Decision Memo

Grizzly Flat Community Fuel Break

USDA Forest Service
Placerville Ranger District, Eldorado National Forest
El Dorado County, California

Background

In 2021, the Caldor Fire impacted a total of 221,835 acres, burning in the high severity category over much of its range. Although the Caldor Fire was destructive, fuel loads within the burn area are still very high. Trees that are dead, dying, or damaged by the Caldor Fire will deteriorate and fall, posing a risk of injury to people, damage to property, and further adding to hazardous fuel conditions. Areas which burned in low and moderate severity categories have many highly stressed trees, which are likely to die and become hazards in the foreseeable future. Additionally, first generation succession pioneer species (such as manzanita) will soon dominate the fire disturbed area, leading to dense ground level fuels and an increased probability of high severity reburn.

The community of Grizzly Flat sustained catastrophic damage, including the loss of 646 homes. This community is still considered at risk due to the potential for reburns within the Caldor Fire burn area to the east as well as its proximity to unburned hazardous fuel conditions to the west. Current and foreseeable conditions necessitate intervention in order to mitigate present and imminent risks to the communities in and around Grizzly Flat.

Accordingly, establishing safe ingress and egress routes for the public and firefighters is a critical need. The project area was selected because of its strategic importance in improving opportunities to control future fires threatening the Grizzly Flat community from the east (on NFS lands) as well as providing safe ingress and egress to and from Grizzly Flat in the event of future fire incidents from the west (not on NFS lands). The primary purpose of this project is to establish and maintain a shaded fuel break within the Wildland Urban Intermix (WUI) Defense Zone on NFS lands in the vicinity of Grizzly Flat.

While fuel breaks are commonly established in undisturbed areas by removing vegetation in order to decrease fuel levels and increase canopy separation, the Grizzly Flat Community Fuel Break (project) is being established in a disturbed area for the reasons stated above. In this case, reforestation (planting) will be required in order to provide shade, a critical component of an effective shaded fuel break due to the inhibiting effect shade has on ground level vegetation growth as well as the cooling effect shade has on fuel conditions in the event of a fire. The project will remove surface and ladder fuels within the project area and maintain reduced fuel levels, reduced canopy closure, and remove existing and emerging snags in order to create an area where wildfire behavior is significantly modified and provide an opportunity for fire suppression and control activities without the risk of injury to firefighters due to falling dead and deteriorating trees. The project will reduce wildfire spread and intensity, reduce the risk of uncharacteristically severe wildfire, reduce the risk of further catastrophic wildfire for the Grizzly Flat community, and provide safe ingress and egress for residents and for firefighters.

