



State of California -The Natural Resources Agency
DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME
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EDMUND G. BROWN JR., Governor
CHARLTON H. BONHAM, Director



Notice of Intent to use Environmental Assessment/ Finding of No Significant Impact in lieu of a Mitigated Negative Declaration for the Sierra Nevada Bighorn Sheep Recovery Program

In lieu of preparing its own Mitigated Negative Declaration, the Department of Fish and Game (CDFG), Inland Deserts Region, acting as lead agency under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), intends to use the Environmental Assessment (EA)/Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI), prepared by the Inyo National Forest, for a project that authorizes CDFG to land a helicopter within wilderness areas to capture endangered Sierra Nevada bighorn sheep for population monitoring, research, and translocations.

Helicopter-supported capture of bighorn sheep with net-guns would be conducted in wilderness areas on the Inyo National Forest to facilitate meeting the goals of the Recovery Plan for Sierra Nevada Bighorn Sheep (USFWS, 2007). All bighorn captured would be fitted with radio-transmitters (VHF) and Geographic Positioning System (GPS) collars. Data collected from these collared bighorn would directly aid in implementing actions to increase the number, expand the range, and enable the recovery of endangered Sierra Nevada bighorn sheep.

Under CEQA, state agencies are encouraged to use a FONSI prepared pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) rather than preparing a new CEQA document, when the FONSI, prepared before a Mitigated Negative Declaration or EIR, would otherwise be completed for the project; and the FONSI complies with CEQA Guidelines.

CEQA Section 15225(a) states that "where the federal agency circulated the EIS or finding of no significant impact for public review as broadly as state or local law may require and gave notice meeting the standards in Section 15072(a) or 15087(a), the lead agency under CEQA may use the federal document in the place of an EIR or negative declaration without recirculating the federal document for public review. One review and comment period is enough. Prior to using the federal document in this situation, the lead agency shall give notice that it will use the federal document in the place of an EIR or negative declaration and that it believes that the federal document meets the requirement of CEQA."

Public scoping was initiated for the proposal to land helicopters in wilderness to capture Sierra Nevada bighorn sheep on the Inyo National Forest in April 2011. A press release was distributed to area media outlets, and letters with project information requesting public input were mailed to 27 individuals, agencies and organizations, and to 19 tribes or tribal representatives. This letter was also submitted to the State Clearinghouse.

The EA prepared by the Inyo National Forest was available for public review starting October 11, 2011. The 30-day comment period ended on November 11, 2011. A legal notice was published in the Inyo Register (newspaper of record) on October 11, 2011. A Notice of Completion & Environmental Document Transmittal was submitted to the State Clearinghouse on October 11, 2011 (SCH#: 2011101029) with 15 printed copies of the EA.

A press release was sent to media outlets and posted to the Inyo National Forest's internet website. Letters were sent to approximately 20 individuals, interest groups, businesses, and agencies. Twenty letters were also submitted to local tribes or tribal representatives. An electronic version of the EA was broadly available to the public through a posting on the Inyo National Forest's website and comments could be received via the website. The printed version of the EA was available at the Inyo National Forest Supervisor's Office in Bishop, CA, or available through mail upon request.

This Notice is provided by the Inland Deserts Region of CDFG, lead agency under CEQA. CDFG intends to use the EA and FONSI in lieu of preparing its own Mitigated Negative Declaration for the project. The EA and FONSI include a description of the Proposed Action and evaluate potential for adverse environmental impacts. The EA concludes the Proposed Action would have no significant impacts to the environment. CDFG believes that the federal document meets the requirements of CEQA.

Digital versions of the EA and FONSI are available at the Department of Fish and Game website at www.dfg.ca.gov/news/pubnotice. Should you have any questions, please contact Dr. Alexandra Few, by email at AFew@dfg.ca.gov or by mail to:

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Attn: Dr. Alexandra Few

DATE: 9/14/12

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DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME