

Attachment 11C(1)

Explanatory Note for the Office of Wildland Fire Coordination May 3, 2010

Attached is the Office of Wildland Fire Coordination's (OWFC) National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) Report as required under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) of 2009, Section 1609(c). The OWFC was approved for ARRA funding under one Treasury Appropriations Fund: Hazardous Fuels Reduction, WUI.

Projects Withdrawn in the OWFC Report – One project was withdrawn during the fourth reporting cycle. It was determined that the land status changes resulting from passage of the Omnibus Public Lands Management Act of 2009 would have required new NEPA for the project, and that the class of NEPA would have been an EIS, which could not have been completed in the timeframe mandated by the ARRA.

New Entries in the OWFC report – No new project has been entered in the report since the previous report.

Consolidation of NEPA Actions – For increased transparency and because of the relatively limited number of projects, OWFC projects are listed individually; we have not grouped projects.

Compliance Documents Completed Prior to ARRA -- For some projects, compliance documents were completed several years ago. For each of these projects, we have confirmed that there are no significant new circumstances or information relevant to environmental concerns and bearing on the proposed action or its impacts, and that the conditions of and around the projects have not changed significantly.

Pending Categorical Exclusion Actions -- All NEPA actions have been completed for projects that were proposed to be implemented under categorical exclusions.

Pending Environmental Assessment Actions – No environmental assessments remain pending.

Change in Total Pending NEPA Actions Since Previous Report – There was only one EA pending reported in the last report. That project has since been completed. All environmental documentation for the 56 ARRA projects has been completed. Additionally, the number of projects needing completion of federal environmental reviews and documents decreased from 21 percent of all projects to 5 percent during this reporting period.

Class of Action Changes -- No project had a class of action change since the previous report.

Difference Between Appropriation and Total Obligations to Date – Most of the hazardous fuels projects are being implemented through contracts, which are not awarded until all environmental reviews and documents are completed. Implementation of the projects is usually dependent on seasonal effects, such as weather conditions and wildlife habitat considerations. Contracting officials prioritize contract preparation based, in part, on when the contract could be implemented. On-the-ground implementation occurs shortly after a contract is award. Once

proper conditions for implementing the remaining projects nears, we expect a sharp increase in the hazardous fuels project contract obligations as well as outlays.

Examples of How NEPA for ARRA Projects Has Been Beneficial to Project Planning, Design or Implementation – Recovery Act Hazardous Fuels Reduction projects are a small, but highly visible, component of the Department’s Hazardous Fuels Reduction Program. The Department implements several thousand hazardous fuel reduction projects annually. The 56 Recovery Act projects in Hazardous Fuels Reduction do not “break new ground” in terms of NEPA, as they were generally “shovel ready”, with much environmental planning underway or completed prior to the passage of the Recovery Act. The Bureaus integrated the NEPA process with other planning at the earliest possible time to insure that planning and decisions reflect environmental values, avoid delays later in the process, and head off potential conflicts.

The ARRA Hazardous Fuels Reduction projects are model projects that serve as local high-profile examples of public outreach and participation, planning and implementation. Each project is used to showcase, within the local community, the potential benefits of utilizing woody materials that would otherwise be disposed of in landfills or burned in large piles during favorable weather conditions. At the same time, the projects showcase efforts to reduce hazardous accumulations of vegetation and woody fuel that pose potential wildfire risks to these same communities. A third major objective is the creation of employment within the community; biomass projects tend to be among the most labor-intensive of those that reduce hazardous fuels. Projects are identified either through the development of local, collaborative community wildfire protection plans, or to meet the objectives of land and resource management plans which often includes the protection of communities from the risk of wildfire as well.

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