



Proposal: Large Mammal Advisory Committee

The primary intent of the prospectus is to demonstrate in a brief document (less than five pages) that a thoughtful approach to resource inventory, monitoring, or investigation has, or is being developed consistent with Department standards and priorities.

Mt Hough Wildlife Habitat Improvement Burn

Proposed Start and Completion Date: 10/1/2012 to 11/30/2014. The environmental document is complete. Burn planning and construction of the fire lines are expected to be complete by 9/30/2012. The burn is planned for Oct or Nov 2012. We have left two additional years in the proposed completion date period to allow for contingencies in case the burn window of fall 2012, or even fall 2013, do not allow completion of the burn as planned.

Executive Summary

Revitalize upland game bird and mule deer summer and winter range habitat for the Sloat Deer Herd through prescribed fire within a large brush field landscape created by wildfire over 50 years ago. Burning will allow for improved deer access, forage availability, renewed plant vigor, nutrition and browse palatability.

Statement of Need

The project is located in the Northeast Sierra Deer Assessment Unit (DAU), which has been identified as a top priority area to attempt to reverse the decline of deer populations through habitat-based efforts. Such efforts include using fire in forested ranges to enhance deer habitat on summer ranges and targeting shrub-dominated winter ranges. Project occurs within Deer Zone X6A. The Sloat Deer herd plan states fire is primary method of habitat improvement and forage regeneration (pages 29-31) and the Management Unit goal states that the Sloat deer herd range must be enhanced (page 41). As part of the Plumas National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan, habitat improvement for deer is part of a long-term management goal (page 4-34) with habitat manipulation for deer habitat improvement and implementation of cooperative DFG deer herd plans a standard and guideline directive.

Introduction

The project area lies on the southwest aspect of Mt. Hough above American Valley and the town of Quincy, California in Plumas County. This area incurred wildfire over 50 years ago and the brush has provided deer habitat for both winter and summer range. Over time this brush field has aged, closed in occupying 100% ground cover, and is now supporting decadent and impenetrable senescent shrubs that are not providing for maximum deer use, either as forage or as cover. Brush species are those that typically make up the species composition of the California Wildlife Habitat Relationships (CWHR) vegetation type designated as Montane Chaparral: preferred summer forage species are the highly palatable deer brush (*Ceanothus integerrimus*), whitethorn (*C. cordulatus*), snowbrush (*C. velutinus*) and bitter cherry (*Prunus emarginata*) and preferred winter forage species silktassel (*Garryea sp.*), wedgeleaf (*C. cuneatus*), and manzanitas (*Arctostaphylos sp.*). Black oak (*Quercus kelloggi*), is interspersed throughout. All of these species are known to be fire adapted and respond favorably to burning with basal

sprouting; wedgeleaf *Ceanothus* is considered a non-sprouter but responds well to hotter burns. Past fires (prescribed burns as well as wildfire) on the Plumas NF, including the project area, have resulted in extensive sprout of the above species and subsequent high use of the basal sprout by browsing deer, especially the silktassel on winter range and the deer brush on summer range. The proposed project area is not within any livestock grazing allotment so all forage produced by the project would be available to deer. Burning would be accomplished by Forest Service Fire crews on the ground through direct ignition along prepared fire lines as well as from the air using the helitorch as an ignition source within the perimeter of the brush field. Project objectives would be to create a mosaic within a 730 acre block composed of 80% burned at moderate severity and 20% burned at light or no burn severity. The project is located in the Northeast Sierra Deer Assessment Unit (DAU), which has been identified as a top priority area to attempt to reverse the decline of deer populations through habitat-based efforts. Such efforts include using fire in forested ranges to enhance deer habitat on summer ranges and targeting shrub-dominated winter ranges. This proposed burn project targets both. The burn would only be completed during one year, but we have planned for contingency burns in the event that we do not have sufficient burn and smoke windows in the fall of 2012. Currently the burn is planned for completion in fall of 2012, but we may not complete until the fall of 2013, or latest by fall of 2014.

Objectives

- The project will regenerate mature, dense brush field into younger age class of early successional montane chaparral through broadcast prescribed fire, resulting in a landscape mosaic of age classes of brush species, making available highly palatable and nutritious sprouts.

Methods

- The project area lies on the southwest aspect of Mt. Hough above American Valley and the town of Quincy, California in Plumas County.
- The dense brush and fuel moisture conditions required to burn the brush at a high enough intensity to regenerate the brush will require helicopter torch ignition.
- The burn would be accomplished in one period, either 1 or 2 days.

Products (and estimated dates of completion)

- Project objectives would be to create a mosaic within a 730 acre block composed of 80% burned at moderate severity and 20% burned at light or no burn severity. Expect to burn a 500 acre area.
- Final project report would be prepared within 30 days of the burn. This report will be provided to Resource Assessment Program and to the CDFG regional offices and will address each of the stated goals.

Collaborators

- CDFG project contact: Terri Weist is local contact from CDFG, North Central Region; (530) 836-0889.
- Mule Deer Foundation has committed \$10,000 to project.
- California Deer Association Elizabeth Keller, 408-464-0366, proposal submitted
- Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation Mike Ford contact, proposal submitted
- US Forest Service contact name: Colin Dillingham, 530-283-7687
- cdillingham@fs.fed.us

Program Planning

- In the event that the burn is not accomplished in the fall of 2012, an annual meeting or conference call would be conducted as well as written project updates would be provided by the US Forest Service to cooperators.

Other Resources requested from CDFG

- None

Issues to be Resolved

- Funding commitments outside of CDFG (RMEF and CDA)

Required Products

- Annual Progress Reports – annual status report through Sept 30 of current year by Oct 31 of each year.
- Final Report – 30 days after completion of burn

Personnel Requirements and commitments from CDFG

- Request \$10,000 to help fund helitorch operation and helicopter costs from either Upland Game or Large Mammal funding source.
- No personnel required.

Budget Detail - per year budget detail by activity/task and broken down by:

- Funding requested from multiple partners.
- \$10,000 committed by Mule Deer Foundation
- No commitment from RMEF or CDA to date.
- \$60,000 committed by US Forest Service

Tasks	Start Date	Finish Date
Develop Burn Plan, construct fire line	4/1/2012	9/30/2012
Complete Burn	10/1/2012	11/30/2014

Project Funding Breakdown	
Item of Expense (salary & wages, equipment, supplies, etc)	Amount
Helicopter Costs (high estimate) – see attached breakdown for details	\$27,800
Burn and Aviation Safety Plan	\$2408
Line Construction and burn in buffer	\$39,860
Helitorch Operation and Fire Mop-up	\$30,979
NEPA Analysis on Project (complete)	NA
Total	\$101,047.00