



File Code: 1950**Date:** October 25, 2021**Route To:****Subject:** Region 5 Post Disturbance Hazardous Tree Management**To:** Interested Citizen

REPLY DUE NOVEMBER 15, 2021

I am writing to inform you of the opportunity to provide input on the R5 Post Disturbance Hazardous Tree Management Project in the Forest Service Pacific Southwest Region (Region 5). Due to the time-sensitive nature of the proposed hazard tree removal, I am requesting your input on the proposed action briefly described below within the next 21 days, by **November 15, 2021**, to ensure your comments are fully considered during this public scoping opportunity.

The record wildfire years in 2020 and 2021 in California have resulted in fire-killed or damaged trees that pose threats to public health, safety, and property. The R5 Post Disturbance Hazardous Tree Management project includes hazard tree felling and removal, as well as removal of downed woody fuels resulting from hazard trees (slash), to reduce public safety hazards along portions of roads, trails, and near facilities (campgrounds, trail heads, Forest Service offices). We have identified a need to expedite analysis and decision making related to this project, which includes activities that are not novel, and for which the effects are generally well-known.

Hazard tree felling, removal, and slash removal is proposed in specific project areas within the following national forests: Inyo, Klamath, Lassen, Mendocino, Modoc, Plumas, Sequoia, Shasta-Trinity, Sierra, and Six Rivers within the North, Central, and Southern Sierra sub-regional zones.

To initiate the scoping process for this project, a more detailed description of the proposed action has been developed to provide the public and other stakeholders an opportunity to review and comment on the proposal. A copy of the proposed action and associated maps can be found on the project website (<https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=60950>).

Based on the nature of activities being proposed, we intend to document the National Environmental Policy Act environmental analysis for these activities within separate environmental assessments for each of the three zones. The environmental assessments will be made available for public review during an upcoming 30-day comment period per 36 CFR 218.22 (anticipated January 2022). Ultimately, the Forest Supervisors will decide whether to implement the proposed actions on each Forest, implement an alternative action that meets the purpose and need, or take no action.

Emergency Determination and Alternative Arrangements

Due to the critical and time-sensitive nature of the proposed action, the Regional Office may elect to seek an Emergency Situation Determination (ESD) from the Chief of the Forest Service. If the ESD is sought and granted, it would expedite the actions proposed in this project (36 CFR 218.21).

An ESD would enable the capture of the commercial value of the salvaged timber, facilitate the accelerated reduction of fuel accumulation and tree disease risk, and expedite safe public and woods



worker access to the affected areas. An ESD would waive the pre-decisional objection process under 36 CFR 218, allowing expedited implementation of the proposed activities in early summer of next calendar year. Whether an ESD will be pursued or not will be determined based on the findings in the initial analysis phase, prior to the public comment period.

The Regional Office may also seek alternative arrangements with the Chief of the Forest Service (36 CFR 220.4(b)(2)).

Where to Send Comments

I request that you submit your comments online at: <https://cara.ecosystem-management.org/Public//CommentInput?Project=60950>. Attachments to comments must be submitted in one of the following formats: Microsoft Word, rich text format (rtf), or Adobe Portable Document format (pdf). Comments submitted to email addresses or inboxes other than the website listed above, in other formats than those listed, or containing viruses will be rejected. Comments received in response to this initial request, including names, addresses, and any other information provided with the comments, will be considered a part of the public record and will be subject to the Freedom of Information Act and released if requested. Individuals and groups providing timely and specific written comments during this or any future designated opportunity to comment will be eligible to participate in the objection process (36 CFR 218.5), if an ESD is not sought or granted. Only those who respond to this request for comments will remain on the mailing list for this project. If you are not able to access the online form, comments may also be sent to Pacific Southwest Regional Office, Ecosystem Planning, Post Disturbance Hazardous Tree Management Project, 1323 Club Drive, Vallejo, California, 94592.

Your input will be used as a part of the scoping process to help identify issues and frame the analysis. Of particular interest to me are comments that identify specific issues (cause-effect statements) related to the proposed activities. Please indicate if your comments are specific to a certain location, National Forest, or zone.

Contact Information

For additional information, please contact Christine Handler, Environmental Coordinator, at christine.handler@usda.gov or 559-920-2188. I appreciate your interest regarding the management of your national forests in the Pacific Southwest Region.

X 

Elizabeth Berqer for Jennifer Eberlien

Signed by: ELIZABETH BERGER
JENNIFER EBERLIEN
Regional Forester

cc: Priya Shahani, Talitha Derksen, Laura Hierholzer