Amador-Calaveras Consensus Group

**Recommendations for UMRWA-USFS Mokelumne Amador Calaveras Forest Health and Resilience Project (MAC), Phase 2**

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# **Background**

This document contains recommendations developed, and approved by, the ACCG for purposes in the Mokelumne Amador Calaveras Forest Health and Resilience Project (MAC) Phase 2 (formerly Forest Project Plan, FPP, Phase 2) project on the Eldorado National Forest, Amador Ranger District and the Stanislaus National Forest, Calaveras Ranger District.

Forest Plan Amendment-specific recommendations were developed by the ACCG’s Forest Plan Amendment Ad Hoc group. The Ad Hoc, formed in 2023, is a sub working group to the ACCG Planning work group, charged with discussing and developing recommendations for California spotted owl (CSO)-related forest plan amendments for the MAC Phase 2 planning effort. The Ad Hoc’s charge was expanded in early 2024 to include developing recommendations for dbh limits for all land allocations for the MAC Phase 2 planning effort. The Ad Hoc includes FS wildlife biologists, FS resource staff, and representatives from UMRWA, SPI, CSERC, and SFL.

Other project-specific recommendations, not addressed by the Ad Hoc, in addition to the above-mentioned, were developed by the ACCG Planning work group. The Planning work group charged themselves with discussing and developing recommendations for additional MAC Phase 2 topics not covered by the Ad Hoc.

# **Forest Plan Amendments**

These are pieces of a larger strategy that we are contemplating as we are making recommendations, but they have a bearing on other components that we may or may not make a recommendation on.

## **Protected Activity Center (PAC) Retirement**

* Retain all PACs that have now or prove to have after required surveys (5 years) occupancy (vs. repro., pair status)
* Location matters (gap analysis to determine whether to even look at the PAC for retirement) retain PACs that are geographically important either presently or future population
* Process/Surveys only determine “eligibility” for retirement, use the gap analysis and other information to decide to or not to retire an unoccupied PAC
* 5 years of survey required, preferably consecutive years, but 5 in a 7-year period is acceptable
* Surveys require 2 years of traditional protocol level surveys, the balance of the 5 could be ARUs or traditional surveys

**Amendment language to go forward to MAC Phase, 2 Team, and the FS:**

*California spotted owl (CSO) protected activity centers (PACs) would be deemed eligible for retirement after 5 years of surveys indicating non-occupancy (i.e., territorial singles or reproductive pairs). All PACs that meet occupied status as a result of these surveys, occupied defined as set forth in the spotted owl survey protocol, would be retained as PACs.*

Received consensus support of the PAC retirement recommendations from the ACCG at the September 20th, 2023 General Meeting.

## **California Spotted Owl/Goshawk Survey Timing**

* + Scale/scope of the project will make completing surveys before a NEPA decision on >200,000 acres highly unlikely in the proposed time frame.
  + Using the SERAL model, include the pre-implementation (defined as pre-award of a contract and modification of habitat) in the “planning period” for the survey requirement.

The 2004 Sierra Nevada Framework requires protocol surveys (both California spotted owl, and northern goshawk) for all suitable habitat that would be affected by vegetation management projects during the planning process. In the past the Eldorado and Stanislaus National Forests have generally interpreted this and completed surveys before NEPA decisions are signed. Given the large scale of the MAC Phase 2 > 200,000 acres, this is not feasible. The ACCG Planning Ad Hoc group has discussed and recommends the above survey strategy of completing the surveys before contracting and/or implementation is started for these species.

Received consensus support of the survey timing language from the ACCG at the January 17th, 2024 General Meeting.

## **California Spotted Owl/Goshawk Survey Locations**

* For vegetation treatments that maintain or improve habitat quality in California spotted owl nesting and roosting habitat outside of protected activity centers, pre-implementation surveys are not required.
* Before authorizing mechanical vegetation treatments that may reduce near-term habitat quality in suitable California spotted owl habitat of unknown occupancy, follow the guidance related to survey timing.

Management activities that maintain or improve habitat quality in the highest quality and best available nesting and roosting habitat would:

* Retain existing CWHR canopy cover class (e.g., do not reduce 5D to 5M);
* Retain clumps of the largest available trees greater than 24 inches diameter at breast height; and
* Retain at least two canopy layers at the stand/patch scale in areas where large trees occur.

Received consensus support of the survey location language from the ACCG at the at the February 21st, 2024 General Meeting.

## **Territories (forthcoming)**

# **Chemical/ Herbicide Use**

Received consensus support of the Chemical/ Herbicide Use recommendations from the ACCG at the November 20th, 2024 General Meeting.

1. **Fuelbreak maintenance**

ACCG’s recommendations/ acceptance for maintenance of fuelbreaks within the MAC Project, include prescribed burning, mastication, other mechanical treatments, hand treatments, targeted grazing and the limited use of chemical/ herbicide application as described below.

