

Cultural Resources

Affected Environment

All throughout the Sierra National Forest are the remnants of past cultures that illustrate the centuries-old relationships between people and the land. These cultural resources hold clues to past ecosystems and human adaptations to them, provide links between living communities and the unique prehistoric and historic land uses of the Sierra NF, and help transform a visit to the woods into an encounter with history. These cultural resources comprise an irreplaceable and non-renewable resource record of past human life and land use. This record is contained in properties with archaeological research value, and locations of cultural importance to local Native American groups.

Archaeological and Historic Values

Cultural resources are the buildings, sites, areas, architecture, and properties that bear evidence of human activity and use, and have scientific, historic, and cultural importance. The cultural resources are not distributed equally across this acreage, but clustered according to the natural resources that were being used (e.g. acorn groves, timber stands, water, mineral locations). With new discovery upon almost every new survey effort, there continue to be many undiscovered cultural resources in the Sierra National Forest (Sierra NF).

Physical remains of over 10,000 years of human history are found throughout the Sierra National Forest. Except for the last century and a half of written history, the only record of this long human use is the remains left by the original native people and their descendants. At the time of contact with Euro-Americans, in the late 1700s and early 1800s, the Fresno River was the boundary between the southern Sierra Miwok to the north and west, and the Chukchansi Yokuts to the south and east. The Western Mono occupied the area around what is now Bass Lake. The boundaries between the groups were ambiguous, with a lot of overlap in the area between the Miwok, Yokuts and Mono.

The processes of subsistence, the hunter-gatherer lifestyle, and the resulting indigenous land use are seen in the archaeological record with features common to the material culture of the native people of the Sierra Nevada (e.g. village sites, bedrock mortars, stone tool artifacts). Some of these sites have ethnographic documentation that indicates a fairly recent history of tribal use; in some cases, tribal use continues at sites that have an occupational history that spans thousands of years.

Historic-era cultural resources reflect particularly the cultural and economic products of the rapid pace of technological achievement in the last 150 years imposed on the terrain of the Sierra Nevada. These resources often reflect environmental changes resulting from industrial and technological advances in resource extraction, landscape use, and management. Sites include remnants of Forest Service administration, exploration and settlement, grazing/range management, mining, transportation, travel, tourism and recreation, and the forest products industry. Each of these themes has an array of associated sites and features. For example, features associated with railroad logging operations may be work camps, refuse dumps, railroad grades, trestles, and discarded equipment.

Native American Cultural Values

Federally recognized tribal governments associated with the Sierra NF, as elsewhere in the United States, have a special political and legal relationship with the U.S. Government. Recognized

tribes are also beneficiaries of a trust relationship with the Federal government. Federal agencies, such as the Forest Service, consult with tribes as with other governments and are responsible for protecting tribal interests. The Forest Service also consults with non-recognized tribes.

There is a deep and abiding concern with many Indian people about what occurs in their aboriginal territory. The Sierra NF honors the traditional ties that many tribal communities and Indian people have to this portion of the Sierra Nevada. Access to and use of the Forest and other public lands is critical for many Indian people, as community identity and cultural survival are dependent on continued access to ceremonial and sacred places, cemeteries, traditional gathering areas, archaeological sites, and resources at a variety of locations on forest land. Certain plants, animals, and locations provide for many needs, including food, medicine, utilitarian type materials, and ceremonial items. Specific resources insure that significant cultural traditions, such as basket weaving, survive and continue. These areas contribute to the tribal communities' way of life, their identity, their traditional practices and cohesiveness.

Consultation with tribes, the local Native American communities, and other interested parties to identify other cultural values, including contemporary Native American interests, was initiated with a Public Scoping Letter that was sent on August 31, 2007, to members and groups in the Native American community in accordance with the Sierran PA, NHPA, and other laws and regulations. Consultation has consisted of meetings, letters, and presentations, and is documented in the project record.

In the area of potential effect, the results of thirty years of cultural resource surveys and investigations have identified 15 archaeological properties that are associated with themes of Sierra NF history. Most sites represent prehistoric life ways; other sites represent historic-era land uses. All of the cultural sites were monitored to determine their current condition and risk of adverse effects.

The Sierra NF manages those cultural resources which are eligible for listing on the NRHP. The Forest does not manage or protect ineligible properties in project activities, unless there is local interest in preservation. NRHP eligibility has not been determined for every archaeological property in the project area. Unevaluated sites are considered potentially eligible, and managed as if eligible. The Sierran PA allows for deferred NRHP evaluation if the property would not be affected by the project, usually through application of Standard Protection Measures.

Contemporary Native American interests can include traditional cultural properties (sites associated with cultural practices or beliefs that are rooted in history and important in maintaining cultural identity), and plant gathering sites for basket materials, medicines, and food resources. The Sierra NF manages such known sites as cultural resources under the provisions of the NHPA, but where the interests of native people are considered to achieve a mutually beneficial outcome during project implementation. The location of these sites is also kept administratively confidential. The Sierra NF will maintain appropriate access to sacred and ceremonial sites, and to tribal traditional use areas, and has consulted with affected tribes and tribal communities to address access to culturally important resources and areas in this project analysis.

