USDA United States Department of Agriculture | Forest Service | Eldorado National Forest Amador Ranger District | 26820 Silver Drive Pioneer, CA 95666 (209) 295-4251 (Voice) (209) 295-5996 (TTY) (209) 295-5998 (FAX)

File Code: 1950
Date: June 25, 2019

Dear Interested Party:

The Amador Ranger District of the Eldorado National Forest proposes to conduct a culvert and water control structure reconstruction project named the Power Fire Culvert Improvement and Erosion Control. The purpose of this project is to restore and improve hydrologic function and connectivity of drainages within the Power Fire area. The existing culverts at stream locations would be replaced by larger culverts/ structures allowing passage of streamflow. Replacement of greater diameter culverts will decrease the likelihood that culverts will fail during large precipitation evens and high streamflow. Failure of culverts frequently results in downstream erosion, diversion of stream along roads resulting in road degradation and increased stream sedimentation. The proposed project would also help restore the health of aquatic resources that specifically benefit populations of aquatic organisms present within the Power Fire area such as Rainbow Trout (*Oncorhynchus* mykiss), Forest Sensitive Foothill Yellow-legged Frogs (*Rana* boylii), and the endangered Sierra Nevada Yellow-legged Frog (*Rana* sierrae).

Background

The culverts and water control structures are located throughout the 17,000 acre 2004 Power Fire. Currently, the culverts and structures are at the end of their design life. Some are damaged with impaired functioning resulting from years of land use and natural events. Cumulative effects of these impacts could leave landscapes vulnerable to damage during flooding events and reduce the function of stream hydrology and aquatic habitat value.

Project Location

The project is located entirely in Amador County, California in T7N, R15E, Sections 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12. T8N, R15E, Sections 14, 15, 16 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36. T8N, R16E, Sections 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35 , 36; Mount Diablo Base and Meridian. The area is accessed from highway 88 from Panther Creek Road, Tiger Creek Road, Ellis Road and Dufrene Camp Road (Figures 1 and 2).

Description of Proposed Action

The Power Fire Culvert Improvement and Erosion Control project involves culvert improvements on National Forest System Roads on the Amador Ranger District within the watersheds affected by the 2004 Power Fire. The proposed project recommends replacing 92 culverts and installing 2 new water control structures. New water control structures may be a low water crossing, culvert, improved ford, high-water bypass or other feature of similar nature. Most existing culverts 18 inches and below will be upsized to 24 inches in diameter, others will be replaced in kind, or sized accordingly with site specific hydrologic and hydraulic characteristics. Culverts will be designed to meet a 100-year storm event.

Culvert replacements and construction will be performed according to Standard Specifications for Construction of Roads and Bridges on Federal Highway Projects (FP-03) and other applicable standard policies and guidelines.

General design criteria for culvert improvements include:

- Ground disturbance at each culvert site is approximately width of culvert plus 2 feet on each side from centerline and length of culvert plus 20 feet on each end.
- If crossing contains flowing water at time work is to be performed, dewatering site will occur in accordance with standard specifications and acceptable industry practices.
- Culvert inlets and outlets may be armored with rip rap, if necessary.
- Rock material will be obtained for the Tragedy Spring Rock Pit or commercial source.

Design Criteria

General Criteria

1. All standards and guidelines from the Eldorado National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (1989), as amended by the 2004 Sierra Nevada Forest Plan Amendment will be followed.

2. All Best Management Practices described in the National BMPs for Water Quality will be followed (FS-990a, April 2012).

3. Should any Threatened, Endangered or Sensitive (TES) species be located during project implementation, a qualified biologist or botanist should be informed, and appropriate measures will be taken to minimize impacts to TES species prior to further work.

Aquatic Wildlife

For the applicable design criteria discussed below:

Suitable habitat for the Sierra Nevada (SNYLF) is 82 feet from special aquatic features (meadows, springs, lakes, ponds) and perennial and intermittent streams above 4,500 feet elevation.

Suitable habitat for the Foothill yellow-legged frog (FYLF) encompasses special aquatic features (meadows, springs, lakes, ponds), perennial and intermittent streams below 4,500 feet elevation.

4. If SNYLF is sighted within the action area, operations will cease in the sighting area and a Forest Service aquatic biologist will be informed of the sighting immediately, who will treat according to the Terms and Conditions described in the Programmatic Biological Opinion issued by the USFWS 2014.

5. Surveys shall be conducted prior to implementation of the project where heavy equipment will enter suitable SNYLF habitat and where water drafting or diversion work occurs in suitable SNYLF habitat.

6. A Forest service biologist or an approved biological monitor will be present during culvert reconstruction and/or dewatering sites that fall within utilized SNYLF habitat.

7. Within suitable FYLF and SNYLF habitat; 1) tightly woven fiber netting or similar material shall be not used for erosion control or other purposes to prevent FYLF or SNYLF being trapped, injured or killed, and 2) plastic mono-filament netting or similar material shall not be used since SNYLF may become entangled or trapped in it.

