Greetings,

Thank you for your interest in the Lone Pine Fuel Reduction Project. Enclosed is my Decision to implement this project. The 3600-acre project area is located in Lone Pine Canyon, just east of the Community of Wrightwood in San Bernardino County, California. Legal location by Township, Range and Sections are included in the attached Decision Memo.

I have considered all comments received regarding the project and have decided that implementation of this project provides the most effective means to protect the community of Wrightwood from the threat of wildfire in Lone Pine Canyon and is consistent with all applicable laws, regulations, and the San Bernardino Land and Resource Management Plan (1989). The project will commence immediately as this decision is not subject to a higher level of review (36 CFR 215.12(f)).

If you have questions or wish to speak to us about this project, Please contact James Rudisill at 909-382-2873 or e-mail at jrudisill@fs.fed.us. Thank you for your interest and participation.

Sincerely,

GABE GARCIA
District Ranger
Front Country Ranger District
Decision Memo
USDA Forest Service
Lone Pine Canyon Fuels Reduction Project
Front Country Ranger District
San Bernardino National Forest
San Bernardino County, California

**Decision:** I have decided to approve the Lone Pine Canyon Fuels Reduction Project. The 3600-acre proposed project area is located in T2N, R6W Sections 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 15, and 16, T2N, R7W Section 1, T3N, R6W, Sections 30-33 and T3N, R7W Sections 25-27 and 36 bounded by Lone Pine Canyon Road and the community of Wrightwood in San Bernardino County, California. My decision includes all the design features and Best Management Practices (attached) described in the project file, including those described within the Biological Evaluation for both plant and wildlife species.

This project is designed to offer protection for the community of Wrightwood by creating a fuels buffer on the National Forest. This is an area of chaparral fuels with scattered clumps of coniferous trees. Due to the density of chaparral in the Lone Pine Canyon, there is a significant risk of an uncontrollable fire running up the canyon and threatening the community. This project will mitigate this risk by breaking up and reducing the continuous brush fields. This would support the Forest Land Resource Management’s (FLRMP) preferred alternative as indicated on IV-30 of the FLRMP.

Specific project activities in forested stands would include:

- Establish 2 fuel breaks along ridge lines just east of Wrightwood. These breaks would be created by mechanical disc and may be up to 300 feet wide.
- Re-establish fuel break system within Lone Pine Canyon
- Prescribe burn lower portions of Lone Pine Canyon systematically in order to provide a continuous mosaic of fuels in the Canyon. This would include the establishment of control lines.

The project consists of a systematic set of actions in order to enable a prescribe burn. First, two fuel breaks will be established between the burn units and the community. These breaks serve as protection from wildfire and contingency areas during prescribe burning. Hand crews and mechanical methods will be used to create a buffer around the units prior to burning. Existing fuel breaks will be reopened where possible to establish control points along the edges of the units as needed, however some new line will be created where there is no existing line. Mechanical lines will be plowed with a large disk. These plowed lines will “chop” up the existing fuels and embed portions of it into the soil thus giving a wider buffer with less visual impacts. The Prescribe burn has been divided into five units, each to be burned separately, with rotation of these burns.
determined by their location in the canyon. Units at the top of the Canyon (west) would be burned first.

**Reasons for Categorically Excluding this Action:** This action is categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental impact statement or an environmental assessment as described in Forest Service Handbook: USDA Forest Service Handbook 1909.15, Chapter 30, Section 31.2; Category 10 – Hazardous Fuels Reduction Activities.

