

Solicitation of Public Comment

For the

VEGETATION TREATMENT PROGRAM

DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT

May 2011

Lead Agency:
California State Board of Forestry and Fire Protection
P.O. Box 944246
Sacramento, CA 94244-2460

TO: State Agencies, Federal Agencies, Local Government Agencies,
General Public

SUBJECT: An Additional Public Comment Opportunity for the Vegetation
Treatment Program Draft Environmental Impact Report.

LEAD AGENCY: California State Board of Forestry and Fire Protection
P.O. Box 944246
Sacramento, CA 94244-2460

CONTACT: George Gentry, Board Executive Officer, 916-653-8007

RESPONSE DATE: This is an additional opportunity for Public Comment to be provided to the Board to supplement the original information gathering process conducted by the Board in 2005 and 2006. Comments would be appreciated at the earliest time possible, but will be accepted no later than **June 30, 2011**.

PREVIOUS NOTICES OF PREPARATION BY DEPARTMENT OF FORESTRY AND FIRE PROTECTION AND THE BOARD OF FORESTRY AND FIRE PROTECTION:

On August 12, 2005, the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (Cal Fire) filed a Notice of Preparation (NOP) for the Vegetation Management Program Draft Environmental Impact Report (SCH #2005082054). Cal Fire conducted scoping for the proposed draft EIR, including public scoping meetings held in Redding, Sacramento, Fresno, and Riverside during August 2005. In 2006 the Department and the Board of Forestry and Fire Protection determined that it is more appropriate for the Board to be the lead agency for the proposed program. This determination is based on the Board's role in developing the regulations and policies that the Department implements through its various vegetation treatment programs.

At their regular meeting on March 8, 2006, the Board acted to accept the Lead Agency role for this EIR (now referred to as the Vegetation Treatment Program in order to avoid confusion with the Department's existing Vegetation Management Program). The Board issued a second Notice of Preparation and provided a public comment period that ended April 19, 2006. All scoping comments received by the Department and Board in response to its earlier NOPs will be incorporated by the Board as a part of the scoping for the Vegetation Treatment Program EIR proposed herein. The Board has entered into a Contract with the Department for the preparation of the Draft Vegetation Treatment Program EIR.

PROGRAM DEFINED:

This document uses the term "Vegetation Treatment Program" to identify the proposed project under consideration by the Board of Forestry and Fire Protection (Board). Use of the project identifier "Vegetation Treatment Program" in this context refers to multiple activities and programs carried out by the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (Department) that manipulate vegetation in order to achieve the goals and objectives described herein. In addition, the Program includes any new regulations the Board may choose to consider in furtherance of the Programs goals and objectives and

to meet the intent of recent legislation (SB 1084). These new regulations would be promulgated via the Board's usual rule-making process.

The reader is cautioned to not confuse the project identifier "Vegetation Treatment Program" with Departments existing Vegetation Management Program, or VMP. The scope of this project includes VMP as well other Department programs that may rely on the proposed EIR for evaluating individual vegetation treatment projects under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). These several programs are described later in this document.

PROGRAM OVERVIEW:

Background:¹

In the early 1980s, the California State Legislature recognized that there had been an increase in the number of uncontrolled fires on wildlands of the state resulting in destruction of important natural resources, loss of recreation opportunities, and an unacceptable level of hazards to public safety. The California State Legislature subsequently passed Senate Bill (SB) 1704 (Keene) which was signed into law by the Governor in 1980 and became effective in July 1981. The bill enabled the state to enter into a contract for prescribed burning with the owner or any other person who has legal control of any property which is included within any land classified by the state as "wildland".

In SB 1704, the California State Legislature established a program of fuel management to achieve the prevention of high-intensity wildland fires. The program allows Department to enter into contracts with landowners for prescribed burning to prevent high-intensity wildland fires, and manage watersheds, rangeland, vegetation, forests, and wildlife habitat. Under SB 1704, the state may assume up to 90% of the costs of conducting a project, assume liability, and suppress escaped fires.