Methodology for Analysis

Data Sources

Existing information from cultural resource records, historic archives, maps, and GIS spatial layers was reviewed to provide specific information about historic properties, or the likelihood that unidentified properties might exist in non-inventoried areas.

The majority of the project had been adequately surveyed for prior projects between 1979 and 1994. In 2007 and 2008, additional surveys were completed in previously unsurveyed areas. For

areas that had never been surveyed, new survey was conducted using a combination of intensive (0 – 30 meter transects) and cursory (50+ meter transects) coverage. Intensive survey was done in clear and/or non-steep terrain. Cursory survey was done where terrain was very steep or had dense brush cover.

Information about the survey, location of historic properties, and the nature of past or current effects, is available for those cultural resources within the area of potential effect, as documented in the archaeological inventory reports for the proposed project (Veilleux/Popelish 2007 and 2008). These reports, which describe the location and composition of the archaeological sites, are kept administratively confidential under the provisions of the Archaeological Resource Protection Act of 1979, 36 CFR 296.

Spatial Analysis

The location of the historic property is the unit of spatial analysis when considering effects in action alternatives. For some historic properties (e.g., Traditional Cultural Property), the setting beyond the historic property's location must also be considered when determining whether an adverse effect will occur.

Effects Timeframes

- Short-term effects occur within one year.
- Long-term effects occur up to 20 years.
- Cumulative effects are analyzed at a 20-year interval.

Measurement Indicator and Rationale

When assessing direct, indirect, and cumulative effects, assessments are based on a historic property possessing at least one of the following NRHP values (36 CFR 60.4(a – d)) unless specific information already exists:

- Prehistoric archaeological site: Criterion D
- Historic archaeological sites: Criterion D
- Historic structures: Criterion C

An undertaking can have no effect, no adverse effect, or an adverse effect. An adverse effect to a historic property can occur when an undertaking directly or indirectly causes alterations in its character or use. An adverse effect on a historic property occurs when an undertaking alters its important characteristics and is measured by the degree to which it diminishes its **location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling or association** (Integrity Measures) (36 CFR 800.5(a)(1)). These integrity measures can also be used to characterize the nature of any potential effects, whether they are direct, indirect or cumulative effects; and their severity. The degree to which historic property values are diminished will be used to measure the direct, indirect and cumulative effects of the proposed undertaking.

When the nature and scope of a proposed undertaking is such that its effects can be reasonably predicted and appropriate measures can be undertaken to ensure that the values of cultural resources or historic properties are not affected in any way, than those cultural resources or historic properties may be managed in a manner which ensures that their values are preserved by using the Standard Protection Measures outlined in the Sierran PA.

Alternative 1 – No Action

Direct and Indirect Effects

Under this alternative, no fuels reduction land management activities would occur. Current management plans would continue to guide management of the project area.

Direct effects under this alternative could happen should a conflagration occur. The lack of fuel reduction management could result in higher intensity wildfires, thereby adversely affecting cultural resources, especially those with wooden components. Should a conflagration occur, indirect effects could occur as a result of increased access to and visibility of cultural resources, increasing the likelihood of artifact looting.

Cumulative Effects

Cumulative effects on cultural resources can be variable as past, current and future actions within the project area have occurred and may continue in the future (i.e. logging activities, road construction). Historic logging and road construction activities did not account for the presence of cultural resources. As no action would occur under this alternative, cumulative effects are unlikely.

Alternative 2 – Proposed Action

Direct and Indirect Effects

There are a total of fourteen cultural resource sites that have the potential to be affected by implementing this alternative. One of these sites is an historic railroad logging system that has thirteen features that have the potential to be affected. These features include: spur grades, a flume, and log chutes that retain intact earthworks; camps and trash dumps; and log chutes with sheave posts. All of these cultural resource sites and historic features will be protected through avoidance (Sierran PA, Attachment 7, Stipulation II.B).

In addition, four of the cultural resource sites have forest road or site conflicts on roads identified for reconstruction needs through the proposed action. With additional protection measures such as padding the site with gravel, staying within the existing road prism or no reconstruction within specified site areas, there will be no effect to these sites (Sierran PA, Attachment 7, Stipulation II.B).

By implementing the Standard Protection Measures outlined in the Sierran PA, no historic values would be diminished as a result of implementing this alternative. There will be no direct or indirect effects to cultural resources under Alternative 2.

Cumulative Effects

As all heritage resource sites will be avoided through project design from current project activities and predictable future project activities, it is anticipated there will be no cumulative effects from this action alternative.

Alternative 3

Direct and Indirect Effects

Effects would be the same as Alternative 2.

Cumulative Effects

Cumulative effects would be the same as Alternative 2.

Alternative 4

Direct and Indirect Effects

Effects would be the same as Alternative 2.

Cumulative Effects

Cumulative effects would be the same as Alternative 2.