There are no extraordinary circumstances present in the project area. Extraordinary circumstances include, but are not limited to, the presence and associated adverse impacts to the following:

- **Threatened, endangered, or sensitive species or their critical habitat:** There will be no impacts to threatened or endangered species or their habitats from this project as planned. A biological evaluation (BE) was completed, including discussion of T/E species occurrences and potential impacts. There are no threatened or endangered species that occupy the project area. No designated or proposed critical habitat is included in the project area and no affects to any listed species are anticipated. For these reasons, no consultation with Fish and Wildlife Service was required. The BE analyzed the effects on Forest Service and Region 5 sensitive species. Impacts may occur to individuals but will not cause a loss of viability or cause a trend towards listing.
- **Flood Plains, wetlands, or municipal watersheds:** There are no adverse impacts to municipal watersheds, flood plains, or wetlands.
- **Congressionally designated areas, such as wilderness study areas, or Natural Recreation Areas:** There are no congressionally designated areas, such as wilderness study areas within the project area. The Pacific Crest Trail, a National Scenic Trail does occur in the project area, but actions proposed in this project are consistent with management guidelines for the trail and adverse impacts are not anticipated.
- **Inventoried Roadless Areas:** There are no Inventoried Roadless Areas within the project area.
- **Research Natural Areas:** There are no Research Natural Areas within the project area.
- **Native American religious or cultural sites, archaeological sites, or historic properties (heritage resources):** An Archeological Reconnaissance Report has been completed for this project and agreements with the State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) have been met. Protection of heritage resources is incorporated into the proposed action and will follow the stipulations in the 1996 Programmatic Agreement (PA) between the Pacific Southwest Region Forests and the California State Historic Preservation Officer (CASHPO) and Advisory Council on Historic Preservation.
**Public Scoping:** Issues regarding wildland fire risk and forest health conditions on the San Bernardino have remained in the news since the Summer of 2003. This publicity has generated feedback to the Forest Service from local residents and visitors concerned about health of the forest, public safety, and fire hazard. I had numerous personal contacts and meetings with individuals, community residents, agencies, and other interested parties during the last year regarding the ongoing forest health issues.

The San Bernardino and Angeles National Forest have held a series of public meetings in the Wrightwood Community in order to: listen to public concerns regarding forest health and wildland fire issues, describe the present conditions around the community, to propose potential projects to address these concerns, and to discuss the potential consequences of those actions. This proposal was mailed to 2897 individuals including the entire Wrightwood Community. In addition, the project was publicized through news releases and through a community web site. Eleven comment letters were received during the scoping period. Based on the low number of responses and feedback from public meetings, the proposed action does not appear to be controversial. Generally, six comment letters supported the project, three opposed or had concerns with the project, and 2 did not offer an opinion. The following questions or concerns were raised:

**Comment #1:** The upper reaches of some burn units should not be burned on a 10-year cycle in order to protect big-cone Douglas-fir and its regeneration. In addition, the fire-return interval should be longer in the rest of the project area in order to limit the loss of shrub species.

**Response:** Consideration has been given to big-cone Douglas-fir including prescriptions to limit the intensity of fire in these stands. The Lone Pine silvicultural report indicated states:

"...backing fire proposed would generally kill a portion of the sapling and pole trees, and scorch the lower branches of the larger trees. However, little mortality in the larger trees should occur and the tree stocking overall would be reduced slightly. The burning would retain stands that are uneven-aged, irregular-sized, irregular-spaced and composed of the pre-burn species composition. Health and vigor would increase slightly because of the reduced tree stocking, but also because of the reduced shrub competition. Bark beetle risk would be reduced. The stands would be more resistant to damage by future wildfires." (Lone Pine Silvicultural Report 2004)

Additional analysis found that prescribe burns would be repeated every 10-15 years, a bit longer than previously planned (Lone Pine Fire and Fuels Report 2004).

**Comment #2:** There should be fuel treatments on the north side of the Lone Pine Canyon Road.

**Response:** Wildland fuels (shrubs and chaparral) on the north side of Lone Pine Canyon road have been studied by the I.D. team and it was concluded that they do not pose as significant of a risk to the community as those in the
treatment areas because the density of fuels is less, fire modeling indicated lower fire behavior potential, and that existing suppression resources are sufficient to suppress fires in this area.

Comment #3: Fuel breaks should not stop short of roads in order to prevent illegal OHV use.