The Department, in cooperation with federal, state, and county resource agencies and private landowners initiated the Chaparral Management Program (CMP) in 1981 to reduce the risk of wildfire and avoid negative impacts on humans, property, and the environment. The Department completed a programmatic environmental impact report (EIR) on the Chaparral Management Program in 1981. The intent of that program EIR was to implement SB 1704 and identify environmental effects, provide mitigation for potential adverse effects that could occur from management activities, and provide an environmental checklist for project-level actions. The CMP programmatic EIR focused on assessing potential impacts of conducting prescribed burning on shrub lands. The CMP later became known as the Vegetation Management Program (VMP).

The California State Board of Forestry & Fire Protection (BOF) and the California State Fish and Game Commission (FGC) initiated a review of the Departments VMP following the major wildfires which occurred in Southern California in fall 1993. Subsequently, a working group was formed in spring 1994 to recommend to the BOF and FGC ways to improve the VMP to provide additional fire protection while meeting the concerns and needs of other agencies and the general public. These recommendations included:

¹ Reference: Jones & Stokes. 2000. EIR Handbook for vegetation management program.

- expand the program and EIR to include all vegetation fuel types in California,
- expand the EIR to include all fuel management techniques that are currently available,
- include a more detailed discussion of the no action alternative in the EIR,
- modify the project-level environmental checklist,
- expand authorization for VMP projects from state responsibility areas to all hazardous areas.

In 1996, the Board and the Department issued a new California Fire Plan,² which placed an increased emphasis on “prefire” projects such as vegetation treatment activities, to help reduce wildland fuels and thereby reduce the costs and losses associated with large, damaging wildfires. The direction of the 1996 Fire Plan led to CDF increasing its emphasis on prefire management activities.

In June of 2000, CDF completed and certified a programmatic EIR for the department's Vegetation Management Program. In January of 2002, the Superior Court of San Francisco County ordered that the EIR be decertified for failure to adequately address the potential environmental impacts of the program. Herbicide use in association with VMP projects was cited specifically (e.g., herbicides used as either a precursor step or a follow-up maintenance step to a VMP project). Where appropriate, information developed as a part of this EIR may be incorporated into the proposed Vegetation Treatment Program EIR.

In 2005, the Legislature passed and the Governor signed into law SB 1084 (Kehoe), which broadened the range of vegetation treatment practices specifically enumerated in the Public Resources Code, added a definition of “hazardous fuel reduction,” and made other changes to the major statutory provisions guiding the Department’s vegetation treatment authorities. See Public Resources Code sections 4461-4494.

Vegetation Treatment Methods:

There are several vegetation treatment methods that the Department and partner landowners use to achieve desired project goals. These are described briefly below.

Mechanical and hand treatments may be applied to forest or brush land. Treatment methods include hand or machine thinning (felling) of trees, pruning, hand or machine removal of brush, piling by hand or machine in preparation for burning, pruning of the lower branches from trees, and mechanical chipping of woody vegetation. In some cases, vegetation materials may be removed from the site for disposal or utilization (e.g., trees utilized for lumber production, wood chips used for mulch or bio-energy) where this activity is economically viable. However, there are cases where such commercial activity is prohibited by law or Department policy.

Both over story and understory vegetation may be treated. The vegetation treated includes brush and small or large trees that are thinned to specified densities. Fuel

² California Fire Plan: A Framework for Minimizing Costs and Losses from Wildland Fires. March 1996. California State Board of Forestry and California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, Sacramento. 104p.

structure and vertical continuity are modified by pruning lower limbs on leave trees, and by removing under-story brush with the objective of preventing devastating crown fires that may kill 100% of standing vegetation and severely threaten homes, communities, wildlife, and water quality.

