



315 P Street • Eureka, CA • 95501  
707.445.5100 Fax 707.445.5151  
cats@alternatives2toxics.org  
www.alternatives2toxics.org

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Ramiro Villalvazo, Forest Supervisor  
Eldorado National Forest  
100 Forni Road, Placerville, CA 95667  
Fax: 530-621-5297

Re: Grizzly Forest Health and Fuels Reduction Project

Dear Ms. Walsh,

Californians for Alternatives to Toxics (CATs) is a public interest, membership organization concerned about the use of pesticides, including herbicides, on public lands and promotes alternatives to pesticide use in California. CATs shares your concern for hazardous fire conditions and forest health issues associated with tree stand overcrowding, invasive plant populations, and forest pests. CATs commends the Georgetown Ranger District for developing alternatives that attempt to take public comments from scoping into consideration.

CATs has historically commented on many Forest Service fuel reduction, thinning and forest health projects because of the common use of the pesticide borate and herbicide use for noxious weed and understory brush management. CATs has several concerns about the preferred alternative (alternative 1) in the Grizzly Forest Health and Fuels Reduction Project DEIS. One of the primary concerns is that alternative 1 leaves open the possibility for the use of multiple herbicides with repeat applications to be used for a variety of vegetation management needs which are not specifically identified and analyzed. Under the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA), the Forest Service must limit themselves to the proposed pesticides with specified formulations over a defined area and time frame for specifically proposed vegetation management needs. In other words, all alternatives must have set parameters for the potential environmental impacts to be understood and for decision makers to make an educated decision.

Table 4, *Chemical Formulation and Application Rate and Type, And Additives*, page 26, is an example of the lack of specific information and analysis for the proposed action and herbicide portion of the project. Table 4 attempts to outline the two proposed herbicides, the adjuvant and the dye for the project. However, the table allows for various formulations of herbicide be used by stating: “*glyphosate (accord or equivalent) and triclopyr (Garlon 4 Ultra or equivalent) as well as adjuvant Syl- Tac or equivalent*”. What equivalents would be used? Chemical formulations have differing levels of toxicity and environmental fate. The Forest Service must specify what formulations of herbicides they plan on using, including surfactants, adjuvant and dyes for the potential environmental impacts to be understood and for the document to stand.

Other open-ended statements in regard to proposed herbicides cloud the description and analysis of the project. For example, page 17 reads: “*Glyphosate would also be potentially applied to any identified noxious weeds throughout the project area. Currently the only identified area is a*

*Scotch broom occurrence in unit 318-017*". This statement, and the similar statement for triclopyr on page 16, leaves open the opportunity for unlimited herbicide use for noxious weeds under the one DEIS. This is not appropriate nor does it adequately describe the full extent of the project and the potential environmental impacts associated with repeat and compounding herbicide use. The DEIS needs to include specific parameters that are well described, site specific and analyzed for proposed herbicide use. How many herbicide applications are planned under alternative 1? What species of brush and perennial plants are targeted? What noxious weeds will be sprayed? What specific chemical formulation will be used?

Another open-ended statement that is particularly disturbing is found on page 17:

*"Follow-up treatment of herbicides would occur 1-5 years after the initial treatment of herbicide in three situations.*

- *where plants targeted in the initial herbicide treatment are difficult to control and may need follow-up treatment with **the same herbicide or a different herbicide to achieve adequate results** (less than 30% cover of brush for at least 10 years for natural brush species and 0% for noxious weeds);"*

The statement "or a different herbicide" is a red flag and demonstrates the lack of clear analysis and set parameters in the DEIS. All proposed herbicide use must be fully disclosed to the public and the decision maker.

Native basketweavers and plant material collectors are concerned about the use of herbicide in sacred sites and historic collection and foraging areas. What basketry materials are present in the project area? Are basketry materials found in areas where herbicides are planned for use? The DEIS fails to evaluate potential significant adverse impacts associated with herbicide use on or near these species, let alone health effects to native tribal peoples of using these plant post spraying activities. What about cultural impacts of important plants or sites being forever degraded and or changed by herbicide spraying? Will signs be posted prior and post herbicide application? These questions need to be sufficiently discussed for the document to stand.

For a project proposal that plans to manage noxious weeds, several important aspects of project description and analysis in regard to noxious weeds are missing from the DEIS. Missing from this discussion is a complete list of the factors that caused invasions of scotch broom, skeleton weed and others. Without knowing what led to past noxious weed infestations how can the Forest Service effectively prevent re-infestation? The Forest Service fails to include in this DEIS a true integrated weed management plan that would include limiting and reducing activities that have led to past invasions. The Forest failed to include analysis of the impacts of: logging, off-road activities, and excessive road construction that facilitate noxious weed dispersal. Disturbances that have led to past and will lead to future noxious weed infestations must be dealt with as part of this plan. The Forest Service needs to include in the EIS their plan for treating disturbance-causing activities that lead to noxious weed infestations within Eldorado National Forest.