Chemical/ herbicide use will be limited to a maximum of 300 acres per year on each District. These locations will be determined by the US Forest Service.

Chemical/ herbicide application methods may include cut stump treatment, wiping onto foliage, drizzling, directed foliar spraying, and spot spraying.

Chemical/ herbicide types may include glyphosate or triclopyr.

The ACCG also recommends that a range of levels of chemical/ herbicide use for the maintenance of fuelbreaks be analyzed in the MAC Project EIS. However, the ACCG’s recommendations for the proposed action are as stated above.

1. **Non-native plant populations, including noxious weeds**

ACCG’s recommendations for chemical/ herbicide use for non-native invasive plant species control and eradication reference the framework described in the Eldorado National Forest’s Eradication and Control of Invasive Plants Environmental Assessment (USFS 2013, <https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/eldorado/?project=25886>).

Integrated pest management (IPM) may be used to treat invasive plant and animal species, which are non-native species whose introduction causes or is likely to cause economic or environmental harm or harm to human health (Executive Order 13112). Chemical/herbicide use should be the last option as described below, when non-chemical methods are deemed not feasible. Early Detection and Rapid Response may also occur within the MAC project area for eradication or control of new or previously undiscovered invasive plant infestations using the methods listed below.

* + 1. Manual Control/Cultural Methods: This approach includes the use of hand pulling and hand tools, including shovels, picks, weed pullers, loppers, and hand saws. This also includes flaming with propane torches, tarping, hydro-mulching, reseeding with competitive native species, and other physical and cultural treatments.
    2. Biological Control: Biological control methods treat invasive species populations through the use of natural enemies such as parasitoids, predators, pathogens, antagonists, or competitors to suppress pest populations. We may release biocontrol agents registered with Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) and the State of California to control invasive plant species.
    3. Targeted Grazing: Targeted grazing uses livestock grazing animals to consume, break off, or trample vegetation to reduce the amount or density of fuels. With targeted grazing, grazing contractors will operate under USFS direction and monitoring to achieve specified fuel-reduction objectives. Grazing can be a relatively inexpensive treatment method, and cattle, goats and sheep can effectively create fuel reduction zones (Lovreglio et al. 2014). Virtual fencing may be used as a component of targeted grazing.
    4. Chemical Control: This approach includes the use of herbicide through cut stump treatment, wiping onto foliage, drizzling, directed foliar spraying, spot spraying, and as a last resort where appropriate, broadcast application. Herbicides and associated surfactants will be used in conjunction with manual/cultural methods for invasive plant management at locations where their use is more effective, provides for worker safety, results in reduced impacts or disturbance when compared to other treatment options, reduces management costs, and/or is integral for the successful management of invasive species populations. The Project MAC EIS will identify a suite of management requirements for herbicide use that define restrictions and specifications to ensure their use is compatible with the protection of sensitive resources.

Treatment frequency, location and prioritization: For each known invasive plant infestation, and for future infestations that may be discovered, one of four treatment strategies is proposed:

1. Annually treat and monitor the infestation with the goal of eradication.
   1. Applies to 11 invasive plant species outlined in the 2013 Eradication and Control of Invasive Plants EA (e.g., tall whitetop, spotted knapweed).
2. Treat and monitor a portion of the identified occurrences each year, focusing on reducing the area coverage and amount over time.
   1. Applies to 14 invasive plant species outlined in the 2013 Eradication and Control of Invasive Plants EA (e.g., scotch broom, yellow starthistle).
3. Treat only leading-edge infestations or where concurrent with higher priority species.
   1. Applies to 14 invasive plant species outlined in the 2013 Eradication and Control of Invasive Plants EA (e.g., puncture vine, oxeye daisy).
4. No treatments are proposed at this time.
   1. Would apply to 18 invasive plant species outlined in the 2013 Eradication and Control of Invasive Plants EA (e.g., mullein).

Criteria for prioritizing treatment sites:

1. Infestations with a high potential for future spread (prolific species found in high traffic areas such as administrative sites, trailheads, major access points for the forest, and systems vulnerable to invasion (recent fires)
2. High value areas (such as Wilderness) and surrounding points of access
3. Early invaders with small isolated infestations on the forest.
4. Leading edge and satellite occurrences of larger more established infestations
5. The perimeter of larger infestations

Herbicide Types: Nine herbicides are proposed for use in this project, including aminopyralid, clopyralid, chlorsulfuron, glyphosate, imazapic, triclopyr, imazapyr, and clethodim and fluazifop for annual grasses.

Design features and Best Management Practices: Follow Design Features and Best Management Practices outlined in the Eldorado National Forest’s Eradication and Control of Invasive Plants EA (2013), and also Forest Plan Standards and Guidelines or label guidance.

# **Treatment Criteria (e.g., dbh limits) for all Land Allocations (forthcoming)**