

VI. Institutional Issues

A. Vegetation Management Program (VMP) in Fire Management



Attainment of the fuels reduction goals of the Tehama-Glenn Unit Fire Plan will require an on-the-ground effort and the Department's partial use of CDF, CDC, and equipment in many areas where stakeholders do not have the finances or resources to do an effective job individually or as a group. The Vegetation Management program (VMP) is currently the primary vehicle by which CDF resources may be used on privately owned lands. In place since 1981, the program has been an effective fuels reduction and rangeland improvement tool. Because of increasing competition for smoke allotments, CDF's use of fire to reduce fuel load may eventually be in jeopardy. If the use of fire is phased out, chipping and biomass supply will likely be the primary disposal method in the future.

Most fuel reduction projects are complex because they involve conflicting land-use interests and political factors. Any project likely to have a long-term impact on fuels and fire hazard will have to deal with the following:

- accommodation of property owner land-use
- active landowner participation
- planning for re-growth and long term maintenance
- overlapping jurisdictions
- long-term funding needs
- environmental clearance NEPA/CEQA.

If we ignore any of these issues, the project is unlikely to have a long-term impact.

TGU can use the VMP program as a leveraging tool. We have a lot to offer along with some limitation. VMP treatments usually provide only a portion of the long-term solution but CDF's efforts are usually critical inputs. We cover the fire-liability issue and have fire crews, dozers, engines and fire-expertise that is lacking in the private sector. We also have useful liaisons with other agencies and some experience in the environmental hoops.

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However we have definite limitations in the area of our long-term commitments, especially in the area of funding. Our links to land-use practices are weak (NRCS, University Co-op and Farm Advisor are better). Our ability to influence County land-use decisions is unfortunately centered around water supply issues. CDF is generally excluded from subdivision placement and post-approval land use CCR's. In the conifer lands, we have more potential influence through the Forest Practice rules, but this ability is limited to well-justified mitigations applied to the THP polygons submitted by timberland owners. In the NEPA arena, other agencies hold more cards and they can raise fatal issues unless they are enthusiastic participants in the project. VMP can be a leveraging tool that we offer up when other benefits to public safety are being accomplished. If we do not see a similar commitment from the landowners and agencies, our long-term efforts will fail.

VMP is a cost-share program. The State's share of a project's cost may range from fifty to ninety percent. This is based on a public benefits formula where the greater benefit to the public, the greater the share of the cost of the project CDF may assume. By their nature, fuels reduction projects in critical areas identified in this plan will have a high public to private benefits ratio. Unit efforts will be concentrated in these areas. Conversely, projects that are essentially range improvement burns that are not near population concentrations will require a higher degree of landowner effort and proportional costs. This is not to say that rangeland burning is of minor importance. Through this century, range improvement burns have been vital in managing wildland fuels on a landscape basis. However, increasing population in the rural areas has brought constraints such as smoke management and liability concerns. Such constraints have made the LE-7, range improvement project, less attractive and has put VMP projects in higher demand with ranchers in the Unit.

The Unit currently has a variety of VMP and non-VMP projects in various stages of preparation, ranging from those with range and wildlife habitat improvement as the primary goals (Lassen Foothills and Vina Plains) to the Mill Creek LLC Shaded Fuel Break project, which has a community fire protection goal. The Tehama-Glenn Unit will make a concerted effort to pursue projects that meet the wide array of demands placed on the Vegetation Management Program in Tehama County.

Objectives

The vegetation management program will shift emphasis to:

- Smaller fuel reduction projects closer to new developments.
- Find alternatives to fire, such as mechanical fuel treatment.
- Emphasis on quality over quantity
- In some instances, the program may be limited to simply providing wildland

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safety and protection zones around high value assets. TGU can loan our ball & chain for private crushing projects.

VMP projects planned or being considered for FY 05/06 include:

Lassen Foothills Range Management – Noxious weed control
Sunflower Vegetation Management – Brush/fuel reduction, watershed/wildlife
Tedoc Mountain CRMP Phase I
Lake California Fuels Reduction – Thinning hazardous brush surrounding residences