



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

Los Padres
National Forest

Monterey Ranger District
406 South Mildred
King City, CA 93930
(831) 385-5434
TDD: (805) 968-6790

File Code: 1950-3

Date: November 20, 2012

Dear Interested Party:

The Los Padres National Forest, Monterey Ranger District, requests your comments on our proposed action for a **Strategic Community Fuelbreak Improvement Project**.

This proposed action is the first formal stage of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process for this project. It is our intent to publish a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) in November 2013 for public review. The DEIS will offer another opportunity for comments before we publish our Final EIS.

This project will focus on pre-suppression fire management within the wildland/urban interface threat zone on the peripheral of the northern Monterey Ranger District. The purpose of this project is to enhance protection for at-risk communities from wildfire. This project will set the stage for future management of fire and ecological restoration in both wilderness and non-wilderness.

The need for this project is to prepare historically used strategic firelines in a condition that will:

- increase wildland fire suppression efficiency when in proximity to communities and related infrastructure
- reduce wildfire risk to life and property
- reduce suppression costs
- reduce adverse fire suppression impacts on the landscape

Proposed Action

The proposed action is to re-establish and maintain 24.1 miles of historically used fuelbreaks – all of which originated as firelines - within the wildland urban interface threat zones on National Forest System lands; approximately 7.5 miles within wilderness and 16.6 miles outside of wilderness. The project would be accomplished over a period of 10 years, as funding and resources become available. Fuelbreak treatments would be as follows:

Non-Wilderness

Fuelbreaks would be constructed and maintained every 3-5 years with a combination of hand thinning with chainsaws, hand and machine piling, pile burning and mastication.



Wilderness

In accordance with the Wilderness Act, enabling legislation, and Forest Service Policy, fuelbreaks would be constructed manually using chainsaws, hand piling and pile burning and then maintained every 3-5 years with traditional tools through a combination of hand thinning, hand piling and pile burning. A monitoring and adaptive management program will be developed to evaluate the rate of vegetative regrowth on the treated fuelbreaks to determine if available workforce is sufficient to maintain fuelbreak integrity with traditional tools or whether additional administrative actions, such as use of chainsaws, will be needed to assist in maintenance.

Strategic Community Fuelbreak locations and dimensions¹ are as follows:
(please refer to attached Project Vicinity Map)

(1a) Palo Colorado Vicinity - Non-Wilderness

Establish a maximum 150 foot wide fuelbreak on the historic fireline adjacent to the Skinner Ridge Trail (FDT 1E04) between Bottchers Gap and Skinner Ridge, a distance of 1.3 miles.

Establish a maximum 150 foot wide fuelbreak on the historic fireline along Skinner Ridge between the wilderness boundary in Section 18 (near Turner Creek) and Pico Blanco Boy Scout Camp, a distance of 2.8 miles.

Establish a fuelbreak that overlaps the existing Mescal Ridge Road, covering 25 feet north of the road edge to 75 feet south of the adjacent ridge center. Fuelbreak would be a maximum of approximately 300 feet wide by 0.6 miles long.

(1b) Palo Colorado Vicinity - Wilderness

Establish a maximum 150 foot wide fuelbreak on the historic fireline between the wilderness boundary in Section 18 (just south of the Turner Creek trailhead) and Devils Peak, a distance of one mile.

(2a) Palo Colorado to Big Sur Vicinity – Non-Wilderness

Establish a maximum 150 foot wide fuelbreak on the historic fireline between the National Forest boundary at Post Summit, across Cabezo Prieto ridge, and where the Mt. Manuel Trail (FDT 2E06) crosses the wilderness boundary in Section 20, a distance of 2.8 miles.

(2b) Palo Colorado to Big Sur Vicinity – Wilderness

Establish a maximum 150 foot wide fuelbreak on the historic fireline between Post Summit and the Little Sur River, a distance of 1.8 miles.

¹ Fuelbreak widths are maximum values. The actual widths may be limited by factors such as width of the ridge and/or proximity to the wilderness boundary.

Establish a maximum 150 foot wide fuelbreak on the historic fireline from where the Mt. Manuel Trail (FDT 2E06) crosses the wilderness boundary in Section 20 to the Big Sur Wild River boundary, a distance of 0.8 miles.

(3) Big Sur Vicinity - Non-Wilderness

Establish a fuelbreak along the historic fireline adjacent to and/or encompassing the North Coast Ridge Road (FDR 20S05) between the Terrace Creek Trailhead (FDT 3E220) and Anderson Peak on National Forest System lands, a distance of 6.8 miles. The maximum width between the Terrace Creek Trailhead and Cold Springs will be 150 feet; maximum width between Cold Springs and the Tanbark Trail will be 300 feet; maximum width between the Tanbark Trail and Anderson Peak will be 150 feet.