Response: This concern has been given careful consideration by fire planners. In areas where these fuel breaks would stop the topography is generally flat. Because of this topography and the relatively easy access from existing roads, it is felt that opening these fuels breaks in times of wildfire could occur quickly and effectively.

Comment #4: Fuel breaks are necessary but prescribed burns carry too much risk of escape.

Response: I am aware that prescribed burning involves inherit risks and that some members of the public believe that risks associated with prescribed burns outweigh their benefits. In this case, I am convinced that prescribed burning is the most effective tool to reduce fuels in Lone Pine Canyon. Lone Pine Canyon eventually will burn, whether through wildfire or through prescribed fire. I believe that a prescribed burn is safe because these fuels will burn under systematic conditions that we determine, with suppression resources pre-staged and available, and at intensities that we expect. This strategy is inherently safer than responding to an unplanned wildfire and will provide the community with long term and large scale protection from the threat of continuous chaparral fuels in Lone Pine Canyon.

Comment #5: There needs to be fire suppression equipment at the scene to prevent loss of control.

Response: Suppression resources will be staffed at each prescribed burn. These suppression crews include resources to carry out and control the prescribed fire and additional contingency resources that are not involved in the prescribed burn but are available for suppression.

Comment #6: "... Our biggest concern is with conditions during the burn. The Weather along with wind patterns can be predicted but never with 100 percent accuracy."

Response: Great care is taken in determining what weather conditions will allow the safe and effective use of prescribed fire in Lone Pine Canyon. Weather conditions will be monitored prior to and throughout the prescribed fire in order to validate predicted weather conditions. The prescribed fire will not be ignited if current observed weather deviates from prescriptions. If weather conditions deviate from prescription conditions after ignition, the prescribed fire will be suppressed.

Findings Required by Other Laws and Regulations: This project area is located in the Santa Ana Management Area as described in the LRMP.
Management emphasis includes recreation, watershed management and wildlife habitat enhancement. This decision compliments the LRMP management direction by incorporating provisions for fire protection and managing the vegetation for watershed and wildlife habitat enhancement as well as maintaining forest stands within recreation areas. This decision is consistent with the San Bernardino National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (1989), the Clean Water Act, the Endangered Species Act of 1973, National Historic Preservation Act (1966, as amended), and the National Forest Management Act of 1976.

**Implementation:** I intend to implement this project as soon as practicable over the next 10-15 years or for the life of this decision.

**Review and Appeal Opportunities:** Pursuant to 36 CFR 215.12(f), this decision is not subject to a higher level of review.

**For more information** For additional information concerning this decision or the Forest Service appeal process, contact District Ranger Gabe Garcia (Lytle Creek Ranger Station—909-382-2850; ggarcia01@fs.fed.us).

Approved By: [Signature]
Date: Aug. 2, 2004

Gabe Garcia, District Ranger
Front Country District Ranger District
San Bernardino National Forest

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Lone Pine Project
Design Features and Best Management Practices

Methodology and Prescriptions

1. Fuel breaks must be established prior to prescribed burning
2. Hand lines and plow disc will be used to establish fuel breaks
3. Hand fire and helitorch methods are recommended
4. In conifer and mixed-conifer hardwood stands, lighting techniques and hand buffers will be applied such that low intensity fires can be established in these stands.

Visual Quality Prescriptions

5. Unit Design and Layout
   a. Blend units including fuelbreaks with natural landscape features such as natural openings and rock outcrops. This will create free form vegetative shapes that mimic natural patterns.
   b. Scatter burned slash on control lines to reduce the color contrast of the exposed soil
   c. A Landscape Architect will be involved with initial layout strategy with other resource specialist including timber and fuels layout crews. A portion of the project area that is representative of the whole project area will be used to convey specific resource prescriptions and overall marking strategies.
   d. Unit boundary marking on trees will be done on the opposite side of the tree from where it is seen from.- example: tree marking along the PCNST would be on the opposite side of the tree that is seen from the trail.

