

Regional Water Quality Control Board
North Coast Region

Executive Officer's Summary Report
Wednesday, August 12, 2015
Regional Water Board Office
Santa Rosa, California

- ITEM: 4
- SUBJECT: Information Item on Klamath National Forest (KNF) Westside Fire Recovery Project (Tom Williams & KNF staff)
- BOARD ACTION: This is an informational item only. No action will be taken by the North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board (Regional Water Board). During the public comment session of the May 7, 2015 Regional Water Board meeting, the Board heard numerous comments from the public expressing concern about this project. The Executive Officer determines whether a project is eligible for enrollment under Order No. R1-2010-0029, *Waiver of Waste Discharge Requirements For Nonpoint Source Discharges Related to Certain Federal Land Management Activities on National Forest System Lands in the North Coast Region* (USFS Waiver); however, in response to public comments, the Executive Officer offered to provide Board members and the public with follow-up information from staff and the USFS.
- BACKGROUND: The Westside Fire Recovery Project (Westside Project) was developed by the Klamath National Forest in response to 2014 wildfires on the Happy Camp/Oak Knoll and Salmon/Scott River Ranger Districts of the Klamath National Forest. The Westside Project encompasses 3 fire complexes that burned about 162,300 acres of KNF land. The project is designed to address needs for: 1) worker and public safety and access; 2) safe conditions for firefighters performing fire suppression for community protection; 3) a project that is economically viable, meeting project objectives and benefiting our local communities; and 4) restored and fire-resilient forested ecosystems.
- On October 8, 2014 the KNF released a public scoping letter requesting comments on development of a Westside Project Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). Regional Water Board staff provide general project scoping comments on December 5, 2014 (Supporting Document 1).

On March 5, 2015, the KNF released a draft EIS for public comment. The draft EIS contained 4 alternatives, each utilizing a mixture of salvage tree harvest, hazard tree treatments, hazardous fuels treatments, and reforestation to meet project goals. On April 27, 2015, Regional Water Board staff provided comments on the draft EIS (Supporting Document 2). For reasons outlined in the comment letter, Regional Water Board staff expressed concern that proposed activities with the potential to impact water quality under the preferred alternative (i.e. alternative 2) may not be mitigated to less than significant, and hence, the Westside Project would not be eligible for coverage under the USFS Waiver.

In response to comments on the draft EIS, KNF has modified its preferred alternative. Among the changes presented in the new preferred modified alternative 3, as compared to alternative 2 (Supporting Document 3), are 1) reductions in acres of fuel treatments in riparian reserves; 2) reduction in acres of roadside hazard tree removal and planting in riparian reserves; 3) reduction in miles of level 1, decommissioned, existing temporary, and new temporary roads within riparian reserves; 4) reductions in the number of road stream crossings; and 5) reduction in the number of landings in riparian reserves. The new alternative also proposed to increase the treatment of legacy sediment sites, in addition to those treated under the Burned Area Emergency Response, by adding 2 focused Watershed Condition Framework (WCF) watersheds and treating additional sites outside WCF watersheds but within the Westside Project area. Project Design Features (Supporting Document 4) were also modified, in general to provide additional water quality protection.

On July 21, 2015, KNF submitted a draft Waiver application package for the Westside Project (Supporting Document 5). As part of that package, KNF provide a cover letter (Supporting Document 6) describing how the new preferred alternative addresses Regional Water Board staff concerns raised during review of the draft EIS. Supporting information was also provided, including amendments to the Geologic Report, Fire Marking Guidelines, and revised Cumulative Watershed Effects analysis for the USLE, GEO and ERA models (Supporting Documents 7-12).

DISCUSSION:

Klamath National Forest staff will present the revised Westside Fire Recovery Project for Board member and public comment and questions.

**SUPPORTING
DOCUMENTS:**

1. Regional Water Board staff comments on KNF Westside Recovery Scoping
2. Regional Water Board staff comments on KNF Westside Recovery EIS Review
3. Proposed Changes for Treatments in Riparian Reserves between KNF Westside Recovery Alternative 2 and Alternative 3 modified
4. KNF Westside Recovery Project Design Features Draft
5. KNF Westside Recovery Waiver Application Draft
6. KNF Westside Recovery Draft Waiver Application Letter
7. KNF Westside Recovery Amendments to the Geology Report
8. Fire Marking Guidelines
9. Westside Cumulative Watershed Effects (CWE) for USLE Model
10. Westside CWE for GEO Model
11. Westside CWE for ERA Model
12. KNF Westside Recovery Legacy Site Inventory

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