

Nomination Received by Council on Environmental Quality, Executive Office of the President
For the CEQ NEPA Pilot Project Program
<http://www.whitehouse.gov/administration/eop/ceq/initiatives/nepa/nepa-pilot-project-nominations>

PART I. NOMINATOR

First Name:	James
Last Name:	Freeman
Organization:	USDA Forest Service
Project Title:	Rancheria Forest Restoration Project
Submitted by:	Member of the Public
Date Received:	June 14, 2011

PART II. SHORT ANSWERS

I. What Federal agency or agencies will be involved in this pilot project?

USDA Forest Service

II. What is the Federal action to which this NEPA pilot project applies?

The proposed NEPA pilot project is the Rancheria Forest Restoration Project on the Sequoia National Forest which is using the entire suite of the electronic Modernization of NEPA (eMNEPA) tools (a suite that is applicable on any Forest Service action). Specifically, we would like to illustrate how the eMNEPA suite of time and cost saving electronic tools are being utilized on the project.

eMNEPA is a web-based system used for Forest Service planning, appeals, and litigation tracking; document storage, tracking, and publishing to the public web; NEPA project website standardization and public comment and response. The Sequoia NF is using all of eMNEPA’s tools to improve and make electronic their entire NEPA process of project tracking, documentation, and public comment and response.

III. How will this pilot project reduce the costs and time needed to complete the NEPA process?

The Rancheria Project utilizes the entire electronic modernization of NEPA (eMNEPA) suite of tools that reduce the cost and time burdens associated with the NEPA process. By processing comments and publishing project information both electronically, the amount of physical documentation the USFS creates for this project and time spent managing this process relation for this project is reduced.

Currently, the Rancheria Project is in the scoping phase and the eMNEPA tools have enabled the project to quickly collect and respond to public feedback. The public can comment electronically and provide feedback earlier in the process so that future rework of the initial NEPA analysis will be reduced. Moreover, comments received by the project can be electronically sorted, categorized, and analyzed. This utility saves the USFS additional time and effort.

As the project progresses, efficiency will be further increased as data and information are centrally located online and easily accessible to the public on the Forest’s web page. The agency can easily

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post updates, which reduces the number of information/data requests that the agency must respond to. This information can be left available indefinitely, creating an electronic library of project information for the public's reference. Providing information to the public through electronic means lessens the financial burden to the agency by reducing manual processing and material costs.

IV. How will this pilot project ensure rigorous environmental protection?

The Rancheria Project proposes fuel treatments in an ecologically diverse area known for intense wildfires and home to protected and endangered species. The area has been identified by the Sequoia National Forest as a priority area in need of treatment to reduce risk of severe wildfires. Stakeholders for this project vary widely and include environmental groups, state and local governments, air quality specialists, forestry & timber industries, tribal members, and landowners.

The eMNEPA suite of tools enhances rigorous environmental protection by ensuring the agency is able to collect and evaluate the information needed to make an environmentally responsible decision. The project accomplishes this by publishing proposed project information to easily-accessible websites and soliciting input through a user-friendly web form.

By making opportunities for comment easy, early, and often, the agency can collect and incorporate new information that the public provides (such as new science or local information). Moreover, the suite of eMNEPA tools automates the posting of NEPA information for collecting, reviewing, and responding to public feedback, allowing disciplinary specialists to spend more time and energy on environmental studies/analyses rather than on administrative tasks. The public is often in a position to identify ways in which a proposed action will impact them socially and economically. By utilizing a quick and easy means for information dissemination and comment collection, the eMNEPA tools will increase the amount of public input on all aspects of the process, including socioeconomics, which can be overlooked in a process that generally focuses on the natural environment.

V. How will this pilot project improve the quality and transparency of agency decisionmaking?

In addition to what we have outlined in the previous sections, the eMNEPA approach to the Rancheria Project increases transparency around decision making, ultimately improving its quality. The Rancheria Project uses the eMNEPA suite of tools to publish and continuously update project specific information onto the Internet. These tools also enable project staff to aggregate comments from the public and respond to them via the Internet.

In short, greater transparency intrinsically improves the quality of environmental decision-making. Increased public access to project information via the Internet, improves decision making efficiency, reduces costs, and can help produce better decisions. Through the Internet, we are able to inform and solicit input from academics, scientists, and interest groups. The external community of experts is able to analyze the project's published information, correct it, and provide suggestions for improvement. Moreover, there is great public interest in the Rancheria Project; the project information that the agency releases empowers the educated and informed citizenry to provide targeted and relevant feedback that will influence the project's final outcome.

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VI. Will this pilot project develop best practices that can be replicated by other agencies or applied to other Federal actions or programs? Please describe?