Hand or machine removal and disposal of vegetation are the most common methods employed due to the close proximity of these projects to populated areas. This is accomplished with hand tools including pruning saws and powered chainsaws. Disposal of vegetation is accomplished by hand piling for burning, or the use of mobile chippers that are fed by hand. Chips are typically disposed of by spreading over the treated area.

For some projects more sophisticated equipment may be used such as mobile masticators, which are pieces of heavy equipment that reduce woody vegetation to small chunks that are scattered across the landscape for decomposition. Other mechanical methods may include the use of machines that fall and bunch small diameter trees and brush that are typically disposed of by chipping or burning. In these instances the material would be moved to landings, chipped, and transported to primary processing facilities such as bio-energy, or solid wood products plants that use chipped material.

Prescribed fire may be applied to forest, brush, or grass lands. Treatment methods include broadcast burning over a large area and burning of piled vegetation materials. Prescribed fire, particularly broadcast burning, is applied according to detailed plans carefully prepared by professional prescribed fire specialists. Burn plans are implemented only when specific weather and fuels moisture conditions exist and when specified staff and equipment resources (e.g., crews, fire engines, bulldozers) are available. Control lines may be put in place around the areas to be burned prior to treatment in order to ensure containment of the prescribed fire to the desired area.

Herbivory is the use of domestic livestock (e.g., cattle, sheep, goats) to reduce vegetation levels on forest, brush, or grass lands through grazing and browsing. Typically, animals are confined to the area to be treated through the use of permanent or temporary fencing. The animals are kept in a given area until the desired fuel reduction is achieved. Depending on the location and the kinds of animals involved, a herder may remain with the animals at all times, or will periodically visit the site to check on the animals' well being, to ensure that the animals have not escaped, and to determine whether fuel reduction goals have been met. Other biological control techniques in addition to herbivory may have application for vegetation treatment. Appropriate techniques that are identified will be addressed in the EIR.

Chemical treatment involves the use of pesticides, in particular herbicides to kill brush or tree species (whether found on forest or brush lands) in place. In limited cases, herbicides can be used as an initial treatment, changing the flammability of targeted vegetation and allowing for a broader prescription window, followed by prescribed fire to complete the fuel reduction. More typically, herbicides are used as a follow-up treatment to control brush species that are trying to regrow following earlier mechanical, hand, or prescribed fire treatments. Application of pesticides is typically done by a Qualified Applicator licensed with the California Department of Pesticide Regulation. All treatments are done under a prescription developed by a Pest Control Advisor also licensed by the California Department of Pesticide Regulation. Pesticides such as Sproax® may be used to treat stumps of trees removed as a part of vegetation treatments to inhibit infections of annosus root disease.

In some instances, more than one method may be applied to a given area. For example, an area may first be treated with a mechanical treatment to make an initial fuels reduction, followed by a prescribed fire treatment.

Programs or Actions That May Use This EIR Include:

- The Board may rely upon the analysis contained in this EIR in considering the environmental impacts associated with adopting new regulations implementing the provisions of new legislation (SB 1084) and updating the existing regulations for consistency with other related environmental laws.
- Vegetation Management Program (VMP) – A program by which private or public landowners and agencies agree to cooperate with the Department on vegetation management projects (historically these have been primarily prescribed burning) using Department resources [Public Resources Code (PRC) sections 4461-4495].
- PreFire Management Program – A program by which the Department assists with planning and projects to achieve priority objectives in State and Unit Fire Plans developed under the Board’s California Fire Plan framework. Such projects are frequently funded by Federal grants (e.g., Wildland Urban Interface grants). (March 1996 California Fire Plan; PRC § 4130, 4201-4204, 4290)
- California Forest Improvement Program (CFIP) – A program by which private landowners receive technical and financial assistance from the Department in performing a variety of resource management improvement practices including management of wildland fuel accumulation. Practices carried out under this program involving the treatment of vegetation may continue to rely on the analysis contained in the CFIP Program EIR or, where appropriate, rely on the environmental analysis contained in the Vegetation Treatment Program EIR. (PRC § 4790-4799.05)
- Proposition 40 Program – A program by which Proposition 40 grant funding is used for projects that protect watershed values at risk from wild land fire (PRC § 30945).
- Range Improvement Program – A program by which the Department may conduct range improvement studies and issue a permit to private landowners for conducting prescribed burning operations on their own land with the intent of improving rangeland quality (PRC § 4491-4495).

