Transportation

Affected Environment

The transportation system (roads) within the project area provides needed access for public use of the National Forest and access to private lands. Most roads receive low traffic volume, but are considered important by their users for dispersed recreation experiences of many types. Maintenance level 1 and 2 roads are generally open to legal OHV use. These roads also provide needed access for Forest Service administrative uses including fire suppression, fuels reduction, recreation administration, timber harvest, reforestation, and assessment of biological resources.

Reduced funding and road maintenance activities associated with timber harvest have limited opportunities to maintain the road system to proper standards. It is estimated that 80% of the road system within the Sugar Pine Adaptive Management Project area fails to meet current road maintenance standards.

The existing transportation system for the Sugar Pine Adaptive Management Project consists of approximately 39.5 miles of National Forest Transportation System (NFTS) roads. Madera County maintains 1.5 miles of roadway. Mariposa County maintains 0.1 miles of roadway. The transportation system for the analysis area is nearly complete. Small areas may be identified during project planning where minor amounts of new permanent road and temporary road construction are needed.

There are 33.4 miles of NFTS native and aggregate surfaced roads and approximately 6.1 miles of paved roadway. These native surfaced roads are not suited for wet weather use due to erosive soils and lack of armoring.

Most system roads are in poor condition and are experiencing erosion problems due to lack of proper road maintenance, wet weather use, and erosive soils. Many of the local roads have received little to no maintenance over the years and will require heavy maintenance and/or reconstruction to eliminate resource damage and meet acceptable standards established in the Forest Service Handbook 7709.58.

Alternative 1 – No Action

Direct, Indirect and Cumulative Effects

Under the No Action alternative, no project activities would take place. Existing road maintenance and reconstruction needed to eliminate resource damage and support equipment access would not take place. There would be no road reconstruction activities on local roads and no new road construction would be needed. The transportation system for the area would continue to receive only minimal, if any maintenance with continued potential for loss of infrastructure investment from erosion, wet weather use and brush encroachment.

Alternative 2 – Proposed Action

Direct, Indirect and Cumulative Effects

The highest priority for Bass Lake Ranger District road management will continue to be safety for the traveling public and employees and improvement and restoration of roads with resource or access needs. Road maintenance and reconstruction will be required for identified roads that do not meet acceptable standards for the proposed service level and transportation system. This work may include installation of culverts, rolling dips, water bars; and aggregate surfacing where soil

erosion is evident; riprap at outlets of culverts, dips and water bars when needed; and minor clearing and widening to a 12-foot road width for equipment access. NFTS roads used for this project will be kept open for public use during sale and post sale activities. Existing landings, skid trails, and temporary roads will be used for timber access, when available.

The Sugar Pine Adaptive Management project is proposing to perform road maintenance and/or road reconstruction activities on all or portions of roads 5S06, 5S17, 5S17X, 5S18, 5S22Y, 5S22YA, 5S79, 5S79A, 6S07, 6S10, 6S47Y, 6S90 and 6S90D. These roads will require a final field review prior to project activities to determine complete road reconstruction and/or road maintenance needs.

The logging systems plan has identified approximately 0.2 miles of new road construction and approximately 0.5 miles of temporary road construction for unit access. After project completion, the new road will remain open to allow access to Yosemite Trails Pack Station facilities; however, all temporary roads will be closed. These roads will require a final field review prior to project activities to determine complete road construction design needs.

There are 26 recorded archeological and historical sites within the Sugar Pine Adaptive Management Project area. A preliminary map review of the location of recorded sites and specified roads shows four road/site conflicts. These road/site conflicts are of minimal concern because of the limited impact of the continued use of the roads, the limited significance of the sites, or the conflicts are easily mitigated.

There is one section of existing forest road 6S90 that was built on previously constructed Madera Sugar Pine Railroad grade. Road 6S90 is scheduled for reconstruction including widening three curves to allow chip van truck access. This will not further affect the historical integrity of the grade.

There are four sites where proposed maintenance or reconstruction of the roads running through them may cause an impact that could be mitigated. The roads that have the most serious road/site conflicts are 5S18, 5S22Y, 5S22YA, and 5S79 which are scheduled for reconstruction.

Planned new road construction, temporary road construction, road reconstruction and road maintenance activities for the Sugar Pine Adaptive Management Project will be reviewed by the District Archeologist to develop mitigation requirements for archeological or road site conflicts prior to work activities.

This relatively low traffic volume road system has received less maintenance in recent years. These roads, mostly maintenance level 2, comprise most of the miles of the road system. Many of them are brushing in and washing out. The results are negative effects on access and environmental resources and loss of the infrastructure investment.

The greatest surface erosion problems occur in highly erodible terrain where existing drainages structures have become non functional due to lack of adequate road maintenance activities and/or wet weather use. Road 6S90 was identified as a native surfaced road located in High Erosion risk soils including the Holland family. Road maintenance and or reconstruction treatments would be considered to reduce the possible adverse effects to water quality and wildlife habitat.

Existing road densities, in general, are acceptable from a wildlife perspective. However, any system roads or unclassified roads not needed should be decommissioned to enhance wildlife habitat and reduce road densities to a more desired level.

Alternative 3

Direct, Indirect and Cumulative Effects

The effects of this alternative would be similar to Alternative 2, since there would be no change in types of activities occurring and utilizing the project area transportation system.

Alternative 4

Direct, Indirect and Cumulative Effects

The effects of this alternative would be similar to Alternative 2, since there would be no change in types of activities occurring and utilizing the project area transportation system.