The Rancheria Project's use of the eMNEPA suite of electronic tools to complete the NEPA process could be easily replicated by other agencies. The Rancheria Project's use of the eMNEPA tool set demonstrates the toolset's usefulness at providing electronic comment collection, review, and response more efficiently. Using a standard toolset would allow management to develop process guidelines that incorporate best practices and reflect local and national policy/guidance. This pilot project will provide potential guidance on project information timing and frequency of publication, when to solicit public feedback, and suggested methodologies for comment analysis.

NEPA projects such as the Rancheria Project that have broad public interest may receive many comments. The Rancheria Project uses the comment management tool to aggregate the comments and categorize them by shared attributes. This allows project staff the opportunity to more consistently respond to similar comments by grouping them into key areas of concern. By making this information available to others in the agency, the knowledge of how comments were responded to on one project can easily be transferred to other teams working on other projects of a similar nature.

Agencies seeking to solicit input from the public may have trouble selecting which information to release to assist the public in providing targeted and relevant feedback. The Rancheria Project's experience will help others to provide the right type of information in sufficient quantities to ensure relevant feedback from the public.

PART III. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

(See attachment on following page.)

Attachment

The project that is proposed to be included as a part of the CEO's NEPA Pilot program is the electronic modernization of NEPA (eMNEPA) toolset that is utilized by the Sequoia National Forest's Rancheria Forest Restoration Project. This project is a forest management project aimed at reducing the potential for crown fires on the Sequoia National Forest. Crown fires are threatening to human communities, but also destroy wildlife habitat, reduce water quality, and increase risks of subsequent natural disasters such as mud slides. The Rancheria project is currently in the scoping phase of the analysis and is seeking public input on the proposed action.

The Rancheria project utilizes the full suite of electronic tools provided by the Forest Service's Electronic Modernization of NEPA (eMNEPA) program. These tools provide the electronic means to distribute information to the public and receive input throughout the NEPA process. eMNEPA has helped improve and modernize the NEPA process for over seven years, but the Rancheria project is the first to use the entire suite of tools.

All resources are currently in place for full implementation of all eMNEPA tools at the Forest Service and could be replicated at other agencies in the very near term. The eMNEPA program and the Sequoia's use of the full suite of tools helps further the Administration's Open Government initiative and the recent Customer Service Executive Order.

The eMNEPA program and the Sequoia's use of the tools reduces administrative costs through electronic distribution and capture of information, ensures environmental protection by improving data flows between the public and the agency, makes the decision-making process more transparent and improves the quality of decisions by easily incorporating public information. Additionally, it could easily be used to gain lessons-learned about managing NEPA electronically for other agencies wishing to implement a similar system.

To give a full picture of how the tools meet the nomination criteria, below are actual screenshots of public-facing portions of the Rancheria project that are supported by eMNEPA.

The Forest enters project information and updates in one place, which first is published to the web via their Schedule of Proposed Actions (SOPA) website:

Forest Service Home > Projects and Policies > SOPA > Sequoia National Forest

Forest Service Schedule of Proposed Actions for the Sequoia National Forest

Current SOPA Report
 (NOTE: The SOPA report is available in a separate browser window.)

April 2011

The current environment should be different.

For more space

Past SOPA Reports
 (NOTE: The SOPA report is available in a separate browser window.)

January 2011

October 2010

July 2010

April 2010

January 2010

October 2009

July 2009 through September 2009 [html](#) (130.9 KBs) [pdf](#) (62.8 KBs)

Past SOPA Reports are provided for historical purposes only.

What is a SOPA?
 How to read the SOPA (Legend)

Schedule Of Proposed Action - 04/01/2011 to 06/30/2011 - Sequoia National Forest - Windows Internet Explorer

fs.fed.us/sopa/components/reports/sopa-110513-2011-04.html#19

Schedule Of Proposed Action - 04/01/2011 to 06/30/2011

Location: UNIT - Kern River Ranger District. STATE - California. COUNTY - Kern. LEGAL - Piute Mountains, Sequoia National Forest. Piute Mountains, south of Lake Isabella, California.					
RANCHERIA FOREST RESTORATION PROJECT EA	- Forest products - Vegetation management (other than forest products) - Fuels management	Developing Proposal Est. Scoping Start 04/2011	Expected:09/2011	06/2012	Penelope Shibley 760-376-3781 pshibley@fs.fed.us
Description: Implement a forest thinning project in the Oak Ridge area of the Greenhorn Mountains. Project formerly referred to as the Revised Sawmill Forest Health and Fuels Reduction Project					
Location: UNIT - Kern River Ranger District. STATE - California. COUNTY - Kern. LEGAL - T25 and 26S, R31 and 32E, MDBM. Oak Ridge area, Greenhorn Mountains.					
REVISION 1 to REVISED ICE	- Forest products	In Progress:	Expected:04/2011	07/2011	Steve Anderson 760-376-3781