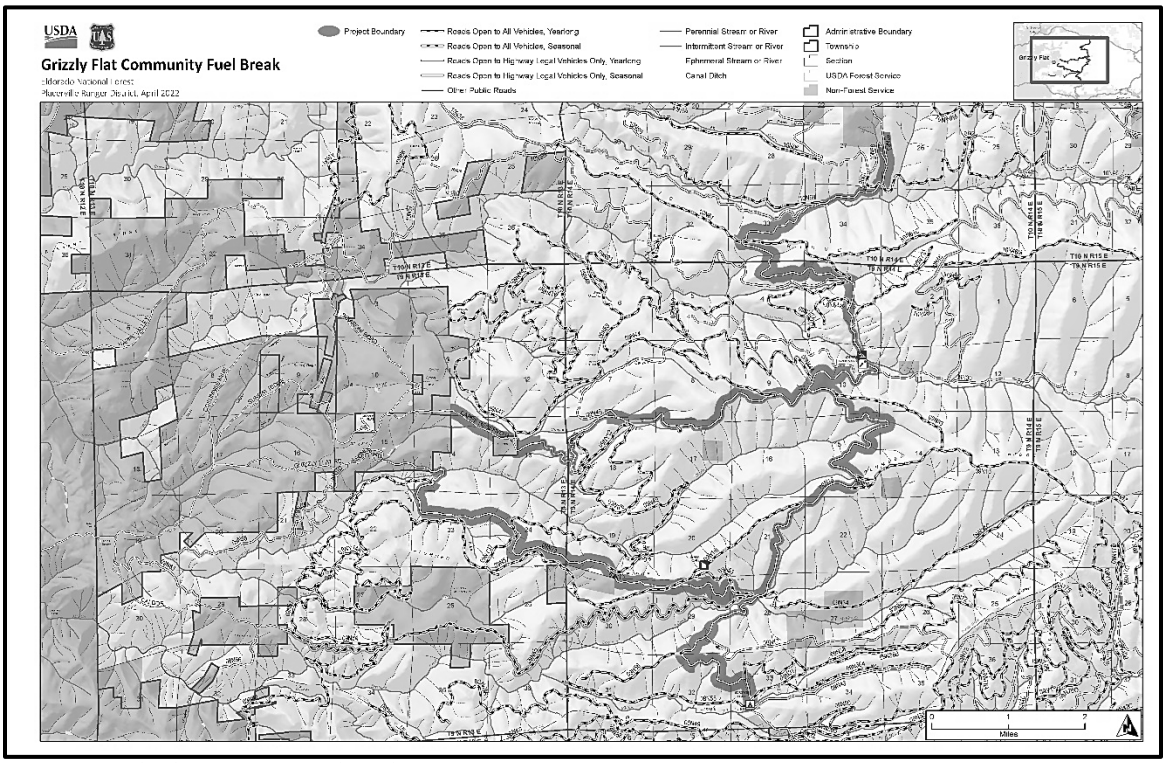

Figure 1. Grizzly Flat Community Fuel Break Project Area Map.

The Grizzly Flat Community Fuel Break (shown in dark gray in Figure 1) will extend across 2,878 acres along 38 miles of primary ingress and egress routes on National Forest Service lands east of Grizzly Flat on the Placerville Ranger District of the Eldorado National Forest:

- Capps Crossing Road (09N30) from NFS property boundary in Grizzly Flat to North South Road
- Leoni Road (09N73) from NFS property boundary in Grizzly Flat to North South Road
- Caldor Road (09N45) from the NFS property boundary near South Steely Road to North South Road
- North South Road (10N83) from Middle Dry Creek to NFS property boundary near Mormon Emigrant Trail

Emphasis on Firefighter Safety and Wildfire Control Line Production

The primary goal within the fuel break perimeter is to create an opportunity for Wildland Firefighters to construct wildfire control lines without the risk of injury due to falling dead or deteriorating trees. Snags and trees with a high probability of mortality pose an unnecessary risk to firefighters in the event of fire suppression and control line production activities. Additionally, snags and trees with a high probability of mortality will deteriorate and convert to downed logs which add undesirable fuels. Leaving snags and trees with high probability of mortality is inconsistent with the desired conditions of a constructed fuel break (USDA 2021(A), USDA 2021(B), USDA 2015, Agee et al 2000), therefore all snags and trees with a high probability of mortality will be removed within the constructed fuel break except for areas within a Wildlife Protected Area Center (see Design Criteria). Sufficient numbers and sizes of snags will be retained at appropriate locations outside of the fuel break across the landscape to meet forest-wide snag retention guidelines (USDA 2004 pp. 49-51).

Additional goals include removing surface and ladder fuels and maintaining fuel conditions with canopy separation and an open understory and overstory. Figure 2 illustrates an area with reduced surface and ladder fuels and increased canopy separation consistent with desired conditions of a constructed shaded fuel break. Notice grass growing from exposed soil, few brush or small diameter trees, and separation of dominant tree canopy. In contrast, Figure 3 illustrates an area with excessive surface and ladder fuels and an interconnected canopy. Notice excessive duff layer, numerous small diameter trees within the understory, and lack of separation of dominant tree canopy.

Figure 2. Example of Desired Fuels and Canopy Conditions.

Figure 3. Example of Undesirable Fuels and Canopy Conditions.

Emphasis on Resiliency in Wildlife Protected Area Centers

Within a Wildlife Protected Area Center (PAC) a primary goal is to preserve and improve resiliency of the existing (surviving) stand, habitat, and protected species. In areas where the fuel break overlaps a California Spotted Owl Protected Area Center (CSO PAC), project activities will balance the primary goals of the fuel break and the primary goals of the PAC by applying two prescriptions. Live stands within the fuel break, within a PAC, and within 200 feet from the edge of a road shall prioritize desired conditions for a constructed shaded fuel break (see Project Actions). Live stands within the fuel break, within a PAC, and more than 200 feet from the edge of the road shall prioritize habitat resiliency (see Design Criteria). This decision allows for the prioritization of habitat resiliency over the majority of these areas while ensuring connectivity and integrity of the fuel break along its length.