Further documentation of these programs may be found in the documents cited in Table 1.

Other Potential Uses of the EIR:

In addition to the Department other state and local public agencies may use this programmatic EIR in cases where their proposed projects are on non-federal lands, within the scope of the treatments, environmental analysis, prescribed mitigations, and findings. Projects which are joint projects with federal partners may also rely on this EIR to achieve environmental compliance on those portion(s) of the project impacting non-federal lands. These agencies include but are not limited to state agencies, local fire districts, local city and county governments, Resource Conservation Districts, and municipal utility districts. Each public agency would be required to make a finding that the potential environmental impacts of their project were covered under the Board’s final EIR and provide public notice prior to project implementation.

Table 1. Documentation of Cal Fire Vegetation Treatment Programs.

| Program | Relevant Documentation |
|--|--|
| Vegetation Management Program | Vegetation Management Program Handbook and Field Guide. June 16, 2001. Department of Forestry and Fire Protection. Sacramento. 135p. Chaparral Management Program Final Environmental Impact Report. May 18, 1981. California Department of Forestry, Sacramento. |
| Prefire –Post fire Management Program | California Fire Plan: A Framework for Minimizing Costs and Losses from Wildland Fires. March 1996. California State Board of Forestry and California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, Sacramento. 104p. California Fire Plan: 2010 Strategic Fire Plan for California, June, 2010; Pages 12 – 21 (Goals and Objectives) Individual CDF Unit Fire Management Plans available over the Internet: www.fire.ca.gov/FireEmergencyResponse/FirePlan/units_countyfireplan.asp |
| California Forest Improvement Program | California Forest Improvement Program Operations Manual. August 2005. California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, Sacramento. Final Environmental Impact Report for Proposed Administrative Regulations for the California Forest Improvement Program to be Adopted by the Director of Forestry and Approved by the Board of Forestry. June 1979. California Department of Forestry, Sacramento. California Forest Improvement Program Environmental Impact Report: Supplement to the Final EIR; State Clearinghouse #79050318. June 1990. Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, Sacramento |
| Proposition 40 Fuels Reduction Program | Procedural Guide for Community Assistance Grant Fuel Reduction Projects Funded by Proposition 40; Sierra Nevada Forest Land and Fuels Management; California Clean Water, Clean Air, Safe Neighborhood Parks, and Coastal Protection Act of 2002. January 2006. California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, Sacramento. 40p. |

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION:

The Board of Forestry and Fire Protection will be the Lead Agency and will prepare a Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) for Vegetation Treatment activities. The DEIR will be prepared in accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act (PRC § 21000 *et seq.*) The lead agency needs to know the views of your agency as to the scope and content of the DEIR relevant to your agency’s responsibilities in connection with the proposed project. Your agency may need to use the DEIR when considering permits or other approvals for future projects carried out under this programmatic EIR.

The lead agency also needs to know the views of members of interested stakeholders on the scope and content of the DEIR. Stakeholders with lands or who can identify public values are encouraged to offer information that will assist this document in addressing the full scope of reasonably foreseeable impacts and feasible alternatives and mitigations that will assure fuels treatment projects have net environmental benefits.

The Vegetation Treatment Program proposes to treat vegetation in order to attain the desired effect by project proponents. The desired effect is the increased resilience of forest and wildland to the impacts of wildfire and the maintenance of ecosystem health.

(better wording?) Vegetation may be treated by hand, mechanical equipment, prescribed fire, prescribed herbivory, and chemicals (pesticides). Combinations of these treatments may occur in order to achieve the desired objective.