Recreation Prescriptions

6. Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail
   a. Post signs advising trail users when project activities are going to take place. Coordinate with PCNST managers on project implementation.
   b. Temporarily close trail when project activities are taking place within the trail corridor, for the safety of recreationist.
   c. Rehabilitate any damage to trail from implementation of project activities.
   d. Activities will be coordinated with management of the Pacific Crest Trail, limiting impacts to users of the system.

7. Fuel breaks will be terminated 50 ft from Lone Pine Canyon road to minimize erosion from illegal A.T.V. activities. (C6.602 view 200')
Post Treatment Rehabilitation

8. After completion of the project, all temporary roads, landings, and skid trails with gradients less than 15% will be assessed by a Forest Service soils scientist for compaction. Those that need it, will be subsoiled to decompact the soils. When it does not conflict with fuel treatment objectives, temporary roads, landings, and skid trails may be mulched using slash, wood chips, or certified weed-free straw or mulch.

9. All temporary roads, landings, and skid trails will be rehabilitated and blocked after project completion. Rehabilitation will include: returning the ground to natural contours, implementing decompaction and erosion control measures as needed, and covering bare soil with slash, chips, pine needles, or cut brush as necessary (when it does not conflict with fuel treatment objectives).

10. A combination of natural barriers (rocks, logs, etc.), screening, fencing, etc. may be used to prevent/discourage illegal vehicle activity during and after the project treatment. Fire Prevention Technicians and other staff will monitor the area and if/when problem areas arise, remedial and preventative actions will be taken as appropriate. Coordination with adjacent landowners, public education, and signing will be used as appropriate.

Wildlife and Plant Prescriptions (including Threatened, Endangered and Sensitive Species)

The following measures would be taken to minimize effects to wildlife.

11. Limited operations period (no treatment activities from May 15 to August 31) to prevent impacts/disturbance in modeled willow flycatcher habitat near the project area when potentially occupied by willow flycatcher. Access to treatment areas will avoid modeled habitat.

12. Restrict burning activities to periods when winds are not expected to carry smoke over the Nelson's bighorn sheep winter/lambing area south of the project area (T2N R7W Sec's. 12 and 13; T2N R6W W Sec's. 7 (SW quadrant), 17, and 18). November 30 - June 30.

13. Minimize project-related over-flights (e.g., approach/departure for heli-torching and containment operations) over bighorn sheep winter-spring (lambing) habitat (T2N R7W Sec's. 12 and 13; T2N R6W W Sec's. 7 (SW quadrant), 17, and 18). November 30 - June 30.

14. Hardwood, conifer, and mixed hardwood/conifer stands: Where possible, retain 8 – 12 large down logs / 5 acres of all age and decay classes (12" diameter at the smallest and at least 20 feet long), in all treatment areas (Forest Plan Standard; FP Rx-72).

15. Hardwood, conifer, and mixed hardwood/conifer stands: Where possible, snags would be retained that meet the following criteria: a minimum of 5-10 hard snags / 5 acres with minimum size of 15" DBH and 40' tall. Within
a 5-acre area, the size class and species of snags that would be retained should be mixed, favoring larger diameter trees (over 30" DBH). Within a 5-acre area, 3 of the snags should be large diameter (at least 30" DBH), 2 of the snags should be 20"+ DBH (if present), and the other 5 can be between 15" and 20" DBH. Snags can be clumped or combined with wildlife use trees (such as acorn woodpecker acorn storage trees). (Forest Plan Standard; FP SG-62). Attempt retention of larger snags that may be present by raking fuels away from perimeter of base.

16. Where they are not a designated hazard, attempt to retain wildlife use trees such as acorn storage trees, denning trees, and trees with nest holes or nests. (Forest Plan Standard; FP SG-62).

17. Lost Lake (T2N, R6W, Sec12) will not be used as a water source for prescribed burn control activities (modeled willow flycatcher habitat).

18. Before establishing fuel-breaks consult with district wildlife staff. Rock outcrops – avoid mapped and unmapped rock outcrops to minimize effects on sensitive reptile habitat;

19. Riparian vegetation (e.g., willow, alder, cottonwood, big leaf maple, and dogwood) that occurs outside of riparian buffer zones would not be removed. Backing fires which do not reduce vegetation canopy below 50% may be allowed pending biologist consultation (Forest Plan SG-42). See also Watershed Prescriptions.