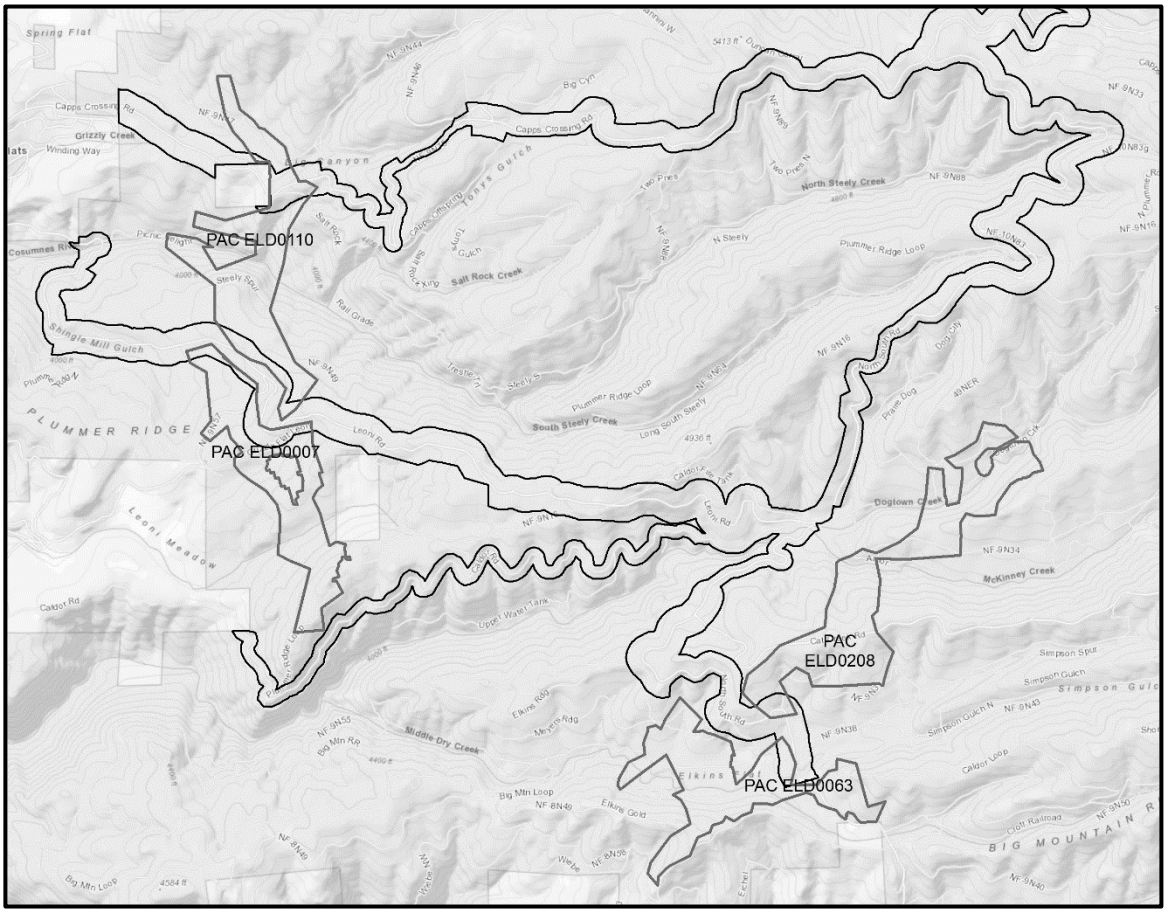

Figure 4. Overlap of California Spotted Owl Protected Area Centers and Grizzly Flat Community Fuel Break.

Figure 4 illustrates the location of four CSO PACs which overlap the fuel break project area; ELD0007, ELD0063, ELD0110, ELD0208. Three of the four PACs do not cross a road and only a small portion fall within 200 feet of the edge of a road, therefore only a small portion fall within the fuel break prescription (see Project Actions). ELD0110 does cross a road (Capps Crossing Road). In this case, the fuel break prescription will be applied to both sides of the road within the 200 foot limit, creating a 400 foot wide fuel break which will be connected along the road to the larger fuel break area. The reduced fuel break width (400 feet) is further reduced if we consider the risk of injury to firefighters from dead and deteriorating trees of sufficient height to fall within the fuel break from beyond the 200-foot limit. Currently there is no known minimum width to

define an effective fuel break as efficacy is dependent on factors outside of the fuel break such as weather, fire behavior, fuel conditions (outside of the fuel break), and suppression activity (Agee et al 2001); however, high severity crown fires have been observed to convert to ground fires when they encounter fuel break managed fuel conditions within approximately 70 meters (approximately 230 feet)(Safford et al 2012). These factors create an opportunity for wildfire control line production to occur near a road, away from the risk of falling trees, and where the fire is predicted to have reduced intensity and have converted to a ground fire where control lines are most effective.

Table 1 illustrates the differences between the Fuel Break prescription and the CSO PAC prescription. The fuel break prescription emphasizes removal of dead and deteriorating trees for both high burn severity and for low to moderate burn severity. The CSO PAC prescription emphasizes retention of large dominant trees and snags for wildlife habitat. Additional information can be found in the Project Actions and Design Criteria.

