



File Code: 5100

Date: September 15, 2004

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen

The Lincoln National Forest (LNF) proposes to amend the LNF Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP) to meet current Wildland Fire management policy, direction, and terminology. Present standards and guidelines within various sections of the LRMP allow for management of unplanned ignitions within each of the affected management areas. This direction is currently too restrictive to allow lightning fires to play an effective role as a natural disturbance influencing forest and woodland ecology and health. The purpose of this proposal is to update direction on wildland fire management within the LNF LRMP to be consistent with several national interagency efforts, including the National Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy of 1995, Wildland and Prescribed Fire Policy and Implementation Guide of 1995, Wildland and Prescribed Fire Policy and Implementation Guide of 1998, National Fire Plan of 2000, and more recent legislation supporting forest restoration such as the Healthy Forests Restoration Act (H.R. 1904).

There is a need to change the limitations on natural fire use in the LNF LRMP to allow broader application of the tool to aid forest and fire managers in forest restoration efforts through effects such as reducing stand densities, reduction of natural or activity fuels buildups, or returning fire as a natural disturbance to ecosystem functions. Natural ignitions would be managed within the same parameters and safeguards as management ignitions. Fire mortality levels identified within the LRMP and subsequent implementation documents should reflect what is expected from natural free-spreading fire burning within any given vegetation type based on known historical fire occurrence and intensities. Acreages that may be affected by natural fire should be determined at the time of fire occurrences using a defined set of fire management criteria, not by an acreage and fire behavior limits as currently stated in the LRMP.

As part of this proposal, both Forest-wide and management area specific standards and guidelines would be amended to reflect changes in policy and terminology. The LRMP Amendment would incorporate the following Forest-wide standard and guidelines to supplement previous land management decisions:

***STANDARDS***

1. Human-caused ignitions will be suppressed utilizing the appropriate management response for fire.



## ***GUIDELINES***

1. Where feasible and appropriate, natural ignitions, prescribed fire, and other mechanical means may be utilized to accomplish resource management goals and objectives.
2. Fire management activities should be designed to retain the natural character of the ecosystems.

The proposed LNF LRMP Amendment would also include two changes to current standards and guidelines, and management prescriptions for 17 management areas in the Smokey Bear, Sacramento, and Guadalupe Ranger Districts:

- 1) The LNF proposes to use naturally ignited fires to help restore the functionality of fire adapted ecosystems. Fire use would help to reduce fire hazard, restore forest structure, improve Fire Regime Condition Class, improve wildlife habitat, and fulfill long-term resource objectives. In order to maximize the benefits of using natural ignitions as a management tool while avoiding unwanted fire effects on the landscape, the following parameters would be utilized to determine whether or not the fire would produce the desired environmental effects:
  - Pinyon-Juniper Vegetation: Based on actual and predicted fire weather and fire behavior modeling, fire use would be considered if less than 60 percent of the burned area would experience complete overstory mortality. This objective allows for sustained crown fires as long as 40 percent of the area will survive the associated fire behavior.
  - Mixed Conifer Vegetation: Based on actual and predicted fire weather and fire behavior modeling, fire use would be considered if less than 20 percent of the burned area would experience complete overstory mortality. This objective allows for sustained crown fires as long as 80 percent of the dominant strata will survive the associated fire behavior.
  - Ponderosa Pine Vegetation: Based on actual and predicted fire weather and fire behavior modeling, fire use would be considered if less than 30 percent of the burned area would experience complete overstory mortality. This objective allows for sustained crown fires as long as 70 percent of the dominant strata will survive the associated fire behavior.
- 2) The LNF proposes to use management ignited fires in the White Mountain Wilderness to meet specific resource objectives, such as reducing hazardous fuel loading in the Wildland/Urban interface.

The Mangi Environmental Group is presently conducting an Environmental Assessment (EA) for this proposal. The EA will investigate the potential for effects on any environmental resources resulting from this proposal. We welcome your comments, suggestions, or other inputs concerning this proposal and the EA to help us ensure that the study thoroughly addresses potential effects of the proposal, and thereby aid the LNF in making a well-informed decision about whether and how to proceed with this project.

If you would like to provide comments on this project or request a copy of the EA, you may do so using one of the following methods. Persons wishing to provide comments on the EA are asked to please submit all comments by October 25, 2004.

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Sincerely,

/s/ Johnny Wilson (for)  
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Forest Supervisor

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