Internet | Protected Mode: On

Then, project information is easily accessed on the Sequoia website (along with other Forest NEPA projects) in an easy-to-read format that is consistent across Forest Service units. Additionally, it is easy to find projects by sorting them by name, project status, management unit, or purpose. There is also an archive at the bottom of the Sequoia's page that shows older projects:

USDA United States Department of Agriculture Forest Service Forest Service NEPA Projects

Forest Service Home About the Agency Contact the National Office

FS NEPA Information

- Home
- Sequoia National Forest
 - NEPA Projects
 - SOPA Reports
 - Appeal Responses
 - Objection Responses

Contact Information

Sequoia National Forest
1839 South Newcomb St
Porterville, CA 93257
(559) 784-1500

Go to main Sequoia National Forest web site

You are here: [NEPA Home](#) / Sequoia National Forest NEPA Projects

Sequoia National Forest NEPA Projects

Projects are proposed actions that are analyzed through the NEPA process (EIS, EA, or CE) that involves analyzing different alternatives to the proposed action, requires public notice and comment, and results in a NEPA decision (ROD, DN, or DM) which, subject to an administrative appeals process, and is implemented on the ground. The Forest Projects below are projects that we are analyzing or have analyzed under the NEPA process. Projects that are "Developing Proposal" or "Under Analysis" may have an opportunity for public collaboration and input on the proposed actions and the analysis being conducted.

Forest Links

- SOPA Reports
- Appeal Responses
- Objection Responses

NEPA Resources

- FS NEPA Procedures and Guidance
- NEPA Links
- CEQ's NEPA.net
- CEQ's Guide to NEPA

Sequoia National Forest Current and Recent Projects

Sort By: Name Status Management Unit Purpose

Developing Proposal

FOREST PLAN REVISION (SQF)

The Sequoia National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan was developed in 1988, and a Mediated Settlement Agreement was completed in 1990. The Kings River Wild and Scenic River and Special Management Area Implementation Plan in 1991, the Presidential Proclamation establishing the Giant Sequoia National Monument in 2000, the Sierra Nevada Forest Plan Amendment of 2001, and the Sierra Nevada Forests Management Indicator Species Amendment of 2007 amended many, but not all, of the elements of these forest plan documents. The Pacific Southwest Region of the Forest Service (Region 5) has begun the process of revising the land management plans for national forests in California, including the Sequoia National Forest.

OSA MEADOW RESTORATION PROJECT

The Osa Meadow Restoration Project proposes three activities: gully elimination using the pond-and-plug technique, incorporating whole trees into the meadow channel and ponds, and staging and installing a rock/vegetation valley grade feature at the lower end of the meadow. These measures would be taken to address the need to restore the natural meadow and stream water table, stream channel characteristics, and vegetation components.

PIUTE MOUNTAIN MEADOW RESTORATION PROJECT

The Piute Mountain Meadow Restoration Project includes restoration treatments in French and Mack Meadows, located in the Piute Mountains of the Kern River Ranger District. The ranger district proposes to install and plant willow fascines, install bank erosion pins, install a floodplain relief culvert where Road 28S24 crosses Bright Start Creek below Mack Meadow, remove a ditch across the road and overside drain, and install a fence to keep cattle out of the meadows during the restoration work.

RANCHERIA FOREST RESTORATION PROJECT

The Rancheria Forest Restoration Project was formerly referred to as the Revised

When you select the project you're interested in, it takes you to a one-stop-shop for project information and documents. You can also subscribe to mailing list updates, request more information, or comment on the project:



USDA United States Department of Agriculture
Forest Service

Forest Service NEPA Projects

Forest Service Home About the Agency Contact the National Office

FS NEPA Information

- Home
- Sequoia National Forest
 - NEPA Projects
 - SOPA Reports
 - Appeal Responses
 - Objection Responses

Contact Information

Sequoia National Forest
4875 Ponderosa Drive
P.O. Box 3810
Lake Isabella, CA 93240
(760) 379-5646

Go to main Sequoia National Forest web site
You are here: [NEPA Home](#) / [Sequoia National Forest NEPA Projects](#) / RANCHERIA FOREST RESTORATION PROJECT

RANCHERIA FOREST RESTORATION PROJECT

The Rancheria Forest Restoration Project was formerly referred to as the Revised Sawmill Forest Health and Fuels Reduction Project. It is located along the ridgeline of the Greenhorn Mountains, adjacent to Rancheria Road near the community of Alta Sierra. In collaboration with the Kern River Valley Fire Safe Council, the Forest Service has determined the need to reduce the risk of uncharacteristically severe wildfire in this area. The purpose of the Rancheria Forest Restoration Project is to design and implement vegetation treatments that would restore the forest to a healthy, diverse, and fire-resilient condition and reduce fuel loads.

