

**Bald Fire Salvage and Restoration Project
Response to Comments Received After Comment Period
June 19, 2015**

This document analyzes public comments received after the legal notice and comment period for the Bald Fire Salvage and Restoration Project (Bald Project). The Bald Project legal notice and comment period began on April 28, 2015 and closed on May 28, 2015.

Table 1 contains the list of those who responded after the legal notice and comment for the Bald Project closed. Two individuals and/or organizations provided comments. To avoid confusion, letters were numbered consecutively beginning where comments from the comment period ended.

Table 1. List of Respondents after May 28, 2015

Letter #	Agency, Organization, Business, or Individual	Date
4	Steven A. Brink, California Forestry Association	May 31, 2015
5	Chad Hanson, John Muir Project Justin Augustine, Center for Biological Diversity	June 2, 2015

Table 2 (on the following pages) identifies and documents specific statements from each of the letters received. The Bald Project Responsible Official identified statements as comments, questions, requests for information, alternative suggestions, potential issues, and literature citations. The Responsible Official then provided rationale for determining the status of the comment. Copies of the letters are in the Bald planning record located at the Hat Creek Ranger District Office. For literature citations, a comment is provided by the Responsible Official on how the literature was addressed.

Table 2. Summary of Letters Received after the 30-Day Legal Notice and Comment Period Closed

Respondent #4: Steven A. Brink, California Forestry Association, letter dated May 31, 2015			
Comment #	Identification	Summary of Comment	Responsible Official's Disposition
4-1	Comment	<p>Following are comments from California Forestry Association (CFA) on the Bald Fire EA and Eiler Fire EA.</p> <p>CFA has membership that includes most of the remaining 36 operating sawmills and veneer mills in CA, some of the remaining 24 biomass powerplants, and nearly all of the private industrial forest land owners. CFA supports the Proposed Action on both the Bald and Eiler Fire EAs.</p> <p>CFA only has one comment on the Bald Fire EA. On pages 11 and 19, the EA talks about “ripping”. CFA believes it would be more accurate to say “contour tilling.” Sierra Pacific Industries for over a decade has shown that contour tilling provides many environmental benefits including capturing 100% of precipitation on-site and seedling survival. CFA was surprised that we could not find any mention of contour tilling in the Eiler Fire EA.</p>	Comment noted.
Respondent #5: Chad Hanson, John Muir Project and Justin Augustine, Center for Biological Diversity, letter dated June 2, 2015			
Comment #	Identification	Summary of Comment	Responsible Official's Disposition
5-1	Comment	<p>On behalf of the John Muir Project of Earth Island Institute and the Center for Biological Diversity, we are submitting the following <u>supplemental</u> comments on the draft Environmental Assessment (EA) for the proposed Eiler Fire Salvage and Restoration Project (Eiler project).</p> <p>Since the comment deadlines for the Bald and Eiler post-fire logging project EAs, significant new information has arisen that contradicts key conclusions in the EAs and Black-backed Woodpecker specialist reports regarding Black-backed Woodpecker (BBWO) populations and trends in the Sierra Nevada.</p> <p>Appendix A of Roberts et al. (2015) (see attached), which was conducted for the Forest Service by Point Blue Conservation, found that a “sharp decrease” in BBWO populations is occurring in unburned forests</p>	<p>The commenters inaccurately claim that decreased Black-backed Woodpecker occupancy in green forests indicate that the population trends in the Sierra Nevada region are strongly declining overall, and that the cause of that decline (if it were to exist) is cumulative effects related to post salvage logging. In the two studies referenced by the commenter, the first, Roberts et al. (2015), indicates only that there is a shift of Black-backed Woodpecker occupancy out of relatively green unburned forest habitat. There is no speculation in Roberts et al. (2015) that the shift is related to population trend changes. Changes in occupancy of habitat are expected since it is widely accepted that Black-backed Woodpeckers prefer recently burned forests with a high density of burned snags. In the</p>

