

Decision Memorandum on Action and for Application of:

Categorical Exclusion for Hazardous Fuels Reduction Activities (43 CFR 46.210(k))

Lehman Flat Fuels Reduction

U.S. Department of the Interior
National Park Service
Great Basin National Park
White Pine County, NV

Purpose of and Need for Action

Fires are a natural part of ecosystems. Many plants and animals evolved under frequent, low intensity fires. Native Americans across used fires as a tool to modify and improve their environment. The evidence of this fire history is well preserved in soils, tree rings and burn scars, ethnographic accounts, and historic photos and journals. A century ago, fire management shifted to a policy of exclusion. Fires were aggressively suppressed, and human use of fire was virtually eliminated. This policy had dramatic impacts. Fuels accumulated, grassland and sagebrush vegetation disappeared, and wildlife like sage grouse declined. Active fuels reduction can reduce fire size and intensity, protect human life and property, and reduce catastrophic post-fire flooding.

This project will reduce fuels and restore sagebrush, riparian, and wet meadow habitat on approximately 65 acres in Lehman Flat. Fuels reductions have occurred in the project area several times since 2004. Project goals are to reduce fuel loads, protect park infrastructure, and private property from catastrophic wildfire, and restore native plant communities. Project objectives are to reduce conifer cover to <5%. Chainsaws would be used to cut conifers. Slash would be piled for future burning, lopped, and scattered or chipped. Revegetation of native forbs, grasses and shrubs and herbicide treatments for annual grasses and invasive forbs would be conducted as needed.

This project area is part of PEPC 71113 (A Wicked Problem: Improving restoration and fuels reduction through adaptive management) but is being reviewed again to ensure compliance is complete and adequate (PEPC 111779).

The following prescriptions will be used to reduce fuels in the project area.

- Reduce conifer cover to less than five percent.
- Use chainsaws to cut pinyon, juniper, mountain mahogany and white fir, including young seedling trees. Do not cut Ponderosa pine or aspen.
- Trees will be cut as low to the ground as possible. Flush cut stumps.
- Slash and cut material will be piled, lopped and scattered, chipped or made available as firewood.
- Maximum slash pile size will be 10 feet in diameter by 8 feet in height, and minimum pile size will be 5 feet in diameter by 3 feet in height.

- Slash piles will be located to minimize damage to live vegetation during burn operations.
- Seeding of native forbs, grasses, and shrubs, as needed.

Cut material and slash will be removed by a combination of mechanical chipping (brush chipper), firewood disposal, and prescribed fire (pile burn). National Park Service, U.S. Forest Service or contract crews will conduct thinning treatments. NPS fire crews will conduct pile burns after a burn plan is developed, approved, and burn plan conditions are met.

Plan Conformance

The Proposed Action is consistent with the General Management Plan and Fire Management Plan. The Proposed Action was designed in conformance with all bureau standards and incorporates appropriate guidelines for specific required and desired conditions relevant to project activities.

Compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act

The Proposed Action is categorically excluded from further documentation under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) in accordance with 43 CFR 46.210 (1) because the project area is less than 1,000 acres, falls within the wildland-urban interface, and contains Fire Regime Condition Classes 2 and 3.

The application of this categorical exclusion is appropriate in this situation because there are no extraordinary circumstances potentially having effects which may significantly affect the environment. None of the extraordinary circumstances listed in 43 CFR 46.215 apply to the Proposed Action.

There were no pertinent situations that arose during the design of activities and no potential for significant effects to natural or cultural resources or public health and safety.

Persons and Agencies Consulted

An interdisciplinary team was consulted during the development of the proposed action. No further steps were taken based on the findings and suggestions from this team. The project will be made public through the PEPC website for 10 days.

Decision and Rationale

I have decided to implement a fuels reduction project on Lehman Flat within Great Basin National Park. Tree removal (chainsaw thinning) will occur on 65 acres to reduce fuels and restore sagebrush, riparian, and wet meadow habitat. Park staff designed the undertaking to avoid causing direct, indirect, and/or cumulative impacts to adjacent NHPA resources. No direct, indirect, and/or cumulative effects will occur to adjacent NHPA resources during project implementation or after the undertaking is complete. A map of the project area is available from the project lead and on the PEPC website ([PEPC 111779 \(nps.gov\)](https://www.nps.gov/pepc/111779)). These actions meet the need for action. In addition, I have reviewed the plan conformance statement and have determined that the proposed action is in conformance with the approved land use plan and that no further environmental analysis or documentation is required.

Implementation Date

This project will be implemented on or after November 7, 2022.

James Woolsey
James Woolsey, Superintendent

11/7/2022
Date

Administrative Review or Appeal Opportunities

Not applicable as the National Park Service has no administrative appeals process.

Contact Person

For additional information concerning this decision, contact Margaret Horner, Biologist, 775-234-7562.