Material resources for performing these tasks may be procured through agreements among private landowners, local, State and Federal government entities, and nonprofit organizations. Funding for performing the work may be provided through cost share agreements between cooperating parties, from grants from Federal and State sources, or from other sources (PRC 4475.5).

PROGRAM LOCATION:

The proposed program would take place on State Responsibility Area (SRA) lands (Public Resources Code § 4125 *et seq.*) where wildland fuels occur, including lands administered by the California Departments of Parks and Recreation and Fish and Game or other State Agencies (ie. DWR); on Local Responsibility Area (LRA) lands with wildland fuels; and on federal lands where CDF is responsible for fire protection or wildfires from those federal lands can be a threat to SRA lands. County fire agencies in Marin, Santa Barbara, Ventura, Los Angeles, Orange, and Kern Counties are under contract to CDF to treat vegetation to reduce fuel hazards on SRA lands and as lead agencies may choose to rely on this program document to carry out their projects. Generally, the Vegetation Treatment Program is not intended for federal lands where CDF is not responsible for wildland fire protection unless wildfire occurring on those lands pose an identifiable threat to SRA lands.

ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING:

Vegetation:

Treatment of vegetation under the proposed program would include a wide range of vegetation types. Analysis conducted during creation of the Draft EIR will define and describe these types in detail using the California Wildlife Habitat Relationships Classification.³ The Department anticipates that this analysis will result in a listing and description of primary vegetation types where this program will function. A precise list to be included in the Draft PEIR is not possible at this time; however, the following list is provided to describe the diversity of types which may be treated under the proposed program:

- Annual and perennial grassland
- Chaparral and shrub lands of various classifications
- Coastal scrub
- Sagebrush
- Montane hardwood-conifer and montane hardwood forests
- Mixed conifer
- Douglas-fir

³ Mayer, K.E. and W.F. Laudenslayer, Jr. (editors). 1988. A guide to wildlife habitats of California. California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, Sacramento. 166p.

Jeffery pine, ponderosa pine and eastside pine
Redwood
Closed-cone/pine/cypress
Pinyon-juniper
Juniper
Oak Woodland
Eucalyptus

Watersheds and Water Quality:

Watersheds encompass a variety of environmental elements including soils and underlying geology, water quality, runoff quantity and timing, fisheries, and the overall condition of the watershed as determined by previous events and resource management practices. Projects that manipulate vegetation have the potential to impact soil erosion, land stability, fisheries, water quality, water storage and conveyance facilities, and domestic water supplies.

Wildlife:

This program will treat a variety of habitats associated with vegetation types as described above, and others that may be identified with additional analysis. Potential impacts to wildlife must be analyzed and where appropriate mitigation developed. These impacts may include a reduction of habitat quality for certain individuals and species, or the enhancement of habitat quality that results in a positive response in the number of individuals and species that make use of the habitat.

Air Quality:

Manipulation of vegetation, especially through the use of prescribed fire, has the potential to impact air quality during completion of individual projects under the program. Projects that potentially impact air quality are under the jurisdiction of the many local air quality management districts spread throughout the State, and the State Air Resources Board. The proposed Draft EIR will be developed through consultation with these air regulation authorities.

Environmental elements associated with air quality would include suspended particulate matter, ozone formation, general visibility, and safety hazards associated with smoke causing visibility problems on highways. By reducing the occurrence of large catastrophic wildfires and removing wildland vegetation for use as biofuels, vegetation treatment projects have the potential to provide carbon sequestration benefits.

Cultural Resources:

Cultural resources may take the form of both prehistoric and historic. Prehistoric resources are in the form of artifacts and other evidence of habitation by Native Americans that predate the settlement of California by Europeans. Historical resources include artifacts and the remnants of structures normally associated with the settlement of California by non Native Americans.

The act of conducting vegetation management projects has the potential of impacting cultural resources by disturbance of the site. Some methods used for vegetation

management have the potential to disturb former habitation sites, destroy artifacts, and alter sites to the extent that their significance may be affected.

