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STATEWIDE ADMINISTRATIVE PROCESSES FOR NPS MANAGEMENT PRACTICES—VERIFYING IMPLEMENTATION

Introduction

One of the objectives of this Water Quality Management Plan is “to enhance Forest Service performance as a water quality management agency, and increase and improve its responsibility, transparency and accountability in its relationships with the Water Boards.” This chapter describes Forest Service administrative processes that are intended to meet this objective by providing formal and systematic processes to ensure that measures for water-quality protection and improvement are incorporated into all activities on National Forest System lands in California.

General

Responsibility, transparency, and accountability depend on Water Board and public access to Forest Service information and decisions and opportunities to exchange information and viewpoints with diverse stakeholders. The WQMP includes the following steps to enhance overall information exchange and accountability:

1. Beginning in 2011, the Forest Service nationally will track the condition of all 6th field hydrologic units on NFS lands using protocols developed by the Washington Office headquarters staff at intervals of approximately 3 years. Watersheds will be classified into 1 of 3 condition classes representing high, moderate, and low geomorphic, hydrologic, and biotic integrity in relation to natural potential conditions. Changes in conditions will be related to Forest Service resource management actions and compared to assigned targets as a basis for funding allocations, and may be considered in performance appraisals of USFS staff.
2. The Forest Service will create a publically-accessible internet site where information related to water-quality protection and improvement and current activities on NFS lands that may affect water quality will be posted or made available through links. Documents available on this site will include our current WQMP, including all Best Management Practices, the current Users Guide for the Best Management Practices Evaluation Program, the Stream Condition Inventory protocol, and Regional and National Forest BMPEP reports. Links will be provided to relevant supporting information, including Forest Service directives (FSM, FSH) and plans (Northwest Forest Plan, Sierra Nevada Framework Planning Amendment, individual National Forest Land and Resource Management Plans and Schedules of Proposed Actions (SOPAs), current wildfire and prescribed fire information (InciWeb), current weather (NWS), and streamflow (USGS).

3. Interagency (Forest Service-Water Board) training sessions will be held annually on BMP development, implementation, and monitoring. Each annual training session will focus on specific issues and topics of current importance, and will cover any changes made to BMPs or evaluation protocols in the preceding year. Training will generally be held in late fall or early winter. Forest Service watershed, timber, fire and fuels, engineering, range, and recreation staff will be encouraged to attend, and Water Board staff will be invited.
4. Interagency coordination meetings will be held annually between each National Forest and its Regional Board(s). The purpose of these meetings is to prioritize restoration of legacy sites, discuss monitoring results, and develop recommendations for changes to BMPs based on monitoring results.
5. An interagency coordination meeting will be held annually between the Forest Service Regional Office and the State Board. The purpose of these meetings is to present and discuss monitoring results, approve or reject recommended changes to BMPs, and evaluate progress on restoration of legacy sites.
6. A public stakeholder group will be established and will meet annually with the Forest Service Regional Office and the State Board to discuss any issues of concern related to water quality on NFS lands. This stakeholder group will participate in field reviews of selected USFS activities on an annual basis.

National Environmental Policy Act Procedures

Under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), all ground-disturbing activities on NFS lands are required to be analyzed for environmental impacts prior to implementation. All NEPA analyses result in a documented decision by the appropriate Forest Service line officer, usually a district ranger or forest supervisor, and all NEPA decisions incorporate site-specific Best Management Practices for protection of water quality. Most low-impact activities that do not involve “extraordinary circumstances” such as impacts to floodplains, wetlands, municipal watersheds, cultural resources, or listed species, may be categorically excluded from the requirement to fully analyze environmental impacts in an Environmental Assessment or Environmental Impact Statement. Decisions to use categorical exclusions are documented with Decision Memos signed by line officers. Environmental Assessments normally require 2 or more alternatives and are used for activities that may involve “extraordinary circumstances” but pose a low risk of significant adverse environmental impacts. A decision to select an alternative with an Environmental Assessment is documented in a Decision Notice and accompanied by a Finding of No Significant Impact. Activities that may include significant adverse effects require an Environmental Impact Statement, which includes a broader range of alternatives. A decision to select an alternative in

an Environmental Impact Statement is documented in a Record of Decision. Although an alternative selected in a Record of Decision may include adverse environmental effects, all alternatives must comply with the federal Clean Water Act, the Porter-Cologne Act, and all other applicable laws.

The Forest Service will incorporate the following practices for NEPA analyses and decisions:

1. National Forest Schedules of Proposed Actions will be updated via the internet quarterly, in March, June, September, and December each year.
2. Qualifications and experience of Forest Service specialists that author NEPA analyses will be described in analysis documents.
3. NEPA analyses for timber, fuels, vegetation management, engineering, and recreation activities that include ground-disturbing activities within riparian zones will include a complete inventory of controllable sediment discharge sources and other legacy sites that may affect water quality within project boundaries and along appurtenant Forest Service roads. NEPA analyses for rangeland grazing allotments will include inventories of legacy sites related to previous livestock grazing. NEPA analyses for watershed restoration projects will not include an inventory of legacy sites other than the sites addressed by the proposed restoration.
4. Erosion control plans will be included as part of the project record for all EISs that involve activities with a high risk of adverse impacts to water quality, including ground-disturbing activities within riparian zones and road construction.
5. Maps will be provided at scales of 1:24,000 or larger when needed to show details or proposed alternatives.

Project Implementation

Projects on NFS lands are implemented through contracts of various types, permits, and using Forest Service (force account) staff. Protection of water quality depends on a complete and accurate transfer of the site-specific BMPs described in NEPA decision documents into contracts, permits, and force-account job specifications. The procedures described below are specific to the various types of project documents used by the Forest Service.

Timber Sales Contracts

Site-specific BMPs will be included in timber sales contracts using standard regional C-clauses that include "fill in the blank" tables to allow development of site-specific measures similar to standard regional clause R5 C6.6. If necessary, special non-recurring C clauses will be used when standard regional C clauses do not apply.

Stewardship and Service Contracts

BMPs will be added directly as requirements in stewardship and service contracts.

Engineering Contracts

BMPs will be included as “pay items” in Engineering contracts rather than as “incidental items.”

Force-Account Job Specifications

BMPs will be included in all force-account job specifications.

Road-Use Permits

BMPs will be included in road-use permits, annual operating plans, reconstruction plans and specification, and maintenance requirements.

Rangeland Grazing Permits

Range allotment grazing permits are managed under Allotment Management Plans (AMPs) and Annual Operating Instructions (AOIs). AMPs and AOIs can be modified based on a NEPA decision for permit renewal. BMPs will be added to AMPs and AOIs when permits are analyzed through NEPA.