NEW: [Click here](#) or click on the "Comment on Project" link from this project's page to comment on this project by submitting attachments or text comments via our new web form!

Project Navigation

- Project Overview
- Planning Detail
- Project Location

Get Connected

- Request More Info
- Comment on Project
- Subscribe to Email Updates

Forest Links

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- Appeal Responses
- Objection Responses

NEPA Resources

- FS NEPA Procedures and Guidance
- NEPA Links
- CEQ's NEPA.net
- CEQ's Guide to NEPA

Location Summary

Oak Ridge area, Greenhorn Mountains
District: Kern River Ranger District

Project Documents

Scoping Documents

- Scoping Letter, May 2010 (PDF 76kb)
- Project Vicinity Map (PDF 650kb)
- Proposed Action Document (PDF 3833kb)
- Map of Other Fuels Reduction Projects (PDF 8027kb)

The project information is spread across three pages (Project Overview, Planning Detail, and Project Location) so as to not overcrowd one page and for easier reading than the SOPA. The project location page could even have a Google Map showing the approximate location of the analysis area. As shown in the below example from another project. This map would be reproduced on the Forest NEPA page, showing all projects (also shown below).

Salmon-Challis National Forest NEPA Projects

Projects are proposed actions that are analyzed through the NEPA process (EIS, EA, or CE) that involves analyzing different alternatives to the proposed action, requires public notice and comment, and results in a NEPA decision (ROD, DN, or DM) which, subject to an administrative appeals process, and is implemented on the ground. The Forest Projects below are projects that we are analyzing or have analyzed under the NEPA process. Projects that are "Developing Proposal" or "Under Analysis" may have an opportunity for public collaboration and input on the proposed actions and the analysis being conducted.

Forest Links

[SOPA Reports](#)

[Appeal Responses](#)

[Objection Responses](#)

NEPA Resources

[FS NEPA Procedures and Guidance](#)

[NEPA Links](#)

[CEQ's NEPANet](#)

[CEQ's Guide to NEPA](#)

Salmon-Challis National Forest Current and Recent Projects



Note: Not all projects may appear on map. See list below for complete list of projects with more information or documentation.

Sort By: Name Status Management Unit Purpose

If you want to comment on the project, the webpage provides a comment web form when the agency is formally soliciting comments and project contact information when the agency is not soliciting comments. The comment web sends comments to the agency's comment analysis tool that organizes and flags comments for early attention, if necessary. Additionally, by putting in your contact information and indicating you'd prefer to be contacted by mail or e-mail, eMNEPA will subscribe you to the appropriate mailing list to receive updates on the project, as they are available.

[Go back to main project page](#)

RANCHERIA FOREST RESTORATION PROJECT #33846

Commenting on This Project

The Forest Service values public input. Comments received, including respondents' names and addresses, will become part of the public record for this proposed action. Comments submitted anonymously will be accepted and considered; however, anonymous comments will not provide the agency with the ability to provide you with project updates. The Forest Service wishes to provide you with as many opportunities as possible to learn about our activities.

To be most useful, your comments are requested by 6/14/2011.

Documents

Document	Size
Proposed Action Document	3833kb
Scoping Letter, May 2010	76kb
Project Vicinity Map	650kb

Comments, or other expressions of interest, along with respondent's contact information, must be received during the comment period to establish a respondent's eligibility to participate in any administrative review. The legal notice of opportunity to comment on this proposed action is the exclusive means for calculating the comment period. The legal notice announcing the comment period appears in the Newspaper of Record.

Option to Submit Comment Electronically

The form below can be used to submit your comments to the responsible project official.

Organization	<input type="text"/>		
Title	<input type="text"/>	Official Representative Type	<input type="text"/>
First Name	<input type="text"/>	Last Name	<input type="text"/>
Address 1	<input type="text"/>	Address 2	<input type="text"/>
City	<input type="text"/>	State	<input type="text"/>
Province/Region	<input type="text"/>	Zip/Postal Code	<input type="text"/>
Country	<input type="text" value="United States"/>	Preferred Contact Method	<input type="text" value="Email"/>
Email	<input type="text"/>	Phone Number	<input type="text"/>
Letter Text	<div style="border: 1px solid #ccc; height: 100px; width: 100%;"></div>		

Attachments

(Total file upload size cannot exceed 10 MBs.)

I have worked with the Forest Service toward implementing these tools for over a year but believe that this approach to presenting and receiving NEPA information could be applied across the Federal Government and would improve the consistency, transparency, efficiency, and effectiveness of the NEPA process.