



FEMA

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

ELKINS LAKE HAZARDOUS FUELS REDUCTION PROJECT HUNTSVILLE, WALKER COUNTY, TEXAS HMGP-DR-1791-TX PROJECT #197

BACKGROUND

In accordance with 44 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) for the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), Subpart B, Agency Implementing Procedures, Part 10.9, an Environmental Assessment (EA) has been prepared pursuant to Section 102 of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, as implemented by the regulations promulgated by the President's Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ; 40 CFR Parts 1500-1508). The purpose of the proposed project is to reduce the threat of wildland fire to the Elkins Lake neighborhood in Huntsville, Walker County, TX. This EA informed FEMA's decision on whether to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) or a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI).

Walker County has applied for Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP) funding under HMGP-DR-1791-TX Project #197. Through HMGP, FEMA provides grants to states and local governments to implement long-term hazard mitigation measures, including wildfire mitigation. The purpose of HMGP is to reduce the loss of life and property due to natural disasters and to enable mitigation measures to be implemented during the immediate recovery from a disaster. HMGP is authorized under Section 404 of the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act.

Two project alternatives were considered in this EA: 1) No Action; and 2) Hazardous Fuels Reduction (Proposed Action). Under the No Action alternative, Walker County would do nothing to prevent wildland fire risk to the Elkins Lake neighborhood. Vegetation encroachment at the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) would continue and would not be abated. The Proposed Action includes the reduction of wildfire fuel sources on a 7.91 acre tract of land (from Latitude: 30.66481; Longitude: -95.52194 to Latitude: 30.66680; Longitude: -95.51549) that lies to the south of Augusta Drive, one of two access/egress routes to the community. Fuels reduction would include the removal of ladder fuels and mulching and scattering of all small trees and shrubs less than 4 inches in diameter. Living trees that are left standing would be pruned up to 6 feet in height to reduce the potential of fire moving from the ground into the canopy of the remaining trees. This would be accomplished by raising the crown height of the tree and removing shrubbery from directly under larger trees. The pruning of live and dead branches would

not exceed 25 percent of the overall crown of the tree to avoid damage and injury to the tree. Vegetation removal and modification would be accomplished with rubber track mulching equipment and through hand clearing in order to reduce soil disturbance.

Standing dead trees would be cut off at the stump and root balls will remain intact and will not be removed. The removed vegetation would be mulched or chipped on site. Some of the very large tree logs already on the ground would be left as wildlife habitat where appropriate. For each acre in the project area, three non-hazardous standing dead trees greater than 12 inches in diameter would be left for wildlife habitat. The 7.91 acre project site will be mowed with a tractor and bush hog on an annual basis in order to keep the project area free from the build-up of ladder fuels and to sustain the fuels reduction that will be achieved by the Proposed Action.

A public notice was posted in the Huntsville Item on September 30, 2010 and the Draft EA was made available for viewing at Huntsville Fire Stations #1 and #2 and on the FEMA website for a 15-day public comment period. No comments were received from the public during the 15-day comment period.

FINDINGS

The Proposed Action as described in the EA will not impact wetlands, floodplains, threatened and endangered species or critical habitat, cultural resources, or minority and low-income populations. During vegetation management activities, short-term impacts to water resources and air quality are anticipated. Positive impacts to public health and safety are expected. No long-term adverse impacts are anticipated. All adverse impacts require conditions to minimize and mitigate impacts to the proposed project site and surrounding areas.

CONDITIONS

The following conditions must be met as part of this project. Failure to comply with these conditions may jeopardize the receipt of federal funding.

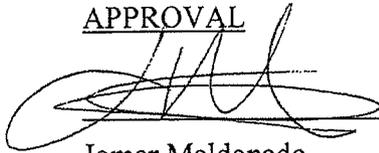
1. The applicant is required to obtain and comply with all local, state, and federal permits, approvals and requirements prior to initiating work on this project.
2. The applicant must ensure that best management practices are implemented to prevent erosion and sedimentation of nearby or adjacent waterways during the proposed vegetation management activities. Equipment must be stored and staged to prevent erosion and sedimentation to ensure that waters are not adversely impacted per the CWA and Executive Order 11990.

3. In the event that archeological deposits, including any Native American pottery, stone tools, bones, or human remains, are uncovered, the project shall be halted and the applicant shall stop all work immediately in the vicinity of the discovery and take reasonable measures to avoid or minimize harm to the finds. All archeological findings will be secured and access to the sensitive area restricted. The applicant will inform FEMA immediately and FEMA will consult with the SHPO. Work in sensitive areas cannot resume until consultation is completed and appropriate measures have been taken to ensure that the project is in compliance with the NHPA.
4. To reduce noise levels, vegetation management activities will take place during normal business hours. Equipment and machinery used at the proposed project site will meet all local, state, and federal noise regulations.
5. All construction activities will be performed using qualified personnel trained in the proper use of the appropriate equipment, including all appropriate safety precautions. Additionally, all activities will be conducted in a safe manner in accordance with the standards specified in the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) regulations. The appropriate signage and barriers shall be in place prior to construction activities to alert pedestrians and motorists of project activities.
6. Changes, additions, and/or supplements to the approved scope of work which alter the existing use and function of the structure, including additional work not funded by FEMA but performed substantially at the same time, will require re-submission of the application prior to construction to FEMA for re-evaluation under the National Environmental Policy Act.

CONCLUSIONS

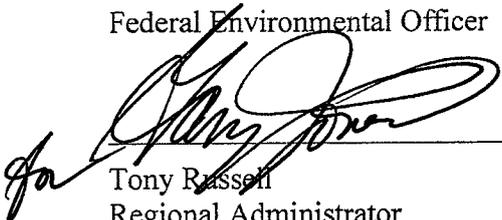
Based on the findings of the EA, coordination with the appropriate agencies, comments from the public, and adherence to the project conditions set forth in this FONSI, FEMA has determined that the proposed project qualifies as a major Federal action that will not significantly affect the quality of the natural and human environment, nor does it have the potential for significant cumulative effects. As a result of this FONSI, an EIS will not be prepared (44 CFR Part 10.9) and the proposed project as described in the attached EA may proceed.

APPROVAL



Jomar Maldonado
Federal Environmental Officer

Date 12/9/2010



Tony Russell
Regional Administrator
FEMA Region VI

Date 12-12-10