

3 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES

3.1 APPROACH TO THE ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS

This Program Timberland Environmental Impact Report (PTEIR) evaluates and discloses the environmental impacts associated with the proposed program, in accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) (Public Resources Code [PRC] Section 21000 and subsequent sections of the CCR), the State CEQA Guidelines (California Code of Regulation [CCR], Title 14, Chapter 3, Section 15000 and subsequent sections of the CCR [14 CCR Section 15000 et seq.]), Z'berg-Nejedly Forest Practice Act of 1973 (FPA; PRC Section 4511 et seq.) and the California Forest Practice Rules (CFPR; 14 CCR Section 1092.01). Sections 3.2 through 3.15 of this PTEIR present a discussion of regulatory background, existing environmental conditions, environmental impacts associated with implementation of later treatment activities under the proposed program, mitigation measures to reduce the level of impact, and residual level of significance (i.e., after implementation of mitigation, including impacts that would remain significant and unavoidable after implementation of all feasible mitigation measures). Issues evaluated in these sections consist of the environmental topics identified for review in the Notice of Preparation (NOP) prepared for the project (see Appendix A of this PTEIR). Chapter 5, "Cumulative Impacts," of this PTEIR presents an analysis of the program's impacts considered together with other past, present, and probable future projects producing related impacts, as required by Section 15130 of the State CEQA Guidelines. Chapter 6, "Alternatives," presents a reasonable range of alternatives and evaluates the environmental effects of those alternatives relative to the proposed project, as required by Section 15126.6 of the State CEQA Guidelines. Chapter 7, "Other Sections Required by Statute," includes an analysis of the program's growth-inducing impacts, as required by Section 21100(b)(5) of CEQA.

3.1.1 Scope of the Analysis

As described in Chapter 2, "Program Description," the proposed program would be implemented within the 17,490-acre program area. This PTEIR employs a programmatic approach to evaluation because the specific site-specific characteristics of individual later treatment activities are not known at this time. As such, the level of detail of the environmental impact analysis is also programmatic in that it addresses the full range of potential environmental effects of the planned activities that would implement the proposed program as specifically and comprehensively as possible. Consistent with the adopted guidance for preparation of Program Timberland EIRs (Board and CAL FIRE 2014), the programmatic assessment of each resource identifies standard mitigations which may be applied when a particular resource is encountered, and environmental impact conclusions are broadly and comprehensively applied to types of treatments and treatment activities that would occur. Where site specific information is available, such as the known locations of cultural resources or sensitive species, that information is incorporated into the analysis to minimize the amount of analysis that is required to determine whether each later activity is within the scope of this PTEIR.

As described above, this approach is consistent with the adopted guidance for preparation of Program Timberland EIRs (Board and CAL FIRE 2014) and State CEQA Guidelines provisions for a Program EIR, as described in Section 15168.

3.1.2 Impact Analysis Approach

This section explains the approach for conducting environmental impact analyses and determining the significance of environmental effects resulting from implementation of the proposed program. In doing so, it describes how the Standard Project Requirements (SPRs) are considered in the impact analysis and when it is appropriate to identify mitigation measures for impacts resulting from treatment activities.

Refer to the Section 1.7, "Standard Terminology," in Chapter 1 for definitions of these terms used in the impact analyses.

ROLE OF STANDARD PROJECT REQUIREMENTS AND CALIFORNIA FOREST PRACTICE RULES

Section 2.5 of Chapter 2, "Program Description," introduces the SPRs for the Tahoe PTEIR, which are listed in Appendix B. The SPRs will be incorporated by the project proponents into all later treatment activities seeking to qualify for coverage under the Tahoe PTEIR. SPRs would be implemented for all treatments to the extent they are applicable, analogous to standard operating procedures, best management practices, or resource protection measures. Where an SPR does not apply to all treatment activities, the applicable treatment activities and treatment types are identified within each SPR. SPRs are intended to avoid and minimize environmental impacts and, in some cases, promote compliance with applicable laws and regulations. For example, a prescribed burn may cause smoke in the vicinity of a public roadway, raising a potential traffic safety effect. Because SPR TRAN-1, Implement Traffic Control during Treatments, requires preparation of a Traffic Management Plan for prescribed burns, including temporary signage, traffic controls along public roadways, and flag personnel for traffic management, its implementation would avoid or minimize significant impacts to public safety.

The CFPR include operational standards that apply to all timber operations for commercial purposes as defined by the FPA in PRC Section 4527(a). A PTEIR may propose alternate practices (14 CCR Section 897[d]) if it demonstrates that those alternate standards would provide equal or better protection of the affected resources. However, CAL FIRE and the TFFT have elected to not propose alternate standards because they are unnecessary for achieving the objectives of the program. Therefore, the existing operational standards of the CFPRs apply to later activities implemented under the PTEIR. These CFPR operational standards are listed in Appendix B. This PTEIR combines the SPRs and the applicable CFPRs into one consistent set of requirements for all later activities implemented under this PTEIR (Appendix B).

