

2012 SHASTA FORESTRY CHALLENGE PROBLEM SOLVING QUESTION

Introduction:

The topic for 2012 is Forest Management Planning on the Lassen National Forest. Your team will be commenting on the currently stated purposes of the proposed Badger Forest Restoration Project. The following information has been published on the Lassen National Forest website: “The purpose is to begin restoration and maintain healthy, resistant & resilient landscapes, rich in biodiversity, with greater capability to adapt and thrive in the face of natural disturbances and large scale threats to sustainability.”

The website has also identified these items listed under project purpose:

- Heritage resource management
- Wildlife, Fish, Rare plants
- Fuels management
- Watershed management
- Forest products
- Vegetation management (other than for the production of forest products)

Since this information was posted on the website, the Reading Fire burned through the southern part of the project area. Wildfire rehabilitation is not listed as a project purpose, but could now become one of the purposes of this project.

Location:

The project is located in the Hat Creek Ranger District of the Lassen National Forest, in eastern Shasta County. The legal description is as follows: Townships 31, 32, & 33 North, Ranges 4, & 5 East. It is north of Lassen Volcanic National Park, southeast of CA-89, and west of the Hat Creek Rim. The project area is approximately _____ acres and is located about 15 miles northeast of Lassen Pines Camp.

Background Information:

When a project is proposed on national forest lands, USFS personnel write a “scoping document” that includes a Purpose and Need Statement, explains the proposed work, and allows a period for public comment. Based on the comments received, a determination is made on which level of analysis should be done. There are three levels of analysis:

- *Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)* An EIS is often used when there are substantial controversial issues that need to be addressed. A multidisciplinary team is assembled to write a draft that describes the potential benefits and negative impacts of several alternatives for action, including no action. The draft is released to the public for a 45 day comment period. The draft is finalized with one alternative chosen. The process of writing an EIS and getting it approved can take several months to years.
- *Environmental Assessment (EA)* An EA discloses one or more action alternatives as well as a “no action” alternative. The proposed action(s), benefits, and possible negative impacts are described. The process is less time consuming than for an EIS.
- *Categorical Exclusion*. A CE, or “Cat Ex” is the most streamlined regulatory method for getting work done. Cat Ex criteria can be automatically applied to situations that are pre-defined, such as salvage logging on 250 acres or less, hazard tree removal near private property or public roads or trails, hazard fuel reduction within 1.5 miles of urban areas up to 1,000 acres in size, and for wildlife enhancement.

The Badger Project will most likely be an Environmental Assessment (EA), however, depending on the volume of and specific concerns in the public’s comments, the project could require an Environmental Impact Statement. It cannot be a Categorical Exclusion because it is more than 250 acres.

A smaller project, the Old Station EA, was completed in 2010 in the area immediately surrounding Big Spring Estates. Although the primary purpose of the Old Station EA was limited to reducing fuels and protecting the community from wildfire, it can provide an example of forest conditions once a fuels reduction project is complete.

Questions to be Answered in Your Presentation:

Now that you have information on the stated project purposes, your task is to evaluate them and come up with proposed actions for purposes you think are important. Here are some things to consider and questions to answer in your presentation:

1. Are there any purposes that have been left out that you think should be on the list? Are there any purposes listed that you think should **not** be there and can be legally removed?
2. **Can all of the purposes be successfully addressed with one plan?** Are there one or more purposes that should have priority over the others, or are they all equally important?
3. For each of the stated purposes, what action(s) would you take to achieve those stated objectives?
4. There are a number of groups of people with different interests and ideas. Will the actions that you propose to meet the purposes of the project satisfy their wants and needs? Groups to consider include:
 - area residents (Firesafe Council)
 - area business owners
 - off-highway vehicle (OHV) users
 - recreation industry (fishing, hiking, etc.)
 - timber industry
 - environmental organizations
 - taxpayers
5. What is the desired condition that you want for the landscape when the project is complete? For example, species diversity, trees per acre, basal area, fuel loading, stream conditions, etc. Be Specific!

Fieldtrip: On Thursday, September 27, you will visit the Badger Project area, making stops at the following four locations:

Stop #1: Twin Bridges dispersed camping area. At this stop we will address watershed management, dispersed camping, and the plant and animal species that inhabit the riparian zone. You will do a small conifer removal project to encourage riparian species such as aspen to thrive.

Stop #2: Private industrial forest land belonging to Fruit Growers Supply Company. At this stop we will discuss how forest products can be produced while protecting the environment on private forestlands, which follow State statutes and regulations rather than Federal, but can be used as an example of timber production. You will collect data about the stand density and volume/value of the timber in two areas with different silviculture on the site.

Stop #3: Big Pine campground, with 19 campsites, operated by the U.S. Forest Service, and adjacent to Big Spring Estates. At this stop we will discuss fuels management as it relates to protecting the Big Spring Estates community. This is also our lunch stop. You will collect data (trees per acre, basal area, and species comp) on two treated stands with different prescriptions.

Stop #4: Potato Butte area, site of a proposed OHV Park. At this stop we will discuss watershed, vegetation, and heritage resource management as it relates to OHV use. On-the-ground work TBD.

Resources:

You will be given the following resources on a flash drive to load onto your team's computer:

- Problem Solving Question (this document)
- Aerial photo of the Badger Project area. This is an excellent resource because it shows the natural resources and current infrastructure in the area.
- Map of the National Forest, which includes the Badger Project area, as well as the area burned by the Reading Fire, some of

which is within the Badger Project area. Compare the aerial photo and the map of the burned area to see what resources were lost or damaged in the fire (riparian areas, timber, wildlife habitat)

- The Burney- Hat Creek strategic fuels reduction plan This is a huge document, but it is recommended you take a look at the following:
 - Page 9 - #1 concern is Big Spring Estates, with a proposed treatment described
 - Page 13 – Note Big Spring Estates’ Fire Hazard Severity Zone Rating
 - Pages 35 – 37 – Photos of buildings in the Old Station area
 - Page 38 – a complete list of wildlife species that may be of concern
 - Page 46 – Biomass analysis
 - Page 62 – Glossary
 - Page 69 – drawing of the “Woodland/Forest Zone”
 - Page 83 – good map of Big Spring Estates
 - Page 87 – Fire History of the area
 - Page 93 – proposed fuel breaks
- The Old Station EA. This is another very large document but it is a good example of the kind of document that is produced for an EA. Notice that there are only two subheadings under the section “Purpose and Need for Action”: 1.) the need for fuel reduction and 2.) the need for improved forest health. The scope of the Old Station EA is much smaller than the Badger EA.
- A fact sheet on parking and dispersed camping guidelines: one of the challenges in the Twin Bridges area is preventing environmental damage from dispersed camping. These are the guidelines used to regulate dispersed camping at this time.
- A report from a field trip on June 25, 2010, to look at the Old Station project area after the project was completed – Pages 9 and 10 provide a quick summary of the Old Station EA and what had been completed as of June 2010.