

FIRE MANAGEMENT PLAN 2008

Lassen-Modoc Unit

V. INSTITUTIONAL ISSUES

A. Vegetation Management in Fire Management

Attainment of the fuels reduction goals of the Lassen–Modoc Unit Fire Plan will require on-the-ground effort. The use of Cal Fire and CDCR crews and equipment will likely be necessary 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 Cal Fire resources may be used on privately owned lands. In place since 1981, the program has been an effective fuels reduction / rangeland improvement tool. Because of increasing competition for smoke allotments, Cal Fire’s use of fire to reduce fuel load is in jeopardy and because of this, chipping will likely become the primary disposal method in the future.

VMP is a cost-share program; the State’s share of a project’s cost may range from zero to ninety percent. This is based on a public benefits formula --the greater the benefit to the public, the greater the share of the cost of the project Cal Fire may assume. Fuels reduction projects in critical areas within the Unit as identified in this plan have a high public to private benefits ratio therefore the unit’s efforts should be concentrated in these areas. For example, the project in the Janesville area that will reduce fuels around the community has a high public/private benefit and lower landowner participation is then justified. 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 managers from the timber industry and ranchers.

The unit has experienced a sharp decline in VMP projects due to a series of factors including a non-existent burn window in the fall of 2003 and 2004 and a lack of available resources in the spring of 2004. In addition, the Scarface projects neared completion of the original planned 20,000 acres with 18,383 acres completed when the ownership changed from Beaty and Associates to Sierra Pacific Industries and word from Sacramento that the extensive herbicide use as prep work for a burn is not covered under the current Chaparral Management Program EIR. The loss of the new VMP Program EIR in a court challenge forced the unit to reconsider several planned projects allowing only a few to go the Negative Declaration route. The unit has hired a new VMP Coordinator in August of 2005 and the unit is now fully staffed. Unit emphasis will now be placed on community fire protection projects as well as some wildlife habitat improvement projects. Plans are also being developed to implement the revised VMP Program EIR on rangeland improvement projects as well as under burning of numerous eastside pine stands that have been biomassed over the last 10 years.

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Battalion 1

Willow VMP 50 Acres 2008

This approximate 50 acre project is largely a reforestation project on SPI property. The method of treatment will largely involve utilizing dozer(s) to pile and/or windrow brush fields currently present in the project area. At some point in time after the bull dozer work, the piles/windrows will be burned. The area will be planted with a mixture of conifer tree species in an attempt to get the land back into productive timberland. Physical work on the project has yet to take place. Future VMP projects may take place in the immediate area in an effort to get the land back into productive timberland.

Battalion 2

Hog Flat Fuel Break

This approximate 490 acre project is a road side shaded fuel brake located along both sides of Highway 44 between Gomez Road and the old Goat Fire. Cal Trans and SPI are the project participants. The method of treatment will largely involve the use of Cal Fire inmate crews to hand cut and pile burn the material. Physical work on the project has yet to take place.

Battalion 3

Ash Creek Wildlife Area (DFG):

This 3,180 acre wildlife habitat improvement project is split between the counties of Modoc and Lassen requiring two Negative Declarations. These have been developed but not submitted pending approval of the new Department of Fish and Game (DFG) manager. The project consists of burning the 3,000 acre tulle swamp at the west end of the 7,000 acre DFG wildlife area.



The town of Adin is east of the project and may be impacted by smoke. The swamp has not been burned since the 1960's and the community strongly supports this project.

Battalion 4

Currently no projects are planned. This battalion is primarily sagebrush steppe with eastside pine stands. Juniper encroachment is a major concern of all of the federal and private land managers. It is expected that once the new Vegetation Treatment Plan (VTP) EIR is approved in early 2009 there will be considerable interest in the VMP program.