20. Chapparal: Retain at least one 40 acre island of continuous cover/ square mile (Forest Plan Rx-39, 1.i).

21. If occurrences of sensitive plants are found where ground disturbance could occur, impacts would be minimized or avoided during project implementation.

22. Areas where out year ground-disturbing maintenance would occur would be surveyed for Opuntia basilaris var. brachyclada prior to those activities. If Opuntia basilaris var. brachyclada were found, those locations would be flagged and avoided during ground disturbing activities.

heritage Prescriptions

23. Prior to project implementation, heritage resource assessments and surveys will be conducted in accordance with the "Regional Programmatic Agreement" (hereafter referred to as the Regional PA). In general, all historic properties will be flagged and avoided by project actions. All historic properties, extant within the Area of Potential Effect, would be identified, recorded, and the perimeter of the boundaries marked with flagging and a suitable buffer applied. No ground disturbing activities would occur within those boundaries and buffers unless specified below.

24. When project activities do occur within the boundaries of Heritage Properties or unevaluated Heritage Sites the following conditions will be applied as Standard Mitigation Measures.
a. Felling and removal of hazard, windthrow, and salvage trees may occur within historic properties under the following conditions. Felled trees may be removed using only the following techniques: hand bucking and carrying, rubber tired loader, crane/self loader, and/or helicopter logging.

b. Equipment operators shall be briefed on the need to reduce ground disturbances (e.g., minimizing turns).

c. No skidding or tracked equipment shall be allowed within historic property boundaries.

d. All such activities mentioned above will be monitored by qualified heritage specialists at the time of tree removal.

25. If additional cultural resources are discovered during project implementation, work will stop in that area immediately until heritage resource specialists can evaluate the site.

26. Areas of the APE that are not accessible due to impenetrable vegetation will either be inventoried within a reasonable time period after the tree removal to identify and record any resources present or will be monitored during mechanical equipment operation.

27. No pile burning will occur within or near heritage properties.

28. Monitoring of sensitive heritage resource areas during and subsequent to project implementation will occur as necessary, as determined by heritage staff.

Watershed Prescriptions

29. Practice 1.13. Erosion Prevention and Control Measures During Timber Sale Operations. This practice was designed to ensure that the purchasers' operations will be conducted reasonably to minimize soil erosion.

30. Practice 5.2. Slope Limitations for Mechanical Equipment Operations. This measure facilitates water drainage by limiting operation to gradients where features such as water bars can be effectively installed.

31. Practice 5.6. Soil Moisture Limitations for Mechanical Equipment Operations. This practice is intended to reduce soil erosion by limiting equipment operation during wet soil conditions.

32. Practice 6.3. Soil productivity and water quality is maintained by minimizing erosion on hill slopes, and delivery of ash, sediment, nutrients and debris to stream channels. Fire should act as a backing fire rather than a running fire and there should be no intentional lighting within the SMZ.
Noxious Weeds Prescriptions

33. A field reconnaissance of the project area and a noxious weed assessment will be developed for the project. The noxious weed assessment will specify areas where disturbance from equipment, fire, and project-related weed vectors would not be permitted.

34. Implement the standard Region 5 "C" clause used during timber projects for noxious weed prevention. Any heavy equipment used during project implementation will be free from noxious or invasive exotic weeds before entering the project area. If any equipment enters a weed occurrence in the project area it would be washed to remove weed propagules prior to leaving the project area. Equipment staging areas will be weed-free.

Air Quality

35. All burning would be conducted within the State of California air quality regulations administered by permit through the South Coast Air Pollution Control District as described in California's Agricultural Burning Guidelines in Title 17 of the California Code of Regulations.

Maintenance

36. All of the above prescriptions may be used in order to maintain the project area in desired conditions for the life of this decision.