



FEMA

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT
Kittitas County Wildfire Fuels Reduction Project
FEMA-PDMC-PJ-10-WA-2013-002

Kittitas County has applied for fiscal year 2013 funding under the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Pre-Disaster Mitigation (PDM) grant program for a wildfire hazard mitigation project. The grant program is administered by FEMA, through the WA Emergency Management Division, to fund pre-disaster mitigation planning and projects that primarily address natural hazards. The Kittitas County project includes vegetative fuels reduction activities around residential structures in the Hidden Valley, Pine Loch Sun, and Sky Meadows communities; which the County has determined are at extreme risk for wildfire hazards.

The project areas comprise approximately 3,351 acres that contain 1,245 lots, and approximately 764 of the lots have structures. The Proposed Action would reduce fuels through vegetation removal and creation of defensible space around up to 300 structures distributed within the target communities. The County expects at least 20 percent of property owners within the communities will request participation. Lot sizes vary and could be up to 10 acres. The Proposed Action consists of the following components which will be implemented by the Kittitas County Conservation District (KCCD):

- Assess the wildfire threat to the participating property.
- Develop a vegetative fuels treatment plan for the property.
- Implement the plan and create defensible space around the structures and property. This would include removal of ladder fuels and other biomass using chainsaws, chippers, brush mowers, and masticators. Limited ground disturbance would occur during fuels reduction. Vegetative debris would be chipped onsite or piled.
- Following initial treatment, property owners would sign a 10-year maintenance contract with KCCD and conduct annual vegetation maintenance surrounding the structures. The KCCD will monitor maintenance activities.

The defensible space would be created consistent with Firewise Program guidelines; sponsored by the U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, and National Association of State Foresters; which include the following:

- Creation of a defensible space zone with at least a 30-foot radius and out to 200 feet around a structure's foundation. The radius may be expanded to provide additional defensible space around structures on steep slopes.
- Planting grass and small islands of fire-resistant plants in the defensible space.
- Trimming trees in the defensible space so the lowest branches are 6 to 10 feet above the ground.

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- Space plants in the defensible space so the plants or plant canopies do not touch; use wider spacing along slopes.
- Plant fire- or drought-resistant plants in the defensible space.
- Avoid removing all vegetation in the defensible space to alleviate the potential for increased soil erosion, especially on the sloped areas.

These guidelines will be augmented by the County's fuels reduction requirements as follows:

- Dead and down material up to 10 inches in diameter will be chipped and the chips scattered over the work site. Some of the material may be left for home firewood.
- The limbs of dead and down trees greater than 10 inches in diameter will be removed and chipped and the remaining trunk will be left in place unless several trees have created a piled concentration. In this case, the remaining tree trunks will be separated by at least 10 feet from any other logs and left on site.
- All vegetation stumps heights will be cut no higher than 2 inches above the ground. All cuts will be a flat or parallel cut to the ground.
- Standing dead trees with red needles still attached shall be felled and treated using the dead and down prescription as required in item 1 and 2 above.
- Contractors will not cut any green trees from the premises that are greater than 8-inch diameter at breast height without prior approval from the landowner.
- Trees 8 inches and greater in diameter (DBH) will be pruned (live and dead limbs) up to a height of 15 feet. Limbs will be pruned when branches are larger than 2 inches diameter (regardless of length) or greater than 2 feet in length (regardless of diameter). No pruning will be done to a height greater than 50% of total tree height. The cut limbs will be chipped on site.
- Trees less than 8 inches DBH will be spaced leaving 2 feet - 5 feet between crowns. Live and dead limbs will be pruned up to a height of 15 feet. Limbs will be pruned when branches are larger than 2 inches diameter (regardless of length) or greater than 2 feet in length (regardless of diameter). No pruning will be done to a height greater than 50% of total tree height. The cut limbs and stems will be chipped on site. Trees < 3 feet high do not require pruning.
- Non-coniferous brush will be cut and chipped/mowed on site unless islands are pre designated or agreed to by the landowner

In accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969 and FEMA's implementing regulations, FEMA prepared an Environmental Assessment (EA) to identify and evaluate potential environmental effects resulting from the alternatives presented in the EA and to determine whether to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) or a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI). Alternatives evaluated in the EA include: 1) No Action, and 2) the Proposed Action to reduce wildfire damage risks through creation of defensible space and fuels reduction around residential properties. Additional alternative methods to reduce wildfire risks were considered but not carried forth and are described in the EA. The Draft EA was made available for public review and comment on November 11, 2014; no substantive comments were received. The Proposed Action is the preferred alternative because the No Action alternative would not address the purpose and need stated in the EA and no other practical alternatives were identified.