The environmental analysis in this PTEIR assumes that each later activity would implement the required SPRs and CFPRs, as required. The environmental analysis identifies residual impacts, or the environmental effects that would occur from treatment activities after implementation of SPRs and CFPRs. These residual impacts are analyzed against the identified threshold of significance accounting for the SPR's and CFPR's environmental protective effects.

LAKE TAHOE WEST MODELING

This PTEIR incorporates modeling and analysis prepared for other forest planning initiatives, where applicable. The Lake Tahoe West (LTW) Restoration Partnership includes scientists, land managers, multiple federal and State agencies, and organizations representing business, recreation, and conservation. Through its science team, the LTW partnership has modeled several forest management scenarios for the Lake Tahoe Basin, which includes the PTEIR program area, with the LANDIS-II model. The LANDIS-II forest landscape model simulates future forests across the entire Lake Tahoe Basin for the next 100 years. The model simulates change as a function of growth and succession, as they are influenced by range of disturbances (e.g., fire, insects), forest management, and land use changes. Climate and climate change affect processes throughout the model. Outputs from the LANDIS-II model have been incorporated into related finer-scale modeling that predicts the effects of representative individual fires, and the combined effects on wildlife habitat, air quality, and water quality and quantity. The Tahoe PTEIR incorporates models and model results from the LTW partnership, as described in applicable resources sections.

3.1.3 Analysis Contents

Sections 3.2 through 3.15 of this PTEIR present a discussion of regulatory background, existing conditions, environmental impacts associated with implementation of vegetation treatments, SPRs, mitigation measures to reduce the level of impact, and residual level of significance (i.e., after application of mitigation, including impacts that would remain significant and unavoidable after application of all feasible mitigation measures). The environmental resource topics evaluated in Chapter 3 are consistent with those identified in the Notice of Preparation (NOP) prepared for this PTEIR (see Appendix C) and consider relevant comments provided on by agencies, organizations, and the public during NOP review.

Sections 3.2 through 3.15 of this PTEIR each include the following components.

Introduction: Each section includes a brief introduction that describes the topics evaluated within the section, any related topics that are not evaluated in detail because they would not be affected by the proposed program, and a summary of any relevant comments provided during the scoping period.

Regulatory Setting: This subsection presents information on the laws, regulations, plans, and policies that relate to the environmental resource being discussed. Regulations originating from the federal, State, and local levels are each discussed as appropriate.

Environmental Setting: This subsection presents the existing environmental conditions in the program area and in the surrounding area as appropriate, in accordance with State CEQA Guidelines Section 15125. The discussions of the environmental setting focus on information relevant to the issue under evaluation. The extent of the environmental setting area evaluated differs among resources, depending on the locations where impacts would be expected.

Environmental Impacts and Mitigation Measures: This subsection presents thresholds of significance and discusses potentially significant effects of implementing the proposed program on the existing environment, including the environment beyond the project boundaries, in accordance with State CEQA Guidelines Section 15126.2. The methodology for impact analysis is described, including technical studies or modeling upon which the analyses rely. The thresholds of significance are defined. Project impacts and mitigation measures are numbered sequentially in each subsection (Impact 3.2-1, Impact 3.2-2, Impact 3.2-3, etc.). A summary impact statement precedes a more detailed discussion of the environmental impact. The discussion includes the analysis, rationale, and substantial evidence upon which conclusions are drawn. The determination of level of significance of the impact is defined in bold text. Significance determinations are made taking into account the influence of applicable SPRs. A "less-than-significant" impact is one that would not result in a substantial adverse change in the physical environment. A "potentially significant" impact or "significant" impact is one that would result in a substantial adverse change in the physical environment; both are treated the same under CEQA in terms of procedural requirements and the need to identify feasible mitigation. Mitigation measures are identified, as feasible, to avoid, minimize, rectify, reduce, or compensate for significant or potentially significant impacts, in accordance with the State CEQA Guidelines Section 15126.4. Unless otherwise noted, the mitigation measures presented are recommended in the PTEIR for consideration by the State to adopt as conditions of approval.

Where an existing law, regulation, or permit specifies mandatory and prescriptive actions about how to fulfill the regulatory requirement as part of the project definition, leaving little discretion in its implementation, and would avoid an impact or maintain it at a less-than-significant level, the environmental protection afforded by the regulation is considered before determining impact significance. Where existing laws or regulations specify a mandatory permit process for future projects, performance standards without prescriptive actions to accomplish them, or other requirements that allow substantial discretion in how they are accomplished, or have a substantial compensatory component, the level of significance is determined before applying the influence of the regulatory requirements. In this circumstance, the impact would be potentially significant or significant, and the regulatory requirements would be included as a mitigation measure.

This subsection also describes whether mitigation measures would reduce project impacts to less-than-significant levels. Significant-and-unavoidable impacts are identified as appropriate in accordance with State CEQA Guidelines Section 15126.2(c). Significant and-unavoidable impacts are also summarized in Chapter 6, "Other CEQA Sections."

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