Vegetation treatment projects also could impact sites where Native Americans collect plants that are culturally significant.

Cultural resources research and surveys are typically conducted for vegetation treatment projects. Mitigation practices and avoidance are routinely applied for protection of cultural resources when conducting projects.

Visual Resources:

Manipulating vegetation under the proposed program may impact visual quality by reducing the effectiveness of visual screens, the creation of open space and exposed ground, the creation of blackened ground, and in general alter the horizontal and vertical continuity of vegetation. The potential for adverse impacts resulting from treatments may be determined by the type of treatment used, the degree to which the site is disturbed, its location in relation to the viewing public, and the manner by which vegetation changes over time following treatment.

Positive impacts are created depending on the perspective of the viewing public in regard to the creation of open space and the reduction of dense closed stands of vegetation. Vegetation treatments can reduce fire intensity and crown fire potential, thus reducing visual resource impacts from wildland fires that occur on treated areas.

Mitigation of Potential Impacts:

Existing documents for guiding the implementation of the Departments various vegetation treatment programs, as identified in Table 1, above, already identify measures that may be used to avoid or mitigate potential adverse environmental impacts from proposed vegetation treatment projects. The Vegetation Treatment Program EIR being proposed here is not intended to replace any of the environmental documents identified in Table 1, but it may serve to supplement them.

The Vegetation Treatment Program EIR will identify and analyze potential environmental impacts of the above program elements, consider impact mitigation measures already in use, and as needed propose new mitigation measures to prevent significant adverse environmental impacts.

PROGRAM GOALS AND OBJECTIVES:

The overall Program goal is to modify vegetation through prescribed management practices to reduce costs and losses (material and human) from wildland fire, and to enhance health and resilience of range, forest, and watershed lands. Specific objectives include:

- Modification of fire behavior by changing the intensity, flame length, rate of spread, and spot fire potential of wildland fuels.
- Reducing the size of large catastrophic fires and their resulting economic impacts.
- Wildlife habitat enhancement and protection.
- Restore periodic vegetation fires to plant communities that depend on fire for

- removing excess, decadent vegetation and maintenance of specie composition.
- Improve air quality by reducing the occurrence of large, uncontrolled vegetation fires that release massive amounts of air pollutants when burning under extreme fire weather conditions.
 - Protect range, forest, and watershed values from severe environmental damage such as soil surface erosion, slope failure, and mass wasting by spreading the occurrence of vegetation treatments over separate watershed units, and treating these units sequentially in a manner that reduces the total sediment load that would occur as a result of wild fires within the watershed as a whole.
 - Control invasive and noxious weeds that replace more desirable plant species on range and forest lands, and enhance range land productivity for domestic livestock and wildlife species.
 - Potentially contribute to increased carbon sequestration through reduction in the occurrence of large wildland fires and utilization of wildland vegetation as biofuels.

EIR CERTIFICATION:

As required by regulation, the Board of Forestry and Fire Protection is the lead agency for this project as implemented by the Department. CEQA requires the preparation and circulation of a draft EIR. The Board may certify the final EIR following the completion of the public comment period and addressing all comments received.

PROGRAMMATIC EIRs AND FUTURE PROJECTS:

The program establishes management goals and direction for future individual projects. Future activities carried out under the program may be both numerous and varied. The draft EIR will analyze the potential impacts that may occur as a result of implementing the program, but does not purport to fully analyze all future site-specific projects that may occur. The level of specificity of the analysis in an EIR is dependent upon the level of specificity found in the project description (CCR §15146). As such, an adequate EIR will focus on the impacts that may arise given the program's general direction as well as the types of projects that may reasonably be expected to occur.

The Board is proposing to develop a programmatic EIR, which considers a series of potential future projects that are geographically similar, carried out under the same authority, and having roughly the same environmental effects which can be mitigated in similar ways (CCR§15168). In addition, the Board may consider the development of new regulations to further the goals and objectives of the Program and to meet the intent of recent legislation (SB 1084). A programmatic EIR has the advantage of providing the opportunity for a more exhaustive examination of environmental effects, both individual and cumulative; consideration of more, and broader, project alternatives; and the development of program-wide mitigation measures that would not be practical in a project-by-project analysis.

Programmatic EIRs generally contain a lesser level of detail than would be found at the individual project level. Programmatic EIRs are less determinate, subject to many variables over time (e.g., levels of funding, policy and administration changes, environmental factors, etc.), whereas a site-specific project can be described with a greater degree of certainty. For example, any of several forms of vegetation treatments may occur repeatedly, in numerous vegetation types, and in various climatic and topographic conditions under this program. The program provides guidance to project

proponents in carrying out these treatments, yet provides little in the way of project specific operational details, leaving that to occur prior to individual project implementation.

Following certification of a final EIR, CDF and others may rely upon the approved EIR in carrying out the various vegetation treatments. Some projects, where the specific activities proposed are within the scope of the final EIR, may proceed without any further environmental analysis. Projects that include activities that were not covered, were only partially covered, or were covered at a programmatic level of specificity in this EIR will require the completion of an Initial Study and preparation of an EIR or Negative Declaration, or where appropriate found to be categorically exempt. All future projects would be reviewed for consistency with the final EIR and the need for further CEQA analysis prior to approval and implementation.

Subsequent actions will be examined in light of this EIR to determine whether:

- other laws require further analysis (e.g., Forest Practice Regulations for Timber Harvesting Plans),
- the action will be consistent with the final EIR,
- the action requires mitigation measures identified in the EIR,
- new significant environmental effects might be involved,
- new mitigation measures might be necessary, and
- an additional environmental document must be prepared.

To the extent that a subsequent action qualifies as a “project” under CEQA (CCR §15378) and is not otherwise exempt, compliance with CEQA will be necessary. As described in Table 2, this compliance can be accomplished with any one of the documents and/or findings listed in order of increasing procedural complexity.

Table 2. Potential Additional CEQA Actions to Implement a Vegetation Treatment Project under the Vegetation Treatment Program (VTP).

| Project Circumstances | Required Documentation/Finding |
|--|--|
| Proposed project is within scope of the VTP EIR: | |
| • fully within scope | No further CEQA analysis required |
| • but <u>minor</u> changes to EIR are needed | Prepare an Addendum to this EIR |
| • but involves commercial timber operations | Prepare a Timber Harvesting Plan that tiers to the EIR |
| Proposed project is outside the scope of the EIR: | |
| • and the activity <u>will not</u> cause a significant effect | Prepare a Negative Declaration that tiers to the EIR |
| • or the activity <u>will</u> cause a significant effect | Prepare a Mitigated Negative Declaration or focused EIR that tiers to this EIR |
| EIR is found to not cover future projects: | |
| • and <u>minor</u> changes to the EIR are required | Prepare a Supplemental EIR |
| • and <u>major</u> changes to the EIR are required | Prepare a Subsequent EIR |
| • or a new EIR is required | Prepare a new Program EIR |

Where additional CEQA documents are prepared for subsequent actions, this Program EIR can be referenced or otherwise utilized to streamline the review process in the following ways:

- To provide the basis in an Initial Study for determining whether the later activity may have any significant effects;
- Incorporate by reference regional influences, secondary effects, cumulative impacts, broad alternatives, and other factors that apply to the program as a whole;
- Focus any later EIR on new effects that had not been considered before (CCR 15168(d)).

When a law other than CEQA requires public notice for CDF to carry out or approve a subsequent activity that relies on this Program EIR for CEQA compliance, the notice for the activity shall include a statement that:

- The activity is within the scope of the program approved earlier; and
- The Program EIR adequately describes the activity for the purposes of CEQA (CCR §15168(e)).

