance sites protected: Fifteen acres of habitat improvement for 4 rare species.

Tons of carbon sequestered or emissions avoided: Fuels reduced at 25 sites totaling about 120 acres, reducing carbon emitted if wildfire is prevented by removing weeds (and therefore fuels). Tons of carbon emissions avoided is unknown.

Acres of land improved or restored: 120 acres

Number of collaboratively developed plans and assessments: Two sites are part of areas covered by existing weed management plans. All sites are part of collaboratively developed efforts under the NPWMA Memorandum of Understanding (2011) to coordinate activities to prevention/control noxious weeds in Nevada and Placer Counties. Refer to Attachment 2.

Supplemental and Supporting Documents:

Attachment 1: Detailed Budget Form

Attachment 2: Nevada Placer Weed Management Area Memorandum of Understanding

Attachment 3: Letter of support from the Nevada Placer Weed Management Area Group

Attachment 4: Small Project Concurrence Form Yuba River RD Manual Weed Treatment FY 2012

Attachment 5: Small Project Concurrence Form American River RD Manual Weed Treatment FY 2012

Attachment 6: Sierra Nevada Forest Plan Amendment Environmental Impact Statement Record of Decision (January 2001) pages A-15 and A-30-32.

Attachment 7: Maps and Photos: A vicinity map is provided that gives an idea of where the 25 weed treatment sites are located on the westside of the TNF. There are 10 topographic maps attached with county assessor parcel numbers for each weed treatment site indicated on the maps.