



File Code: 1950
Date: September 13, 2021

Dear Interested Party:

The United States Forest Service, Tahoe National Forest, is preparing an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) to consider and disclose the anticipated environmental effects of implementing the proposed North Yuba Landscape Resilience Project (North Yuba Project). The proposed Project has been developed through a collaborative process by the North Yuba Forest Partnership (NYFP). The Partnership is made up of a diverse group of nine entities, including the Forest Service, working in common purpose to improve and restore forest health and resilience, reduce the risk of uncharacteristic wildfire, protect and secure water supplies, and protect communities from the effects of high-severity wildfire and climate change in the North Yuba River watershed. The purpose of this scoping letter is to provide information to potentially interested parties about the Project and how to participate in an early and meaningful opportunity for public involvement. Information on how to comment is found at the conclusion of this scoping letter.

Purpose and Need

The Project area (also referred to as the “Landscape”) stretches from New Bullards Bar Reservoir east up to the Sierra Crest along Highway 49. The Landscape is approximately 275,000 acres, of which approximately 210,000 acres are National Forest System lands within Sierra County, with just the westernmost portions of the project area in Yuba County. The watershed includes valuable forest habitat, is an important source of water to downstream users, supports diverse habitats, offers excellent opportunities for recreation, and is home to multiple communities including Camptonville, Downieville, and Sierra City. The NYFP recognizes that the North Yuba River watershed resides within the Ancestral and Traditional homelands of the Nisenan Tribe and includes shared boundaries with the Mountain Maidu, Konkow, and Washoe Tribes. These Tribes exist today and retain their relationships with the forest.

The NYFP is motivated to reduce risk of, and increase resilience to, severe disturbances, including wildfire, within this Landscape. Beneficial, low-to-moderate severity fire has been largely absent in this Landscape for more than a century. Structure and composition of the Landscape’s forests have been substantially altered from historic conditions as a result of decades of fire exclusion, mining, and past harvest activities. Forests in this condition are highly susceptible to drought, insect and disease infestations, and destructive wildfire. A large, high-severity wildfire within the Landscape could result in loss of human life and would cause considerable damage to communities and watershed health. Recognizing that community safety and forest health are complementary and interrelated, the NYFP is working together to reduce the risk of high-severity wildfire and protect communities at an increased pace and scale, given the geographic scope and severity of the problem.



Proposed Action

A principal goal of the NYFP is to plan and accomplish forest restoration and wildfire risk reduction at a landscape scale. To accomplish this, efficiency and effectiveness of project planning needs to be increased, including meeting survey requirements, and ensuring compliance with NEPA. In addition, given that project implementation will occur over many years, it is desirable to allow regular opportunities to address changing conditions on the ground (e.g., insect outbreak, wildfire, etc.) and provide periodic formal, structured comment and pre-decisional administrative review opportunities for the public before decisions are made. Toward this end, a staged decision-making approach is planned for the Project. Staged decision-making means that proposed actions for the entire Landscape would be analyzed in one EIS; however, separate decision documents would be issued for smaller sub-project areas within the Landscape as Project implementation proceeded.

To accomplish the goals and objectives identified above, the Project includes the following activities in various locations across the Landscape.

- Prescribed fire – including understory burning and pile burning;
- Thinning – including thinning from below and variable density thinning, with tree removal accomplished using hand thinning, mastication, ground based mechanical thinning, and aerial thinning;
- Opening creation – including openings ranging from 1 to 3 acres each;
- Strategic tree planting – including planting conifer and/or hardwood tree species within 10 to 20 percent of the 1- to 3-acre created openings;
- Sanitation cutting and stand improvement – including removal of mistletoe-infected overstory conifer trees;
- Conifer removal, prescribed fire and fencing to restore aspen stands, meadows, and fens;
- Stabilize, realign, and restore incised stream channels;
- Soil decompaction;
- Road repair, maintenance, and decommissioning;
- Manual, cultural, and/or chemical removal of non-native invasive plants; and
- Project-specific amendments to the Forest Plan (1990 and 2004, as amended) that would only apply to this Project.