Establish a 150 foot wide fuelbreak on Partington Ridge adjacent to and/or encompassing the Deangula Trail (FDT 2E07) between the North Coast Ridge Road (FDR 20S05) and the National Forest boundary, a distance of 0.8 miles.

Establish a fuelbreak encompassing the Tan Bark Trail between the North Coast Ridge Road (FDR 20S05) and the Forest Boundary, a distance of 0.8 miles. Commencing at the North Coast Ridge Road and traveling west towards the National Forest boundary, the first approximate 600 feet in length will be a maximum of 300 feet wide. The remaining length to the Forest boundary will be a maximum of 150 feet wide.

(4a) Cachagua and Jamesburg Vicinity - Non-Wilderness

Establish an anchor point through the use of prescribed fire and/or hand thinning with chainsaws, hand and machine piling, pile burning, and mastication around the Chews Ridge Lookout Tower and the Monterey Institute for Research and Astronomy Observing Station. Acreage is approximately 64 acres.

Establish a 150 foot wide fuelbreak on the historic fireline along Chews Ridge between the Chews Ridge Lookout Tower and north 0.7 miles to the wilderness boundary.

(4b) Cachagua and Jamesburg Vicinity - Wilderness

Establish a 150 foot wide fuelbreak on the historic fireline along Hennicksons/Chews Ridge on National Forest System lands between the National Forest boundary above Los Padres Dam and wilderness boundary near Tassajara Road, a distance of 3.9 miles.

Collaboration

To exchange information and work together towards agreement on conservation goals, the Monterey Ranger District initiated Firescape Monterey an informal collaborative group comprised of community and stakeholder partners who promote an all-lands approach to both protection of life and property affected by wildfire and healthy resilient ecosystems through collaborative stewardship. With facilitation and guidance by the Fire Learning Network, and a

focus on ecological restoration, participants in Firescape Monterey have identified five key important landscape values: Fire Adapted Human Communities, Natural and Wilderness Qualities, Biodiversity, Cultural Resources, and Watersheds. While Firescape Monterey continues to work towards collaborative and financially supported efforts among all land managers to accelerate the pace of landscape restoration, the Los Padres National Forest will focus our work sequentially in meeting goals developed collaboratively. This project is a key element of an overall district-wide planning process to expand and develop partnerships to increase organizational capacity to meet landscape restoration goals.

The Los Padres National Forest requests your comments on this proposed action. A 45-day comment period will commence on the publication date of a “notice of intent to prepare an environmental impact statement, Strategic Community Fuelbreak Improvement Project” in the Federal Register. Date of publication is expected between November 29 and December 4, 2012. If you do not have access to the Federal Register, please contact me and I will provide the date of publication as soon as it is published.

Two public meetings are scheduled to provide the public with an opportunity to engage with the Forest Service in discussions regarding the proposed action and process of the environmental impact statement.

December 4, 2012, 5:30pm – 7:30pm at the U. S. Forest Service Monterey District office:
406 South Mildred Ave., King City, CA 93930

December 6, 2012, 5:30pm – 7:30pm at the U. S. Forest Service Big Sur Station: 47555
Highway 1, Big Sur, CA 93920.

It is important that reviewers provide their comments at such times and in such manner that they are useful to the agency’s preparation of the environmental impact statement. Therefore, comments should be provided prior to the close of the comment period and should clearly articulate the reviewer’s support, concerns and contentions.

Include the following information with your comments: your name, mailing address, email (optional), and telephone number; the project name: Strategic Community Fuelbreak Improvement Project; and site-specific comments about the proposed action, along with supporting information you believe will help identify issues, develop alternatives, or predict environmental effects of this proposal. The most useful comments provide new information or describe unwanted environmental effects potentially caused by the proposed action. If you reference scientific literature in your comments, you must provide a copy of the entire reference you have cited and include rationale as to how you feel it is pertinent to the Strategic Community Fuelbreak Improvement Project. Comments received in response to this solicitation, including names and addresses of those who comment, will be part of the public record for this proposed action.

Address: Send written comments to Los Padres National Forest, Monterey Ranger District, 406 South Mildred Ave., King City, CA. 93930, attention: Jeff Kwasny. Comments may also be sent via facsimile to 831-385-0628, or via e-mail to: comments-pacificsouthwest-los-padres-monterey@fs.fed.us.

Additional information regarding this proposed action can be obtained from Jeff Kwasny, Project Team Leader, at Big Sur Station #1, 47555 Highway 1, Big Sur, CA 93920, (831)-667-1126, OR Timothy Short, District Ranger, at 406 South Mildred Ave., King City, CA 93930, (831)-385-5434.

Sincerely,

/s/ Timothy J. Short
TIMOTHY J. SHORT
District Ranger

Enclosed: Project Vicinity Map