

**AMADOR COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS  
COUNTY ADMINISTRATION CENTER  
810 Court Street  
Jackson, CA 95642**

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**REGULAR MEETING AGENDA**

**ADDENDUM**

**DATE:** March 8, 2016  
**TIME:** 9:00 a.m.  
**LOCATION:** County Administration Center, 810 Court Street, Jackson, CA

**The following item(s) is (are) hereby added to the Regular Agenda:**

***Addendum # 1:***

**US Forest Service Panther Fuels Reduction and Forest Health (Panther) Project:**  
Discussion and possible action relative to a scoping request for comments by the Amador Ranger District of the US Forest Service for the Panther Project.

March 8, 2016

Rick Hopson  
District Ranger  
Amador Ranger District  
26820 Silver Drive  
Pioneer, CA 95665  
[Comments-pacificsouthwest-eldorado-amador@fs.fed.us](mailto:Comments-pacificsouthwest-eldorado-amador@fs.fed.us)

Dear Mr. Hopson

The Amador County Board of Supervisors appreciates the opportunity to comment on the Panther Creek Project. The Board fully supports the Proposed Action and praises the Forest Service for proposing this project. The Board appreciates the proposed reduction in the use of herbicides and the reduction in roadside fuel breaks from that originally considered, as well as the application of skyline yarding. The Board recognizes that additional changes to the proposed action are inevitable as analyses are completed. To that end, the Board suggests the following issues be considered during such analyses.

#### Issue 1

Select The Overall Main Objective: Without prioritization, each analysis is subject to its own priority, leading to a project that may be less desirable for all objectives. We suggest the following prioritization:

Main Priority – Fire protection and safety. For many reasons, the primary purpose of this project is fire protection and safety. The Forest Service is and has invested extensive amounts of public funds to restore the forests lands burned in the Power Fire. The Panther Project overlaps some of the forest lands burned in the Power Fire and is a key area for protection of the Power Fire restoration from wildfires that originate around Highway 88 or from private lands. The Panther Project would also provide key protection to private forest lands, homes on those private forest lands, and the historic Ham Station from wildfires originating on National Forest System Lands. The Panther Creek Road transverses through the center of the Panther Project and is a main evacuation route for the nearby homes and recreationists. The project area is also home to three of the most productive owl PACs on the Forest. One was partially consumed in the Power Fire. Catastrophic fire through the area would be a significant loss to the owl populations. Finally, because of the Power Fire, this area is the last of the national forest lands in Amador County that are capable, available and suitable for the production of wood products. Therefore, it is the last area that can provide significant economic support to Amador communities.

Tiered to but subservient to this main objective are all other objectives.

#### Issue 2

Balance The Ecological, Social And Economic Objectives Within The Main objective: As changes to the proposed action are considered, the evaluation will include the balance of the secondary objectives listed, such wood fiber for job creation and public consumption, a landscape capable of producing a sustainable supply of natural resource materials, minimal adverse effects of wildfire on socio-economic conditions, improved forest health and road maintenance. We suggest consideration of the following during the analyses:

#### Ecological balance

As noted above, the project area is home to some of the most productive spotted owls on the forest. We suspect one consideration will be to eliminate the proposed mechanical harvest in the spotted owl home ranges. The consideration will likely be analyzed in the required alternative to the proposed action that is consistent with the interim spotted owl guidelines. As consistency is developed and measured, we ask the Forest Service consider the following facts.

