



FEMA

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

Mill Creek Defensible Space Project

Walla Walla County

FEMA-PDMC-PJ-10-WA-2010-006

Walla Walla County has applied for fiscal year 2010 funding under the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Pre-Disaster Mitigation-Competitive (PDM-C) grant program for a hazard mitigation project in the Mill Creek watershed. The grant program is administered by FEMA to fund pre-disaster mitigation planning and projects that primarily address natural hazards. The Mill Creek Defensible Space Project would include wildfire mitigation around residential structures in the Mill Creek watershed in southeastern Walla Walla County.

The Proposed Action would reduce fuels through vegetation removal on approximately 187 residential structures in the Mill Creek watershed area. Homeowners and landowners with homes or cabins along portions of the following roads would be invited to participate in the project: Mill Creek Road, Blue Creek Road, Upper Dry Creek Road/Biscuit Ridge Road, Scott Road, Seamen Road, and Lewis Peak Road. Areas targeted for vegetation removal include a 30-foot radius around the main residential structure. The 30-foot radius around the targeted homes would collectively total about 28 acres.

Local firefighters from Fire District #4 and a Walla Walla County Emergency Management Department staff member would make an individual onsite fire threat assessment of each property in the project area using the U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, and the National Association of State Foresters' Firewise guidelines. The assessment would include structural vulnerability, access route capability, water sources, and fuel loads. The County would provide technical assistance to residents to identify how defensible space could be created and maintained. If vegetation management is recommended as a result of the assessment, contract crews would perform these activities, including vegetation removal, thinning, trimming, and in limited cases planting grasses by hand. Vegetation management activities would not occur within the County's established buffers for critical areas protection.

Residents would conduct annual maintenance of the vegetation surrounding the structures. The County and Rural Fire District No. 4 would monitor properties every 2 years to ensure proper maintenance.

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In accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969 and FEMA's implementing regulations, FEMA prepared a Draft 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. 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 May 25, 2011; 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 there are no other practical alternatives were identified. Thus, the proposed action is selected.

FINDINGS

Based upon the PDM grant application, Final 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 and attached EA, may proceed.

APPROVAL



Mark G. Eberlein
Regional Environmental Officer
FEMA Region 10

6-28-11

Date

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Attachment A:

PERMITTING, PROJECT CONDITIONS, AND MITIGATION MEASURES

Walla Walla County shall comply with the following project conditions and mitigation measures:

- The County is responsible for securing all applicable local, state, and federal permitting before site work and complying with conditions therein.
- Project activities will not occur within the County's established stream buffers:
 - Mill Creek and Blue Creek: 100-foot buffer
 - Dry Creek: 75-foot buffer
 - Spring Creek: 50-foot buffer
 - Little Blue Creek: 35-foot buffer
- In order to minimize potential impacts to nesting birds, vegetation removal should occur in late summer and early fall, outside of the typical migratory bird-nesting season, which ranges from March through August. If removal activities must take place during the nesting season, the applicant shall ensure that a qualified professional conducts a breeding bird survey before removal activities begin in order to avoid disturbance or "take" as defined by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act.
- The County is responsible for selecting, implementing, monitoring, and maintaining Best Management Practices to control erosion and sedimentation, reduce spills and pollution, and provide habitat protection.
- In the event that potentially significant cultural resources are discovered during project activities, and in compliance with State and Federal laws protecting cultural resources, 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.
- Any change to the approved scope of work will require re-evaluation for compliance with NEPA and other laws and EOs, before implementation.