8. Existing waterholes and other aquatic sites including ponds, lakes and streams used for water drafting or diverting would be surveyed for Aquatic TES species. In the event TES species are found to occur at drafting sites; sites will not be used.

9. The use of low velocity water pumps and screening devices for pumps (per S&G 110) will be utilized during drafting or dewatering for culvert reconstruction to minimize risk to SNYLF. A drafting box measuring 2 feet on all sides covered in a maximum of 0.25 inch screening is required. Drafting would be from the deepest water source, near the bottom.

Terrestrial Wildlife

10. A limited operating period (LOP) for California spotted owls (March 1 through August 15) would restrict restoration activities for roads/routes, or portions of roads/routes, that are located within spotted owl Protected Activity Centers (PACs), unless surveys confirm that owls are not nesting.

    - LOPs would be implemented for all or portions of spotted owl PACs: AMA0001, AMA0004, AMA0005, AMA0007, AMA0009, AMA0013, AMA0015 and AMA0016.

11. A limited operating period (LOP) for Northern Goshawks (February 15 to September 15) would restrict restoration activities for roads/routes, or portions of roads/routes, that are located within goshawk Protected Activity Centers (PACs), unless surveys confirm that owls goshawks are not nesting.

    - LOPs would be implemented for all or portions of goshawk PAC RO5F03D51T35-01.

Botanical Resources

12. Sensitive plant populations within the project area would be flagged for avoidance. All ground disturbing activities with mechanical equipment, would be excluded from

sensitive plant protection areas. If new sensitive plant occurrences are discovered during project implementation the project botanist would be notified to develop necessary protection measures.

13. Lava caps, which support unique plant communities in the project area, would be protected from motorized equipment and vehicles.

14. All equipment and vehicles (Forest Service) used for project implementation must be free of invasive plant material before moving into the project area. Equipment will be considered clean when visual inspection does not reveal soil, seeds, plant material or other such debris. Cleaning shall occur at a vehicle washing station or cleaning facility before the equipment and vehicles enter the project area.

15. Known invasive plant sites along roads in the project area will be flagged prior to implementation and will be avoided as much as possible. If infestation cannot be avoided contact a Forest Service Botanist.

16. Where proposed road work occurs in known invasive plant infestations equipment would be cleaned prior to leaving infested areas.

17. All earth-moving equipment, gravel, fill or other materials would be weed free. Onsite sand, gravel, rock, or organic matter would be used where possible.

18. Any new occurrences of sensitive plants identified within the project area would be flagged and avoided when necessary.

19. Straw or mulch used for erosion control would be certified weed-free. A certificate from the county of origin stating the material was inspected is required. Any seed used for restoration or erosion control would be from a locally collected source.

Hydrology and Soils

20. The Power Fire Road Culvert Improvement and Erosion Control project meets the applicable Best Management Practices (BMPs) for roads in the following document: *National Best Management Practices for Water Quality Management on Forest System Lands (April 2012).*

21. The following management requirements from the U.S. Forest Service Region 5 *Water Quality Management Handbook* (USDA 2012) would be applied to prevent impacts to on-site and downstream water quality during implementation:

    - **BMP 2.8 Stream Crossings** – This BMP minimizes water, aquatic and riparian resource disturbances and related sediment production when constructing, reconstructing, or maintaining temporary and permanent water crossings.

Archeology and Heritage

22. 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 2013).*
23. Should any previously unrecorded cultural resources be encountered during implementation of this project, all work should immediately cease in that area and the District Archaeologist be notified immediately. Work may resume after approval by the District Archaeologist; provided any recommended Standard Protection Measures are implemented. Should any cultural resources become damaged in unanticipated ways by activities proposed in this project; the steps described in the Regional PA 2013 for inadvertent effects will be followed.

24. Should the project boundaries or activities be expanded beyond the current Area of Potential Effects (APE), Section 106 compliance for this project will be incomplete until additional cultural resource review is completed.

25. The District Archeologist will be kept informed of the status of various stages of the project, so that subsequent field work can proceed in a timely fashion. Monitoring of the area may occur after the project has been complete.

Categorical exclusion

The project is categorically excluded from documentation in an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) or Environmental Assessment (EA) in accordance with the Environmental Policy and Procedures Handbook in which a project file and Decision Memo are required.

36 CFR 220.6 (e) (18) Restoring wetlands, streams, riparian areas or other water bodies by removing, replacing, or modifying water control structures such as, but not limited to, dams, levees, dikes, ditches, culverts, pipes, drainage tiles, valves, gates, and fencing, to allow waters to flow into natural channels and floodplains and restore natural flow regimes to the extent practicable where valid existing rights or special use authorizations are not unilaterally altered or canceled.

How to Comment and Time Frame

We are asking for your comments on this proposal. This scoping notice is intended to provide those interested in or affected by this project with an opportunity to share information, and make their interest and concerns known. Please provide an email address if you prefer future communication on this project electronically in place of hard copy.