- The Interim Recommendations qualify the application by stating, “This charge cannot be accomplished through simple measures such as increasing the amount or quality of suitable habitat set aside for the owl because of the risk that fire poses to habitat loss, particularly in dense-canopied forests associated with owl occupancy and productivity” (page 1). This statement appears particularly applicable for the Panther Project given the primary objective of fire protection and safety.
- The Interim Recommendations admit that “These conservation measures are not expected to be appropriate or ideal in every situation – their greatest value is in prompting managers to consider these additional protections, and possibly others, in the process of planning and implementation” (page 2). If they are not appropriate in some situations, at least some of the conservation measures are not appropriate for the Panther Project, given the primary purpose and the strategic location of the Panther Project,
- While the Interim Recommendations are focused on the short-term, the authors observed that “the long-term viability of the California spotted owl will depend on producing pine and mixed-conifer forests that are resilient to disturbances such as fire, tree-killing insects, and drought (page 4)”. The proposed action for the Panther Project is focused on creating just such a forest condition.
- Throughout the home range, the Interim Recommendations suggest the need to provide some level of heterogeneity by creating “fine-scale gaps (up to 2.0 acres) associated with shrubs, meadows, or low tree and canopy densities within a matrix of higher density forests”. It further recommends “developing variable density treatments to create heterogeneity at multiple scales to create spatial discontinuity in forest fuels and create openings for regeneration of pines and oaks” (page 12). This represents a change to the current forest-wide management direction (page 9). Again, the proposed action is designed to create the recommended level of heterogeneity.
- While the Interim Recommendations generally discourage mechanical treatments, the authors do include the use of mechanical thinning for fuel reduction treatments that are consistent with habitat enhancement (page 16). “In instances where mechanical thinning in designated habitat is warranted, we recommend that silvicultural prescriptions be informed by and follow to the degree possible the concepts in GTR-220 and 237...” (page 17). The proposed action is consistent with that recommendation.

If elimination of mechanical treatment is analyzed, we encourage the Forest Service to add an analysis of switching the tractor units to skyline units. We believe the impacts to owls from mechanical treatments, whatever they are purported to be, will be much less with skyline yarding. In summary, we believe if the analysis will incorporate these principles in the analyses, the resulting alternative will be identical to or nearly identical to the Proposed Action.

#### Social Balance

As stated above, we appreciate the significant reduction in herbicides from that originally considered by the Forest Service. We suspect that other commentors will request an analysis of no herbicide use. Anticipating that analysis, we encourage the Forest Service to consider the impact on forest economics, forest ecology and spotted owls in particular, of an otherwise early return of mechanical treatments.

#### Economic Balance

Few Forest Service projects of late include a design for positive net revenues. We believe this project has the potential to cover its costs and produce some revenue for other forest enhancements. GTR 220 provides such flexibility and the authors of that report acknowledge that application of GTR 220 should be balanced with economics. We encourage the Forest Service to design, to the degree possible, this project for positive net revenues.

#### Issue 3

Application of GTR 220: The Proposed Action incorporates the recommendations for GTR 220 but only for commercial harvest units. GTR 220 is not intended to be a commercial harvest prescription, but a landscape prescription. It can guide the location of commercial harvest units, but its application is landscape in scale. For example: GTR 220 suggests that in general, stem density and canopy cover would be highest in drainages and riparian areas and then decrease over the mid slope and become lowest near ridge tops. Ridge lines would have the highest percentage of pine in contrast to riparian areas. Midslope stand density and fir composition would increase on more northern aspects and flatter slope angles and become more open as slope steepens and on southwestern exposures. GTR 220 is as applicable on the ridge tops as it is mid-slope. Yet the Proposed Action prohibits commercial harvests and thereby the application of GTR 220 on ridge tops by permitting only the thinning of live conifers less than or equal to 10 inches dbh within the fuel break. Ridge tops are defined as 1000 feet on each side. We suggest the distance is entirely consistent with GTR 220 but it is impossible to transition from thick to thin forests over that kind of distance, and create pine stands without the possibility of commercial harvesting. We encourage the Forest Service to lift the ban on commercial harvests within the fuel breaks and consider creating a transition zone between the edges of the ridge top zone and the mid-slope zone.

#### Issue 4

Grazing: Grazing is suggested as a possible fuel break maintenance treatment, but only includes goats or sheep. Since this area is an active cattle grazing allotment, we suggest cattle be included in the definition of grazing.

Thank you again for proposing this action and for the opportunity to comment. We look forward to assisting in the development of this important project.

Sincerely,

John Plasse  
Chairman  
Amador County Board of Supervisors