Prescription & Management Priority	Low-Moderate Burn Severity Some Live Trees Remaining Tree retention is based on Probability of Mortality and Desired Canopy Cover	High Burn Severity No Live Trees Remaining Desired Canopy Cover will be achieved through Reforestation
Fuel Break Within the Fuel Break Outside of a PAC And Within the Fuel Break Within a PAC Within 200' from the edge of a road	Leave Live Trees (all sizes) with Probability of Mortality less than 60%. Remove all Snags. Remove all vegetation up to 18" DBH in order to remove ladder fuels and add spacing to canopy and overstory. Live Trees greater than 18" DBH and less than 30" DBH may be removed in order to achieve Desired Canopy Cover. Selection should favor retention of the largest and healthiest surviving trees.	Remove all Snags. Reforestation will restore canopy cover.
California Spotted Owl PACs Within the Fuel Break Within a PAC More than 200' from the edge of a road	Leave Live Trees (all sizes) with Probability of Mortality less than 90%. Leave Live Trees equal to or greater than 18" DBH. Leave 4-8 snags per acre in clumps. Select snags with higher structural integrity. Snags should be of the tallest/largest available. Wildlife Biologist will assist in selection, location, and distribution of retained snags. Remove all vegetation up to 18" DBH to make Owl Habitat more resilient.	Not Applicable.

Table 1: Project Area Burn Severity and Prescription Matrix.

Decision

I have decided to approve the Grizzly Flat Community Fuel Break (Project) on the Placerville Ranger District of the Eldorado National Forest. The project will limit the intensity and spread of future fires, provide opportunity for suppression and control, provide egress for Grizzly Flat area residents, provide ingress and egress for firefighters and first responders, and prioritize resilience of surviving tree stands and wildlife habitat.

Project Actions

Construction of the Grizzly Flat Community Fuel Break will include a series of implementation and maintenance activities. These activities were selected based on the differences of current conditions and desired conditions for a constructed shaded fuel break. The desired conditions within a shaded fuel break are characterized by minimal surface and ladder fuel loading and reduced crown closure leading to a more open understory and overstory.

Reducing available fuel will decrease flame lengths and fire intensity, lessen the potential for crown fire, increase the effectiveness of suppression efforts, enhance safe public egress in the event of wildfire, and improve firefighter safety (USDA et al 2014 pp. 57-59). Within wildland-urban intermix (WUI) zones, the desired conditions are intended to create defensible buffers between developed areas and flammable wildland vegetation (USDA 2004 pp. 40-41).

Removal of Snags and Trees with a High Probability of Mortality

Removal of snags and trees with a high probability of mortality will be achieved through implementation of a salvage operation. No standing snags will be retained within the Fuel Break where firefighter safety and fire control line production are prioritized (except for live stands within a Wildlife Protected Area Center, see Table 1 and Design Criteria). Additionally, all trees with a probability of mortality less than 60% shall be retained.

Methods of tree removal may include ground-based logging equipment such as feller bunchers and rubber-tired or track-mounted log skidders, cut-to-length systems that utilize an in-woods tree processor and log forwarder, and conventional logging systems that employ timber fallers with chainsaws and rubber- or track-mounted log skidders. Operation of ground-equipment will be generally limited to slopes less than 35%

There will be instances where slopes greater than 35% will require tree removal . Ground based equipment may be used on short pitches (approximately 100') of greater than 35% slope. No skid trail creation will occur on slopes greater than 35%. Existing skid trails may be used by agreement with the Forest Service. Other methods of tree removal will be aerial logging with a skyline system or end lining. Additionally, in areas identified as suitable by the soil scientist and/or hydrologist, shovel logging or ground-based logging may be considered. Skyline machinery will require full suspension for log removal in special aquatic areas.

Thinning

Understory thinning will occur in areas with surviving trees that exceed desired canopy cover or desired canopy spacing consistent with a constructed shaded fuel break. Thinning activities shall retain the largest and healthiest remaining trees. Thinning may include mechanical and nonmechanical methods in order to remove ladder fuels and add spacing to canopy and overstory. Removal of ladder fuels may include smaller diameter trees as well as branches of larger trees.

Thinning will retain live dominant and codominant trees with a crown spacing of one to one and one half crown width between residual trees. Distances depend on size and length of branches of standing trees. Distance between crowns of residual tress generally will be between 75 and 100 feet apart in a mature stand. A guideline for achieving desired canopy cover will be to remove trees less than 18" DBH and assess canopy cover. Trees between 18" DBH and 30" DBH may be removed in order to achieve desired canopy cover. No live trees greater than or equal to 30" DBH will be removed (except to allow equipment operability in accordance with USDA 2004 pg. 50). Selection should prioritize retention of the largest and healthiest remaining trees. Residual canopy cover shall be retained at 40%.

Mastication

Mechanical mastication may be implemented throughout the project area as needed to remove ground level fuels such as smaller surviving trees, downed trees, stumps, and brush (e.g., manzanita). Mastication treatment intervals will take into account the rate of growth of new brush as well as reforestation efforts.

Prescribed Burns

Prescribed burns (also known as controlled burns) may be implemented throughout the project area as needed in order to remove light ground level fuels and decrease resistance to control of the fuel break in the event of a fire incident in the future. Prescribed burn treatment intervals will take into account vegetation growth rates as well as reforestation efforts. Prescribed burn treatments that take place in areas that have been planted will maintain adequate stocking and limit tree mortality. Minimum stocking in planted areas prior to pre-commercial thinning is 150 tree per acre over at least 50% of the area. Post pre-commercial thinning, mortality from prescribed burning should not exceed 20% of the existing trees per acre.

