**Motor M2K Group Breakout Questions (v.2)**

**August 12, 2019**

The following topic areas and associated questions were identified based on comments or concerns raised at the July 11th public engagement meeting, the July 22 field trip to the experimental forest, and internal discussion informed by past vegetation management projects. The interdisciplinary team (ID Team) will utilize discussion surrounding these topics to develop a draft proposed action for review and discussion at the next pre-scoping public engagement session to be scheduled in September. Note: not all topics may be discussed during group breakouts or discussed in length; however, comments on these questions are still desired and can be submitted to the MOTOR M2K ID Team prior to or following the August 12th meeting. To best utilize comments relating to these specific questions during this phase of the project development we ask that additional responses be received by August 26th.

***Topic 1: POST-DECISION PUBLIC PARTICIPATION***

**Question: What are some processes or checkpoints we can put in place to ensure public input is considered throughout the life of this project?**

**Background:** The MOTOR M2K project will result in a NEPA decision authorizing vegetation management activities within the project area for a period of 10-15 years. Stakeholders have expressed concerns about the ability for the public to meaningfully express concerns or affect decisions on vegetation management activities for the next 15 years since the MOTOR M2K will cover vegetation management activities across both entire forests (or longer if existing conditions have been evaluated as similar enough). The decision will include an Implementation Guide that describes among other things, how stakeholders and other interested public will have post-decision opportunities for further involvement in treatment development and review. Additional discussion and suggestions from concerned stakeholders is needed to develop a plan that addresses this topic.

***Topic 2: HERBICIDES***

**Question: Should the use of herbicides be included as a management tool, and if so, under what conditions?**

**Background**: Two needs for using herbicides have been identified based on input. These needs include the maintenance of fuel breaks and control of non-native, invasive terrestrial weeds.

1) Herbicides could be used in strategic locations to kill select vegetation and modify the live fuel profile (i.e, decrease the proportion of shrubs) and reduce potential fire behavior either as part of the initial treatment, applied as a treatment for maintenance of the fuel profile at a regular interval, or when certain conditions are met. 2) Vegetation treatments could create conditions conducive to the introduction or spread of non-native, invasive weeds. Herbicides could be used to control additional spread following any or all project-related treatments. Additionally, the use of a borate compound (for example, Sporax®) could be used on cut conifer stumps to prevent the spread of the fungal pathogen causing annosus root disease.

***Topic 3: SALVAGE LOGGING***

**Question: Should salvage be considered in this project, and if so, under what conditions? What constraints should be considered when authorizing salvage or logging?**

**Background:** The ID Team has identified a need to abate hazard trees to provide for worker and public safety and to protect infrastructure. Additionally, extensive tree mortality has created conditions where some locations have potential for high severity fire outside the range of conditions under which these ecosystems evolved. In past projects salvage and hazard tree logging has been utilized to remove trees, to reduce fuel accumulation and manage longer term fuel loading, to recover economic value, and/or to prepare a site for natural or artificial regeneration of trees following a disturbance such as wildfire or insect/disease/drought related mortality.

***Topic 4: ADDITIONAL SIDEBOARDS/MANAGEMENT REQUIREMENTS***

**Question:** **What limits (or side-boards) on treatment activities should the Forest Service consider in implementing these landscape scale treatments and why?**

**Background**: The MOTOR M2K project will include design features or management requirements to bound the scope of activities or effects on resources. These features will be important to bound the final decision, so that the effects can be predicted, analyzed and disclosed. Defining management requirements would be one way to address the uncertainty regarding a proposed action that has a broad scope and does not have specific treatment units. The Forest Service is asking for the group identify potential management requirements or sideboards that could limit uncertainty or unacceptable effects while still meeting the purpose and need of the project.

***Topic 5: WILDERNESS/PROPOSED WILDERNESS AND INVENTORIED ROADLESS***

**Question: Should any actions be taken in designated or proposed wilderness areas or inventoried roadless areas, and if so, what actions and under what circumstances?**

**Background:** Mechanical treatments in designated or proposed wilderness areas or inventoried roadless areas are generally prohibited by law, regulation, and policy. However, local exceptions can be made for specific circumstances. For this project, treatments could be limited to prescribed fire to substantially minimize the need for mechanical tool use, or could be expanded to include other treatment tools or actions to improve effectiveness of other adjoining landscape-level treatments.

***Topic 6: CALIFORNIA SPOTTED OWL CONSERVATION STRATEGY***

**Question: Should we implement the newly released CSO Conservation Strategy?**

**Background:** This Strategy focuses on the immediate need for maintaining high-quality habitat, especially around occupied nest sites, while developing resilient habitat across the landscape. Maintaining well-distributed territories across the CSO range will increase population resilience to the effects of climate change and other environmental stressors. Managing the landscape toward NRV is a central and guiding principle of this Strategy and can help develop resilient habitat conditions that provide CSO conservation in the long term. The conservation measures aimed at maintaining the CSO and their suitable habitat where they exist today provide some immediate stability for individual owls while we work to align the landscape with NRV. This Strategy recognizes this may entail some short-term, localized risk to resilience as more sustainable and dynamic habitat is developed through active management. Aligning the landscape with NRV is the first step towards an eventual resilient future range of variation. Recommendations in the owl strategy include providing more flexibility in diameter limits, a greater degree of treatment options in existing CSO PACs, and changes in how owl territories are mapped. Implementation of some of these recommendations may require minor forest plan amendments.

***Topic 7: REFORESTATION***

**Question: The interdisciplinary team is not currently considering reforestation as part of this decision. Is there a compelling reason reforestation should be considered in this project, and if so, under what conditions and or constraints?**

**Background:** The scope of the MOTOR M2K project has been limited to vegetation management actions that address the immediate threat major disturbance agents (wildfire, insects/disease/drought) pose to life, property or ecosystem resilience.Patches of mortality could occur, have, and will continue to occur as a result of insect or pathogen outbreaks, wildfire, drought, or other factors. If mortality is extensive, there could be a need to re-establish or restore the appropriate forest cover. Smaller areas of mortality may be an acceptable occurrence in portions of the landscape, but larger areas may require additional efforts to facilitate ecosystem recovery. Additionally, diseases such as white pine blister rust, a non-native pathogen, has the potential to greatly alter species composition by killing smaller sugar pine and white pine.

Because this type of future event is considered to be unforeseeable, including this action would potentially allow for greater responsiveness and flexibility in creating and maintaining a more resilient landscape. Results of the recent tree mortality event are still on the NFS lands now, like extensive areas near Bass Lake.

***Topic 8: OTHER TOPICS***

**Question: What other topics need to be discussed in detail, or assigned a working group to improve a draft Proposed Action for an for effective scoping process?**