Different types and combinations of activities are proposed in key areas designated in the Forest Plan to better protect the resources in these areas, including: (1) inventoried roadless areas (IRAs), (2) California spotted owl and northern goshawk protected activity centers (PACs), (3) California spotted owl home range core areas (HRCAs), and (4) other forested areas, which include wildland urban intermix (WUI) threat zones, old forest emphasis areas, and general forest areas.

The Project proposes several project-specific amendments to the *Tahoe National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan* (1990) as amended by the *Sierra Nevada Forest Plan Amendment* (ROD 2004) (Forest Plan). Forest Plan amendments would modify, remove, and add specific forest plan components to allow activities aligned with the Project's goals to improve overall forest resilience to stressors associated with altered fire regimes and drought and create conditions conducive to re-introducing fire in this Landscape.

A detailed description and maps of the proposed Project activities and project-specific plan amendments can be found on the Project website at: <https://www.yubaforest.org>.

Public Participation Opportunities

At this time, the Tahoe National Forest is at the beginning stages of planning and environmental analysis for the Project. A notice of intent (NOI) to prepare an EIS is anticipated to be published in the Federal Register on September 16, 2021. The Forest Service will post the published NOI on the Project website (noted above) as soon as it becomes available. Publication of the NOI will initiate the 30-day public scoping period. During the scoping period, the Tahoe National Forest is requesting public comments concerning issues and concerns related to the Project's proposed actions. Providing your comments at this early point allows us the opportunity to incorporate your thoughts, concerns, and issues into the environmental analysis. The Forest Service will use scoping comments to help identify issues and alternatives to be analyzed in a Draft EIS, which is expected to be available for comment in the summer of 2022.

If you would like to provide scoping input, please submit written comments within 30 days of the date the NOI is published in the Federal Register to: Eli Ilano, Tahoe National Forest Supervisor, c/o Laurie Perrot, Attn: North Yuba Project, 631 Coyote Street, Nevada City, CA, 95959. Comments may also be submitted electronically at: http://www.fs.fed.us/nepa/nepa_project_exp.php?project=59693. Under the right-hand column heading "Get Connected," select Comment / Object on Project. Submitted comments should include: (1) name, address, and telephone number, of the commenter; and if applicable, the organization represented; (2) a heading or subject line of "North Yuba Project," and (3) specific concerns, issues, or suggestions related to the Project and the reasons for any concerns or suggestions.

Two public scoping meetings are scheduled, one on September 22, 2021, and the other on September 30, 2021. Both meetings will begin at 6:30 p.m. and the public will be able to attend these meeting either via the internet or telephone:

September 22

Zoom Meeting Link

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/82903703181?pwd=RXhFRXpTTUpNlU4V3lseVVCK1pVUT09>

Telephone: (669) 900 6833

Webinar ID: 829 0370 3181

Passcode: 465960

September 30

Zoom Meeting Link

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/89001537848?pwd=NmhMbmdxQVdLSnZNVFcxNzJTWZgrZz09>

Telephone: (669) 900 6833

Webinar ID: 890 0153 7848

Passcode: 690554

An in person viewing location will also be available at the Downieville Community Hall, 322 Main Street, Downieville, CA 95936. Additional information about scoping meetings and other aspects of the scoping process are available on the Project website.

This project is subject to pre-decisional administrative review consistent with the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2012 (Pub. L. 112-74) as implemented by Subparts A and B of 36 CFR part 218. In addition, the proposed forest plan amendments are subject to pre-decisional administrative review, pursuant to Subpart B of the Planning Rule (36 CFR part 219). As the Responsible Official, I am requesting your specific written comments during this initial 30-day designated opportunity for public participation. Only those who submit timely and specific written comments during a public comment period will be eligible to file an objection. Specific written comments are those submitted to the

Responsible Official during a designated opportunity for public participation (36 CFR 218.5(a)), which includes the scoping period. For the purposes of this Rule, specific written comments should be within the scope of the proposed action, have a direct relationship to the proposed action, and must include supporting reasons for the Responsible Official to consider.

If you do not wish to comment but would like to follow the development of this Project proposal, please select "Subscribe to Email Updates" in the "Get Connected" section at http://www.fs.fed.us/nepa/nepa_project_exp.php?project=59693. If we do not hear from you, we will not be able to include you on the mailing list for this specific project.

Thank you for your interest in the management of the Tahoe National Forest.

Sincerely,

(for) ELI ILANO
Forest Supervisor