Reforestation

Reforestation will prioritize species and spacing appropriate for a shaded fuel break through the establishment of plantations that will be maintained with successive fuels reduction and thinning. Species selected will be consistent with historic native species as well as provide culturally important vegetation and resources.

Site Preparation

Areas will be cleared of existing surface fuels and or resprouting vegetation maximizing the amount of mineral soil accessible for planting of seedlings. Site preparation may be conducted using mechanical or prescribed fire methods.

Planting

Seedlings will be planted at 12 foot spacing in order to achieve approximately 300 trees per acre (TPA). Interplanting will occur where stocking falls below 150 TPA.

Seedlings will include a mixture of conifer species including Ponderosa Pine, Sugar Pine, Douglas-Fir, Incense Cedar, and White Fir.

Post Planting Activities

One or more release treatments for survival of planted conifers using mechanical and or

manual methods will occur. Initial live ground cover will be reduced below 20% for 2-3 years after initial planting.

Pre-commercial thinning will take place 5-7 years after initial planting in order to achieve approximately 100-120 TPA.

Additional thinning and release treatments will take place in 10-12 years after initial planting in order to maintain tree stocking and live fuel levels at desired levels. Live fuel cover (shrubs) will be maintained below 50%.

Ongoing thinning and release treatments will take place 20-25 years after initial planting in order to maintain canopy separation and canopy cover at 40%.

Thinning and release treatments may include manual methods (such as hand thinning/ pruning) as well as mechanical methods (such as mastication).

Design Criteria

The constructed fuel break will include the maximum allowable width of 1000 feet in order to maximize effectiveness and opportunity for wildfire control.

Wildlife

In areas where the fuel break overlaps California Spotted Owl (CSO) Protected Area Centers (PACs), project activities within 200 feet of the edge of a road may prioritize desired conditions consistent with a constructed shaded fuel break. Project activities more than 200 feet from the edge of a road shall prioritize desired conditions consistent with maintaining and enhancing the best available remaining CSO habitat.

Project activities within a PAC more than 200 feet from the edge of a road should balance snag retention with resiliency in order to provide legacy large logs that become incorporated into the future forest structure while making the area more resilient to future disturbances. Retain 4 to 8 snags per acre in clumps to provide habitat complexity. Selection of snags for retention shall favor existing snags with the highest structural integrity. Wildlife Biologist will assist in selection, location, and distribution of retained snags.

Project activities within a PAC more than 200 feet from the edge of a road should prioritize retention of remaining interior island owl refugia by targeting smaller diameter accumulated fuels which wouldn't exist historically because regular low-intensity fires would have prevented their existence. Remove all vegetation less than 10" DBH.

Project activities within a PAC more than 200 feet from the edge of a road should prioritize resilience of surviving tree stands and resistance to drought and disturbance. Prescribed burning is permitted.

Maintain a Limited Operating Period (LOP) prohibiting mechanical operations during the breeding season for California Spotted Owls (March 1 through August 15) within PACs ELD0007, ELD0063, ELD0110, and ELD0208. See Figure 4 for PAC locations.

Avoid developing temporary roads, landings, or decking within the remaining best available owl habitat (large/tall trees). Where temp roads are needed to treat in PACs, previously used temporary roads (as opposed to new temp road construction) will be used to the greatest extent

possible. Temporary road decommissioning in PACs will occur soon after their use.

Wildlife biologist will survey some areas in the large-scale high burn severity areas to determine owl occupancy and will need access to deploy and remove acoustic recording units.

Notify a US Forest Service Wildlife Biologist if any Federally listed or Region 5 Forest Service Sensitive species are discovered during project implementation so protective measures can be applied, if needed. Include necessary clauses in agreements and contracts to require notification.

Hydrology and Aquatics

If federally listed Threatened, Endangered, or Forest Service Sensitive (TES) botanical, aquatic, or terrestrial species are detected during work, operations will cease in that area and the appropriate biologist will be informed immediately to determine appropriate actions to take. Before restarting activities, consultation may need to be initiated with USFWS for listed species.

A Limited Operating Period (LOP) restricting all work activities at or below the 4500-foot elevation will be implemented from 1st fall frontal system depositing a minimum of ¼ inch of rain between October 15th through April 15th. Activities may resume after a 72-hour drying period. The LOP may be lifted in locations where sufficient survey data demonstrate the absence of CRLF or suitable breeding habitat.

Storage of fuel or other toxic materials and maintenance of equipment shall not occur within Riparian Conservation Areas (RCAs*).