	<p>throughout the Sierra Nevada in recent years (see Roberts et al. 2015, p. 39), and concluded that the data indicate a “strong change in green forest occupancy” appears to be occurring (Roberts et al. 2015, p. 40, and Figure A.1 on page 42). Roberts et al. (2015), Appendix A (pp. 39-42), hypothesized that BBWOs that previously occurred in unburned forest may have been increasingly moving into burned forest in recent years, as the last three years have had above-average fire amounts. Given this, for populations to be stable overall (in the face of declining populations in unburned forest), occupancy would have to increase substantially in burned forest recently. However, this is not the case; in a separate study conducted for the Forest Service by the Institute for Bird Populations specifically in burned forest, the authors found that occupancy in 2013 and 2014 were the lowest since the study began in 2009, and 2014 was the lowest year of all (page 2 of Siegel et al. 2015—see attached). Neither Roberts et al. (2015) nor Siegel et al. (2015) assessed their results in light of the other, so neither had the complete picture in terms of current BBWO population trends in the Sierra Nevada. The current declines are consistent with projections of Odion and Hanson (2013), given the amount of BBWO habitat that has been logged in recent fires (about 50%, or more, in the 2013 fires: Rim fire, American fire, and Aspen fire, e.g.—similar or higher cumulative amounts are proposed for logging in Bald and Eiler).</p> <p>In light of this significant new information, an EIS must be prepared, or at least a supplemental EA (with additional public comments allowed), to evaluate whether an EIS is required. We look forward to hearing from you on this issue.</p>	<p>second study they refer to, Siegel et al. (2015) discusses this type of an occupancy shift towards preferred habitat stating “...the birds in our greater Sierra Nevada study area may frequently have the potential to colonize younger postfire forests, as adequately large fires burn throughout the region during most years. So, for a woodpecker inhabiting a 6-year old fire area, whether or not it moves to a newer fire area may not be determined by the characteristics of the site it currently occupies, but rather by whether there is a better, more recently burned site nearby to colonize.” Similarly, regarding regional trends in Black-backed Woodpecker occupancy, Siegel et al. (2015) summarizes data collected from 2009 through 2014 stating that there is no significant change in trend regarding Black-backed Woodpecker occupancy in National Forests of California. While data indicated that individual point occupancy and associated abundance was statistically lower in 2014, they conclude it does not indicate a declining population trend and the proportion of occupied fires has remained constant. In conclusion, the commenter’s heightened concern regarding the results of the Roberts et al. (2015) and Siegel et al. (2015) relative to the status of the species’ population is speculative and does not warrant the preparation of an EIS.</p> <p>The commenter also points to three specific fires to inaccurately show a trend, claiming that cumulative losses of Black-backed Woodpecker habitat approach 50% on a regional basis. A Black-backed Woodpecker burned habitat analysis was conducted by USDA Forest Service Regional Biologists in 2015. In contrast to the 50 percent stated by the commenter’s, the Forest Service Biologists found that a maximum estimate of 20 percent of 249,931 acres of burned forest Black-backed Woodpecker habitat created by wildfires from 2007-2014 had been proposed for tree removal, (35% of habitat across all landownership which includes private lands). These results are summarized in the updated Black-Backed Woodpecker Supplemental Report for this project. These figures are maximum estimates of habitat loss based on known treatments, proposed treatments, and assumptions that all private lands would be salvaged. In actuality, a substantial</p>
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5-1.1	Literature Citation	Roberts et al. (2015)	<p>This paper was an update to a previously published paper by Fogg et al (2014) regarding Black-backed Woodpeckers in unburned forests. They detected Black-backed Woodpeckers at green forest transects on all forests except for Sequoia National Forest and the Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit. Contrary to previous analyses, Black-backed Woodpecker occupancy in green forests showed a marked decrease in 2014 from previous years. Regarding this decreased rate of occupancy, the authors state that a large number of fires occurred in 2012 and especially 2013, and they feel this might account for the change because many individual Black-backed Woodpeckers that had been occupying green forests moved to the recent fire areas following the 2012 and 2013 field seasons. "These results are preliminary and future work will be necessary to further elucidate this pattern."</p> <p>The authors of this study did not imply that the observed declines in occupancy were anything more than as stated, that individual woodpeckers vacated previously held home ranges to take advantage of recently burned areas, and did not imply that the species was in jeopardy. The commenter's suggestion</p>

			that this study indicates a heightened concern regarding the status of the species' population is not supported, and does not warrant the preparation of an EIS.
5-1.2	Literature Citation	Siegel et al. (2015)	<p>This report was an update to ongoing Management Indicator Species monitoring the Institute of Bird Populations is conducting for Region 5 of the US Forest Service, which has been conducted annually from 2009-2014. Black-backed Woodpeckers were detected within recent fire areas on both the west and east sides of the Sierra Nevada crest, and across nearly the full latitudinal range of the study area. In 2014, mean Black-backed Woodpecker occupancy within recent fire areas was statistically less than all previous years of this monitoring effort. Regarding this lower level of occupancy, the authors state there is no significant evidence of a temporal trend in occupancy rates during the six years (2009-2014) they have been monitoring Black-backed Woodpeckers on National Forests in California, or of a broad-scale change in the species' distribution in California. The authors conclude that the proportion of occupied fires has remained constant and that while the monitored abundance of Black-backed Woodpeckers was statistically lower in the past year, this does not indicate a declining population trend. Black-backed Woodpeckers remain present across their historic range in California.</p> <p>The second part of Siegel et al. (2015) examines the probability of Black-backed Woodpeckers to colonize and vacate (leave) burned habitat. Specifically, they used the data discussed above from the 2009 to 2014 MIS survey points. They found that the probability of Black-backed Woodpeckers to vacate a given site was 70 percent, and occurred less frequently at survey points with greater burn severity and greater pre-fire canopy. They also showed that colonization was likely to occur at early post-fire points and at points with higher densities of snags. In summary, they conclude that Black-backed Woodpeckers in their greater Sierra Nevada study area may frequently have the potential to colonize younger post-fire forests, as adequately large fires burn throughout the region</p>

			<p>during most years.</p> <p>Similar to the response of 2.1-1, Siegel et al. (2015) do not imply that their 2014 results indicate the species was in peril or even decline, rather that Black-backed Woodpeckers may vacate older burns or areas with less desirable habitat (such as green forests) for more newly burned forests. The commenter's assertion regarding results of Siegel et al. (2015) relative to the status of the species' population is not supported and does not warrant the preparation of an EIS.</p>
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