



UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY
REGION IX
75 Hawthorne Street
San Francisco, CA 94105

November 20, 2009

Patricia A. Grantham
Forest Supervisor
Klamath National Forest
Thom-Seider Project
P.O. Box 377
Happy Camp, CA 96039-0377

Subject: Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Thom-Seider Vegetation
Management and Fuels Reduction Project, Siskiyou County, California (CEQ
#20090355)

Dear Ms. Grantham:

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has reviewed the above-referenced document pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations (40 CFR Parts 1500-1508), and our NEPA review authority under Section 309 of the Clean Air Act.

EPA reviewed the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) and provided comments to the Forest Service on May 26, 2009. We rated the DEIS as Environmental Concerns – Insufficient Information (EC-2) because of concerns over the limited number of alternatives presented for the proposed project. We recommended that certain sections of the DEIS be reformatted and reorganized to make them easier to read, and that the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) include additional information on treatment descriptions, worker exposure to naturally occurring asbestos, air quality emissions and mitigation measures, and climate change. Finally, we recommended that the Forest Service focus on the use of local stewardship contracts that utilize community and Tribal labor pools.

One of the primary concerns raised about the DEIS was the lack of alternatives to the proposed action. Although EPA prefers to see EISs with distinct alternatives to the lead agency's preferred proposal, we acknowledge (as stated in the Forest Service's comments on page 340 of the FEIS) that the Healthy Forest Restoration Act "calls for only one action alternative for that portion of the project within 1.5 miles of a community at risk"; the FEIS includes a section detailing alternatives considered but eliminated from detailed study; and the original proposed action was altered to address environmental concerns raised about the project.

EPA is pleased that many of the issues identified in our review of the DEIS have been addressed in the FEIS. In response to EPA comments, helpful revisions were made, both in format and content, which greatly improved the document. Also, additional information was provided to address EPA concerns about treatment methods, closure and restoration plans for the proposed temporary roads and landings, effects from climate change, and impaired waters (Clean Water Act Section 303(d)) in the project area.

EPA remains concerned, however, about potential worker exposure to naturally occurring asbestos (NOA). In its response to EPA's comments regarding NOA, the Forest Service describes that "there is a potential for dust-generating activities in areas underlain by ultramafic rock to put asbestos fibers into the air," and that "most of the existing roads pass through ultramafic rock in at least some segments." Later, the Forest Service states that "standard mitigation" and "dust abatement" measures will be applied to mitigate potential impacts. Asbestos fibers, however, can remain airborne for as long as ten days, posing a potentially significant human exposure hazard. EPA recommends that, in addition to Best Management Practices and mitigation measures, the Forest Service minimize or restrict the use of routes that may intersect potential NOA.

EPA also continues to recommend the use of local stewardship contracts to ensure that the community and Tribal labor pool reap economic benefits from the proposed project.

We appreciate the opportunity to review this FEIS. When the Record of Decision is signed, please send one copy to the address above (mail code: CED-2). If you have any questions, please contact me at (415) 972-3521, or Jason Gerdes, the lead reviewer for this project. Jason can be reached at (415) 947-4221 or gerdes.jason@epa.gov.

Sincerely,

/s/

Connell Dunning for

Kathleen M. Goforth, Manager
Environmental Review Office (CED-2)