Mechanical exclusion zone: No mechanized work within 100 feet of any perennial or intermittent stream or special aquatic feature* or 25 feet of any ephemeral stream.

Hand falling of trees is allowed within the mechanical exclusion zone. Trees should be felled away from the stream and left in place, bucked and scattered, or removed by reach in and full suspension.

Tops, limbs, and small trees within the mechanical exclusion zone should be lopped and scattered to provide as much ground cover as possible.

Slash shall be added to primary skid trails while operations are occurring to facilitate incorporation into the substrate and help stabilize soil.

No new landings will be created in the RCA*. Reuse of existing landings within the RCA* shall be allowed where creation of a new landing is likely to result in more resource damage than use of the existing landing within the RCA*.

Any skid trails or landings within RCAs* shall be repaired to restore soil infiltration capacity and soil cover to reduce erosion and may include practices such as, reshaping to restore natural surface flow patterns, installation of drainage control features, decompaction, placement of organic material, and seeding on disturbed soil surfaces.

At a minimum, an annual review of burning treatment plans will occur with a Forest Aquatic Biologist to ensure conditions for Threatened, Endangered or Sensitive species have not changed and to ensure consistency with FWS consultation determinations.

Ignition will be excluded 50 feet from high water edge or adjacent riparian vegetation (whichever is greater) from perennial, intermittent, and special aquatic features. Fire is allowed to back into

the 50-foot exclusion zone. Ignition may occur within the exclusion zone if it is deemed necessary to maintain control of a prescribed burn or to control burn severity.

Fire containment lines shall be rehabilitated to prevent transport of water and sediment to nearby aquatic systems prior to the onset of winter weather or large summer storm.

*The RCA is defined as 300 feet from perennial streams and special aquatic features (lakes, wet meadows, bogs, fens, wetlands, vernal pools, and springs), and 150 feet from intermittent and ephemeral streams.

Botany

Sensitive plant populations within the project area shall be flagged for avoidance. Where it is necessary to remove trees from within site boundaries, the project botanist shall be consulted to mitigate impacts. Hazard trees adjacent to site boundaries shall be directionally felled away from the site. Manual thinning (hand thinning) and prescribed fire (controlled fire) within sensitive plant protection areas may occur at the recommendation of the project botanist. The project botanist shall be notified prior to implementation of the prescribed burn in sensitive plant populations and if available will be onsite to take part in, and/or monitor burning and associated effects. At a minimum, a post burn visit shall be conducted by the botanist. Reforestation activities shall be excluded from Sensitive plant populations. If new Sensitive plant occurrences are discovered during project implementation, the project botanist shall be notified to develop necessary protection measures.

Site-specific mitigations to avoid impacts to un-surveyed Sensitive plant habitat will be developed by project botanist prior to implementation of project activities. Mitigations may include flag and avoid, LOPs, hand fell and leave, or remove by reach-in only.

Application of Magnesium Chloride for dust abatement will not occur within 100 feet of roadside occurrences of Sensitive plants.

Where sensitive plant populations occur within or adjacent to fuel break, actions will be taken to limit OHV activity including scattering materials, placing barricade rock, and/or leaving strategic patches of vegetation to discourage vehicles from driving off designated routes into sensitive plant habitat.

Motorized equipment and reforestation shall be excluded from lava cap plant communities. Site specific exemptions may occur with input from project botanist and soil scientist. Line construction through lava cap communities shall be avoided when feasible. If necessary, line construction will be completed with hand tools only. Hand felling within lava caps may occur to meet fuel break objectives.

No reforestation activity shall occur within 25 feet of riparian vegetation occurring along perennial and intermittent streams, or special aquatic features.

Invasive Plants

Known invasive plant sites in the project area will be flagged prior to implementation and the spread of occurrences will be avoided as much as possible by conducting all project work outside of flagged exclusion areas. If project activities cannot be completely avoided within flagged infestations, risk minimization strategies shall be employed such as working in the infested area last, working in infested areas when propagules are not viable, limiting the number of people or

equipment within the infestation, and cleaning mechanical and manual equipment, clothing, boots, etc., before moving to other un-infested National Forest System lands. These areas will be identified on project maps.

All off-road equipment shall be cleaned to ensure it is free of soil, seeds, vegetative matter or other debris before entering National Forest System lands to prevent the introduction or spread of invasive plants. Equipment will be inspected before initial entry and any subsequent re-entries onto the project area. If determined necessary during the inspection, cleaning shall occur at a vehicle washing station or agreed upon cleaning location before the equipment enters or re-enters the project area.

Invasive plant surveys shall occur prior to project implementation and for five years following project implementation. If found, newly detected or expanding Eldorado National Forest Priority 1 or 2 invasive plants shall be treated in accordance with the design features of the Forest-Wide Treatment of Invasive Plants Project (ENF 2013).

