

If applicable, describe any of the project's areas of controversy known to the Lead Agency, including issues raised by agencies and the public.

The project does not have any significant areas of controversy.

Provide a list of the responsible or trustee agencies for the project.

Responsible Entity: State of California Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD)

Responsible Agencies: U.S. Department of Interior Bureau of Land Management (BLM), U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service (USFS) Stanislaus National Forest (STF)

Trustee Agencies: San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District

Partnering Agencies: Sierra Nevada Conservancy, California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE), County of Tuolumne

1.1 PROJECT LOCATION

The project is in the western Sierra Nevada in Tuolumne County, California. The project area consists of eight distinct fuel breaks located between Wagner Ridge in the south and State Highway 108 in the north (Figure 1). The size and location by Township (T), Range (R), Mount Diablo Meridian for each fuel break is listed in Table 1. See Figure 1.

Table 1
LOCATION AND SIZE BY FUEL BREAK

Fuel Break	Approximate Size (acres)	USGS Quadrangle	Township, Range and Section
Highway 108	125.7	Twain Harte	T03N, R16E, Sections 25, 34-36 and T02N, R16E, Sections 3-4
Contingency North	102.5	Twain Harte	T02N, R16E, Sections 1, 2, 10, 11, 14, 15
Contingency South	85.6	Twain Harte/Tuolumne	T02N, R16E, Sections 21, 28, 33, 34
Paper Cabin	214.9	Tuolumne	T01N, R16E, Section 20, 21, 27-29
Rim Truck East	405.2	Tuolumne/Groveland/Jawbone Ridge	T01S, R16E, Section 1-4, 12, 25 and T01S, R17E, Sections 7, 17, 18, 20, 28, 33
Corcoran	108	Moccasin	T01S, R15E, Sections 11, 12, 14, 23
Long Shanahan	404.5	Groveland	T01S, R16 E, Section 25, 26, 35, 36 and T01S, R17E, Section 19, 20, 29, 20, 31 and T02 S, R16E, Section 2 and T02S, R17E, Section 5, 6
Wagner Ridge	362	Groveland	T01S, R16E, Section 27, 28, 29, 33, 34, 35, 36 and T02S, R16E, Section 1, 2 and T02 S, R17 E, Section 5-8

1.2 PROJECT BACKGROUND

The proposed project consists of expanding a series of shaded fuel breaks in Tuolumne County on federal lands (U.S. Department of Interior Bureau of Land Management [BLM]- and U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service [USFS]-administered land), private lands, and lands controlled by State and local agencies. The project is a collaborative effort under the oversight of the State of California Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD) and Sierra Nevada Conservancy (SNC). The USFS Stanislaus National Forest (STF) would be implementing the fuel break activity and California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) staff would be providing support and facilitating STF implementation activities.

The proposed project is part of the Community Watershed Resilience Program (CWRP), which consists of three interconnected sets of activities in Tuolumne County for resilient recovery from the 2013 Rim Fire. The CWRP is funded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, and its activities will assist in community recovery efforts and building resiliency to future disaster. The three sets of activities comprised by the CWRP are: (1) Forest and Watershed Health Projects, including a system of strategic fuel breaks to protect communities from future wildfire; (2) Community Resilience Centers that provide shelter and necessary services in the event of a disaster; and (3) Biomass Utilization Facility Projects that utilize forest byproducts. The proposed project is a Forest and Watershed Health Project activity under the CWRP, which is a collaborative effort to restore and protect the Tuolumne River watershed.

The proposed project requires analysis pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) because it is partially on federal land, and because implementation is financed with federal funds from the Community Development Block Grant Program NDRC. Review pursuant to the California Department of Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) is required because the project would partially occur on private lands, and lands controlled by State and local agencies, and because HCD is taking a discretionary action to fund the project activities.

1.3 PURPOSE AND NEED

The purpose of the project is to protect communities in Tuolumne County from wildfire and to minimize the spread of fires originating in developed areas while supporting fire resilient landscapes

The shaded fuel breaks proposed in this project are needed to:

1. Reduce the threat of large, high severity wildfires to communities. These strategically placed fuel breaks would interrupt potential fire spread into the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI).
2. Provide treated areas with low fuel for fire crews to work from and more quickly stop fire spread.
3. Provide safer ingress and egress routes for the public and firefighters during a fire.
4. Protect critical wildlife habitat and forests from wildfires.

1.4 PROPOSED ACTION

The project would reduce ladder fuels and establish eight 300-foot-wide shaded fuel breaks totaling 22 linear miles (approximately 1,808.4 acres). Most of the areas proposed for treatment would expand existing fuel breaks. Treatments would begin in 2020 and be completed in 2021.

Fuels Treatments

Treatment prescriptions will be determined for a given area based on vegetation characteristics, proximity to residences and infrastructure, slope, and the presence of sensitive resources. The treatments may include a combination of hand or machine felling of trees, mechanical or hand piling and pile burning, and masticating brush and smaller trees. All standing and fallen dead trees would be treated.

Where economically feasible, on USFS lands, timber would be harvested and removed under a USFS timber contract. On BLM lands, all live and dead trees to be treated would be assessed for highest and best use, and if BLM chooses to not extract the material due to a balance of economic, ecological, and public safety reasons, it would be piled and burned. No timber would be sold from private properties in the project area.

Selected live trees less than 12-inches diameter at breast height (dbh) would be treated and trees up to 16 inches dbh may be extracted from USFS and BLM lands where a timber sale is feasible and required to meet desired spacing and reduction of ladder fuels. The residual trees would be spaced to break up the vertical and horizontal continuity of the fuels, reduce crown contact to less than 10 percent, and to achieve an average crown spacing of between 5 feet and one full crown width. Removal of oaks would generally be avoided.

On USFS lands only, future maintenance of recolonizing vegetation would be done with the herbicide glyphosate. Directed herbicide applications would target only brush species that could create ladder fuel into the overstory trees and/or high fuel loading within these areas. This would include most ceanothus species and other taller/sprouting species such as manzanita. Herbicides could be used up to three times over a 10-year period after implementation of the initial treatments and would be applied by hand.

Management Requirements and Design Criteria

The proposed treatments were developed by CAL FIRE and the STF, in accordance with the management direction contained in the Stanislaus National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (STF LRMP; 1991), as amended. Incorporation of the applicable management requirements as design criteria are standard practice by STF to meet the goals and objectives for management of the Forest. While the proposed project also includes non-USFS lands, the project is being implemented as a cooperative effort. Therefore, the management requirements and design criteria identified by the STF would apply for the entire project and are incorporated into the project design. Additional management requirements and design criteria specific to actions on BLM lands are also included to address possible timber harvest on BLM lands. Specific standards and guidelines were identified for the following resources: general special-status species; foothill yellow-legged frog and western pond turtle; California mountain king snake, nesting birds, special status plants, riparian

conservation areas and jurisdictional waters, noxious weeds, cultural resources, noise. In addition, design criteria for ground-based extraction on BLM lands are specified.