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FINDINGS

Based upon the PDM grant application, EA, and Attachment A and in accordance with 1) FEMA's regulations in 44 CFR Part 10 for environmental consideration, including Executive Orders (EOs) addressing floodplains (EO 11988), wetlands (EO 11990), and environmental justice (EO 12898); and 2) the Council of Environmental Quality's regulations in 40 CFR Chapter 5 for implementing NEPA, FEMA determined the proposed project will not significantly affect the quality of the natural and human environment. As a result of this FONSI, an EIS will not be prepared (44 CFR Part 10.8) and the project, as described in the grant application, attached EA, and following conditions may proceed.

APPROVAL



12-18-14

Mark G. Eberlein
Regional Environmental Officer
FEMA Region 10

Date

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Attachment A:

PERMITTING, PROJECT CONDITIONS, AND MITIGATION MEASURES

Kittitas County shall implement the Proposed Action as outlined above and comply with the following project conditions and mitigation measures:

- To minimize potential impacts to surface waters, no vegetation management activities would be allowed within 5 feet of a stream's Ordinary High Water Mark (OHWM); and within 15 feet of the OHWM, limbing and thinning would not be allowed on trees greater than 7 inches dbh that overhang the streams.
- Fuels reduction activities in wetlands in the target communities will be avoided. If wetlands can not be avoided, additional analysis of proposed activities and the wetland on the project site will be required to minimize impacts.
- Removal of trees 8 inches in diameter at breast height or greater would be prohibited within 100 feet of the of water bodies with known presence of Endangered Species Act-listed fish species including: Cle Elum Lake, Teanaway River, and Swauk Creek.
- To avoid potential noise-related disturbance to northern spotted owls, project activities would be prohibited between March 1 and July 31 within suitable nesting/roosting habitat for northern spotted owls as delineated in the Biological Assessment Figures 7-9 (9/25/2014).
- To minimize potential impacts to migratory nesting birds (see EA Appendix for bird list), vegetation removal should occur from late summer to mid-winter, outside of the typical migratory bird-nesting season (March through August). If removal activities must take place during the nesting season, the County shall ensure that a qualified professional conducts a breeding bird survey on the property before removal activities begin in order to avoid disturbance or "take" as defined by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA). Surveys should be coordinated with the US Fish and Wildlife Service to determine if a permit under MBTA is required or if other measures can be taken to address impacts to migratory birds or active nests. This information must be documented on the project site assessment/treatment plan.
- To minimize the potential for impacts to known archeological resources within the target communities (see EA), the County will be required determine if a participating property has or is close to a known site. Site locations will be provided separately and characterized as avoidance areas, details of sites must remain confidential. Fuels reduction activities must be avoided within the perimeter of the recorded site location plus a 250 feet buffer. This information must be documented on the project site assessment/treatment plan.
- The County is responsible for selecting, implementing, monitoring, and maintaining Best Management Practices to minimize ground disturbance, control erosion and sedimentation, reduce spills and pollution, and provide habitat protection. To the maximum extent practicable, vegetation removal activities beyond the immediate defensible space around a structure that involve use of mechanized equipment should be conducted in dry soil conditions and equipment staged on existing roads or previously disturbed areas.

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- In the event that cultural resources or human remains are discovered during project activities, and in compliance with State and Federal laws protecting cultural resources and human remains, including Section 106 of the NHPA; work in the immediate vicinity will cease, the area will be secured, and the SHPO and FEMA will be notified to evaluate the discovery.
- Any change to the approved scope of work will require re-evaluation for compliance with NEPA and other laws and EOs, before implementation.