Cultural Resources

At-risk historic properties and cultural resource sites within the area of potential effects (APE) shall be identified for avoidance with the use of flagging and on project implementation maps as documented in the Cultural Resource Management Report R2022-0503-56015, Grizzly Flat Community Fuel Break (Serin, 2022).

Salvage operations within and adjacent to cultural resource site boundaries shall be conducted as to directionally fell snags and hazard trees away from flagged sites and sensitive features. These operations on or in the vicinity of cultural resource sites shall be coordinated with the District Archaeologist.

Mechanized equipment shall be excluded from cultural resource site boundaries, except areas where removal of woody material is specifically approved by the District Archaeologist. With the clearance of the District Archaeologist, thinning within sites may be conducted by hand with vegetation piled outside of the flagged boundaries or away from sensitive features.

Placement of any control lines for prescribed burning associated with this project shall be coordinated with the District Archaeologist.

Low intensity prescribed burning shall be allowed on select cultural resource sites as identified in the Cultural Resource Management Report for the project, and in consultation with Native American tribes.

Access to archaeological sites resulting in additional resource risk shall be blocked or disguised where feasible following project activities. Should any previously unrecorded cultural resources be encountered during implementation of this project, all work in that area shall cease as soon as practicable and an archeologist shall be notified. Work may resume if approved by an archeologist subject to implementation of additional protection measures, as necessary to meet provisions in the Region 5 PA (2018).

Should any cultural resources become damaged in unanticipated ways by project activities, the steps described in the Region 5 PA (2018) for inadvertent effects shall be followed.

This project complies with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended in accordance with provisions of the "Programmatic Agreement among the USDA

Forest Service, Pacific Southwest Region (Region 5), the California State Historic Preservation Officer, the Nevada State Historic Preservation Officer, and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation Regarding Processes for Compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act for Management of Historic Properties by the National Forests of the Pacific Southwest Region (Region 5 PA)" (USDA 2018).

Environmental Analysis

This action is categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental impact statement (EIS) or an environmental assessment (EA) under the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) of 2021 (Public Law No.117-58, Section 40806). This authorization is applicable because the BIL allows for the construction of fuel breaks adjacent to existing linear features (such as a road) that are up to 3000 acres, and a maximum width of 1000 feet, with the primary purpose of reducing the risk of uncharacteristic wildfire on Federal land or catastrophic wildfire for an adjacent at-risk community. All project activities identified in the The Grizzly Flat Community Fuel Break Proposed Action and Decision Memo are explicitly permitted within the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law Section 40806 (subpart (c)(2)). Furthermore, the fuel break will be established along existing roads (*existing linear feature, such as roads* in accordance with subpart (c)(1)(A)), on Federal land (*on Federal land* in accordance with subpart (c)(1)(A), will include a maximum width limit of 1,000 feet (*up to 1,000 feet in width* in accordance with subpart (c)(1)(A)), will cover 2,878 acres (*may not contain treatment units in excess of 3,000 acres* in accordance with subpart (d)(1)), within the WUI of NFS lands and the community of Grizzly Flat (*shall be located primarily in – (A) the wild-urban interface* in accordance with subpart (d)(2)), for the primary purpose of reducing the risk and probability of high severity reburn (*intended to reduce the risk of uncharacteristic wildfire* in accordance with subpart (c)(1)(B)), which may further threaten the community of Grizzly Flat (*for an adjacent at-risk community* in accordance with subpart (c)(1)(B)). The project is herby supported by a Decision Memo and a Project Record (*documented through a supporting record and decision memorandum* in accordance with subpart (b)).

Additionally, I find that there are no extraordinary circumstances that would warrant further analysis and documentation in an EA or EIS. I took into account resource conditions identified in agency procedures that should be considered in determining whether extraordinary circumstances might exist:

1. *Federally listed threatened or endangered species or designated critical habitat, species proposed for Federal listing or proposed critical habitat, or Forest Service sensitive species*.

   There are two Federally listed species that have some potential to be within the project area; the Sierra Nevada Yellow-Legged Frog (SNYLF) and the California Red-Legged Frog (CRLF). There is also some potential for one species proposed for listing; the Foothill Yellow-Yegged Frog (FYLF). The probability for adverse effects to these species from the Grizzly Flat Community Fuel Break Project was analyzed in a Biological Analysis and through consultation with the US Fish and Wildlife Service. The Forest Service believes adverse effects to the these three species is unlikely. This characterization is based on (1) the lack of any documented SNYLF, FYLF, or CRLF populations within the project area, (2) the lack of good CRLF breeding habitat in the vicinity of the project area, (3) the current poor condition of streamside riparian habitat in the burn area, (4) design criteria that restrict actions within suitable SNYLF, FYLF, and CRLF habitat, and (5) design criteria that minimize the potential for indirect adverse effects to suitable SNYLF, FYLF, and CRLF habitat. The full rational for the Forest Service determination for these species is available in

the Biological Analysis which can be obtained through the Placerville Ranger District of the Eldorado National Forest.

2. *Flood plains, wetlands, or municipal watersheds*.

   The Hydrology Report (Markman 2022) supports a Finding of *"No adverse effects to floodplains, wetlands, and municipal watersheds*." The two primary reasons for that Finding are: a.) the project contains Design Features that have been shown to be effective in protecting aquatic features, and b.) the project does not influence the risk of Cumulative Watershed Effects (CWE) in any watershed.

3. *Congressionally designated areas such as wilderness, wilderness study areas, or national recreation areas*.

   The project will not occur within a Congressionally designated areas such as wilderness, wilderness study areas, or national recreation areas.

4. *Inventoried roadless areas or potential wilderness areas*.

   The project will not occur within an Inventoried Roadless Area or Potential Wilderness Area.

5. *Research natural areas*.

   The project will not occur within a Research Natural Area.

6. *American Indians and Alaska Native religious or cultural sites*.

   There are no known American Indian or Alaska Native religious or cultural sites within the project area.

7. *Archaeological sites, or historic properties or areas*.

   This project complies with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended in accordance with provisions of the *Programmatic Agreement among the U.S.D.A. Forest Service, Pacific Southwest Region (Region 5), the California State Historic Preservation Officer, the Nevada State Historic Preservation Officer, and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation Regarding Processes for Compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act for Management of Historic Properties by the National Forest of the Pacific Southwest Region (Regional PA 2018).*

   A comprehensive Cultural Resource Management Report (R2022-0503-56015) was completed. Cultural resource surveys and site monitoring for the Grizzly Flat Community Fuel Break project took place in 2021 and 2022. The cultural resource inventory strategy utilized the Region 5 Hazardous Fuels Protocol for Non-Intensive Inventory Strategies for Hazardous Fuels and Vegetation Reduction Projects (Appendix H of the Regional PA 2018). Approximately 70 cultural resource sites have been identified within the project area. Protection of cultural resources in the area was incorporated into the Proposed Action through such measures as flagging and avoiding sites during project implementation and directional felling of trees posing a hazard to cultural resource values. In some locations, specialized equipment and low impact tree removal methods will be used within and adjacent to cultural resource sites in conjunction with monitoring by an archaeologist. Based on the analysis documented in the Cultural Resource Management Report, the Proposed Action will

not result in adverse effects to historic properties.

In addition, the project has limited context and intensity (40 CFR 1508.27), and this action will produce little or no individual or cumulative environmental effects, to either biological or physical components of the human environment (40 CFR 1508.14).

Public Involvement

This action was originally listed as a proposed action on the Eldorado National Forest Schedule of Proposed Actions on April 7, 2022 and updated periodically during the analysis. The SOPA, the Proposed Action, a Cover Letter, and a Project Map was published on the Eldorado National Forest website. The Proposed Action, a Cover Letter, and a Project Map were mailed to a list of Interested or Affected Parties on April 7, 2022 notifying them of the opportunity to provide input or comment. Additionally, the project was discussed with the South Fork American River Cohesive Strategy Collaborative on March 9, 2022, March 24th, 2022, and April 13th, 2022. The Forest Service received several letters in response to the Proposed Action. These letters introduced additional discussion within the Interdisciplinary Team assigned to this project and are reflected in the Decision Memo. A summary of comments and how they were considered is recorded in the Project Record on file.

Tribal Consultation was initiated during the scoping process for this project. Letters from the Placerville District Ranger were emailed to Tribal Officials and Cultural Representatives of the following tribes and organizations: Buena Vista Rancheria of Me-Wuk Indians, California Indian Baseketweavers' Association, California Indian Water Commission, El Dorado Band of Miwok Indians, El Dorado County Indian Council, El Dorado County Wopumnes Nisenan-Mewuk Tribe, Jackson Rancheria, Shingle Springs Band of Miwok Indians, United Auburn Indian Community, Washoe Tribe of Nevada and California, and Wilton Rancheria. The Eldorado National Forest Tribal Relations Program Manager responded to requests for additional information.

Findings Required by Other Laws and Regulations

This action is found to be consistent with all applicable laws and the Eldorado National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (1989), as amended by the Sierra Nevada Forest Plan Amendment (2004).

Administrative Review (Objection) Opportunities

This decision is not subject to legal notice and comment procedures of 36 CFR 218.22 and is not subject to the pre-decisional administrative review process pursuant to 36 CFR 218.

Implementation Date

The project may be implemented immediately.

Contact

For additional information concerning this decision, contact: Brian Brown, NEPA Planner, Eldorado National Forest at (530) 647-5304 or by email at brian.brown@usda.gov or by mail at 4260 Eight Mile Road, Camino, CA 95709.

6/1/2022

Scot Rogers
District Ranger

Date

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