This DEIS also states that surveys of the proposed treatment area have few known populations of noxious weeds other than small areas of scotch broom and rush skeleton weed. Yet the plan repeatedly proposed that herbicides be used for noxious weed management. How does the

Forest Service know that herbicides are the most appropriate management tool for these future noxious weeds without knowing the identity or extent of invasion? If monitoring is done and new populations are found in the project area, small, new infestations are relatively easy to control with manual methods. Why have manual, biological, grazing or other non-chemical invasive plant management strategies not been addressed? This is a large gap in the current DEIS that requires further discussion.

CATs also found the description of the application methods for all alternatives that include herbicide use to be vague and contradictory. Page 25 reads: *“Herbicide application would be restricted to ground based application. Backpack sprayers with no boom would be used to apply spray in sweeping motions. The spray would be applied directly to targeted plants..”*. The use of the term “sweeping motions” does not lend confidence to the following statement that “spray would be applied directly to targeted plants”. Further description of the application method would lend clarity on this subject and also help determine the potential for environmental impacts. Quantity and application rate greatly alter potential environmental impact. The statement on page 25 also seems to be the only place in the DEIS, other than the BMPs that discuss the herbicide application methods. The BMPs state that herbicide spray will be kept within 24 inches of target plants. This is contradictory to the statement that spray will be applied directly to target plants. 2 feet is a wide margin of error that could greatly impact non-target organisms and soil health. The herbicide application evaluation in the DEIS is not acceptable. The DEIS completely dismisses the possibility of drift from the herbicide spraying by stating that spray will only be applied to target plants. Whenever herbicides are sprayed the possibility of drift to non-target species, soils, and water sources are present. Winds and various weather conditions can increase the likelihood of herbicides effecting non-target species and soils. Even using wick applicators does not prevent non-target plants and soils from being impacted. All these impacts must be weighed and considered as costs and negative adverse impacts associated with herbicide treatment methods.

The Aquatic Wildlife Effects section for alternative 1 in the DEIS states in several locations that there is not data on effects of the proposed herbicide applications. For example, page 109: *“SPORAX - Very little information is available on the effects of borax to amphibians.”* This and other examples in the DEIS show that the Forest Service does not have sufficient data to analyze the potential environmental effects of the proposed project. How will the Forest Service rectify these gaps in critical data? It is perplexing to think that the Forest Service proposes to use chemicals on public lands that are little understood or rarely studied. Page 109 states: *“[s]tandard chronic exposure studies on the effects of borax and boric acid in fish were not identified in the literature; all of the available data are from a single study on the effects of borax on rainbow trout, channel catfish, and goldfish.”* This information was gathered in 1977 and needs to be updated. More information regarding effects of borax and boric acid must be considered. Please see attached CATs memo on borax.

Chapter 3 states *“It is assumed that the thick skin of the western pond turtle would cause contamination from skin exposure to herbicides to be less likely.”* This presumption needs to be supported by sound science. Have studies concluded that the pond turtle’s skin would actually protect it from herbicide exposure? If not, then more analysis needs to be undertaken. Chapter 3 also states that *“None of the mapped western pond turtle nesting habitat locations are proposed*

*to be sprayed with herbicides; however, if herbicides were to reach western pond turtle eggs underground, potential effects to treated eggs are unknown.*” If pond turtle eggs may come in contact with herbicides, the effects need to be studied before any action is taken. If it is not feasible to make needed studies to fill data gaps for significant potential effects, the reasons must be given in the EIS.

The insufficient description and analysis throughout the DEIS for the proposed use of herbicides skews the analysis to support alternative 1, the proposed plan. The Forest Service repeatedly throughout the DEIS provides an inadequate description of the alternative 3, the no-spray alternative. By doing so, the Forest service skews the analysis to improperly support its conclusion. NEPA requires that the alternatives be objectively evaluated. The Forest Service also fails to provide a reasonable range of alternatives. The Forest needs to address the DEIS’s lack of a reasonable range of alternatives. Alternatives 1 and 3 are the same; just Alternative 3 is without herbicide use. Why is there only one no pesticide use alternative? Why aren’t several different approaches and techniques evaluated in an integrated vegetation management (IVM) alternative? The lone no pesticide alternative is never given a fair evaluation. All alternatives need to be objectively evaluated, without the biased presentation given in the DEIS.

We look forward to seeing a final EIS that adequately analyzes the project, identifies the impacts and chooses an alternative supported by sound science.

Sincerely,

Vanessa M. Vasquez,  
Programs and Policy Associate

Patricia M. Clary  
Executive Director