PROGRAM CHECKLIST:

At the time of EIR certification the Board will adopt a Programmatic Checklist (CCR § 15168(c)(4)) to be utilized in implementing future individual projects. The checklist is an important component of the programmatic EIR process. It ensures that the individual project is within the scope of the analysis in the EIR and that mitigation measures identified in the EIR are in fact carried out in subsequent projects.

HOW WILL THE PROPOSED ACTION BE ACCOMPLISHED:

The proposed action shall be accomplished by employing a variety of techniques for the manipulation of vegetation. This action may employ the use of State and/or other public or private resources. Possible methods for manipulating vegetation may include treatments by hand, machinery, chemical applications, biological controls such as prescribed herbivory, prescribed fire, and combinations of the above techniques. Through these actions fuel breaks, defensible space, and landscape treatment of wildland vegetation will occur.

ALTERNATIVES, INCLUDING THE PROPOSED PROJECT:

In accordance with Section 15126 of the CEQA Guidelines, a draft EIR must analyze a range of reasonable alternatives to the proposed project that could feasibly attain the objectives of the project. The CEQA Guidelines provide the following direction for analysis of the alternatives.

- Describe a range of reasonable and feasible alternatives to the project, or to the location of the project.
- Evaluate the comparative merits of the alternatives.
- If there is a specific proposed project, explain why other alternatives were

- rejected in favor of the proposal.
- Focus on alternatives capable of avoiding or substantially lessening significant adverse environmental effects or reducing them to a level of less than significant, even if these alternatives would impede to some degree the attainment of the project objectives, or would be more costly.
- If an alternative would cause one or more significant effects in addition to those that would be caused by the project as proposed, the significant effects of the alternative shall be discussed, but in less detail than the significant effects of the project as proposed.

In addition to analyzing the proposed project the Board will analyze a No Project Alternative.

The Board is soliciting the public's and other agencies' suggestions for a range of alternatives to be analyzed in this DEIR.

POTENTIALLY SIGNIFICANT PROJECT EFFECTS:

A lead agency, is required to identify the potential impacts that may result from implementing the proposed project [CCR §15082(a)(1)(C)] in order that responsible agencies may make reasonable response and offer feasible mitigation. After many years of carrying out similar projects CDF and the Board anticipate that this program may cause potentially significant impacts to the following resources:

- Air Quality
- Biological Resources - including state and federally listed wildlife and plant species
- Cultural – Historical and prehistoric
- Soils
- Vegetation
- Noise
- Aesthetics
- Water Quality

POTENTIAL BENEFICIAL IMPACTS:

- Reduced risk of catastrophic fire and its impacts to human life and property.
- Improved air quality through the reduction in number and size of wildland fires.
- Protection and enhancement of wildlife habitat.
- Protection of watershed values, including water quality and aquatic habitat, by reducing the number and size of wildland fires.
- Range improvement through the control of noxious and invasive plant species.
- Forest improvement through reduction of dense understory vegetation.
- Reduced costs and losses associated with large, damaging wildfires.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

The comment period for the Notice of Preparation (NOP) ended in May 2006. There has

been a significant delay in the ability to complete this draft Vegetation Treatment Programmatic Environmental Impact Report (VTPEIR). Due to that delay the Board is providing the public a time period to provide any additional thoughts or updated information on the program that may have occurred since the closure of the comment period for the NOP. This new comment period will end at **5 P.M. on June 30, 2011**. All comments must be submitted to the name and address below, by the close of the comment period at 5 P.M. on June 30, 2011.

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Email: board.public.comments@fire.ca.gov

In addition to the Solicitation of Comments the Board will provide the public two Webinars during April and May of 2011 where they may also submit comments or information on the VTPEIR. These are yet to be scheduled, but dates and information for participation will be noticed on the Board of Forestry and Fire Protection website (<http://www.bof.fire.ca.gov/>) early April 2011.

Additional information about the CEQA process is available at:
<http://ceres.ca.gov/ceqa/>