A map of the project area is enclosed. If you have information the Forest Service may not be aware of, or feel you have issues regarding potential effects of the Proposed Action, please send

your comments in writing to Chuck Loffland, District Biologist, Eldorado National Forest, Amador Ranger District, at the letterhead address, or preferably, via email to comments-pacificsouthwest-eldorado-amador@fs.fed.us with Subject: Power Fire Culvert Improvement and Erosion Control Project Comments. Comments should be received by July 26, 2019 in order to be most helpful.

If you have any questions about this proposal, or would like more information, please contact Chuck Loffland at (209) 295-5954.

Sincerely,

/s/ Richard G. Hopson
RICHARD G. HOPSON
Amador Ranger District

ENCLOSURE: PROJECT MAP

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Figure 1. Power Fire Culvert Improvement and Erosion Control project footprint

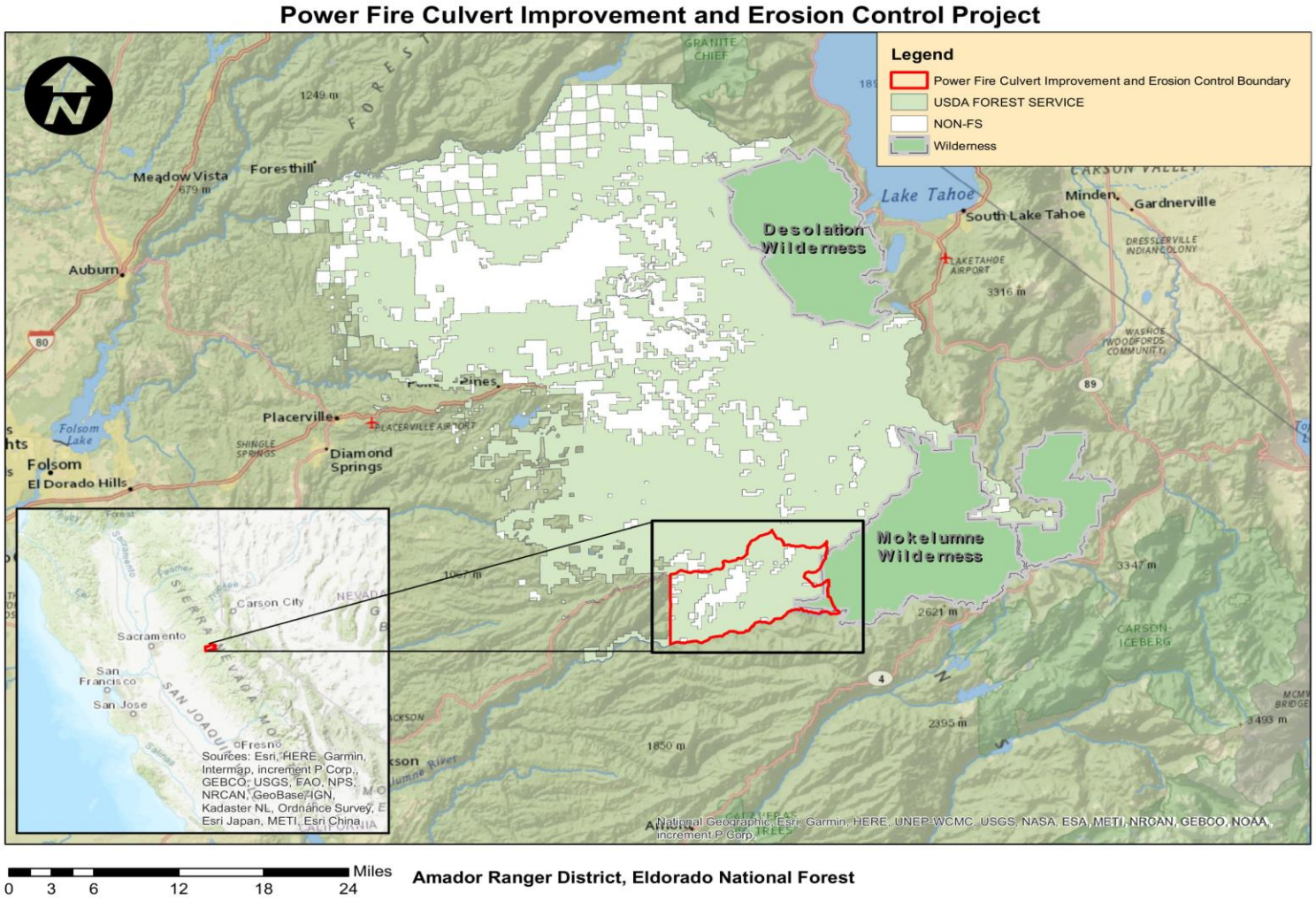

Figure 2. Proposed culvert and water control structure improvement sites