

FINAL REPORT

for

California Department of Forestry & Fire Protection's
CALIFORNIA FOREST STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM

East Branch Fuels Reduction, Access Improvement,
and Erosion Control Project

Contract #: 8CA98026



East Branch of East Weaver Creek, near Weaverville

Prepared by:

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Background/Resource Problem

The accumulation of wildland fuels over time in rural areas of California is the problem that needs to be addressed by proactive efforts to protect lives, property, and resources. This realization led to the development of the East Branch Fire Management Plan, which is a community-based planning effort. This plan addresses fire safety and forest health opportunities for 31 rural residential parcels within the lower one-third of the East Branch watershed. The California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CDF), U.S. Forest Service, and private foresters have come to recognize that the expansion of homes into the 'wildland-urban interface' has created a potential for devastating loss of lives and forest resources.

Large fires have occurred in the project area in the past, and, despite all efforts, will probably occur again. The mix of residential development, forestland, hot summer weather, and limited road access, make fire and fuel management an important concern for area residents and land managers. The topography in East Weaver is best described as a canyon, where side slopes lead steeply up from the canyon floor. Due to the steepness of the hillslope, many of the homes were built relatively close to one another on the flatter terrain, separated only by wire fences and dense forest vegetation. Homes are situated on both sides of the canyon. Fire exclusion in the past, and the continued growth of forest vegetation, has resulted in many trees and shrubs becoming overcrowded and some are now showing signs of decline and mortality. Many such trees/shrubs can be found growing beneath the large conifer overstory. This creates a "fuel ladder", which allows small ground fires to be carried up into the crowns of the large trees. Proper steps to treat this situation must include a method to thin out dead woody fuel, densely packed "green" vegetation, and lower branches of leave trees.

Foresters, ecologists, wildlife biologists, and fire managers have developed strategies to allow for safer coexistence of people and forestlands. Prescriptions for maintaining healthy forest conditions generally call for reduced tree densities, elimination of "fuel ladders", and use of low intensity prescribed fire. Access to these areas is also critical for fire fighters. The East Branch Fire Management Plan calls for fuel breaks at strategic locations (see attached fuel break map), an emergency evacuation route, fuel modification including chipping, thinning, and fuel ladder removal, emergency access improvement, and prescribed low-intensity burns.

Since 1996 there has been an organized East Branch Forest/Fire Management Plan operating in a designated area of 910 acres in the East Branch Drainage. The planning process to date has brought together area residents, fire and forestry experts from CDF, Trinity County Planning Department, and USFS, the AmeriCorps program, Trinity County Resource Conservation District, Sierra Pacific Industries, and the Trinity River Conservation Camp. The East Branch

community has been conducting thinning projects and fuel ladder removal to create home defensible spaces. The USFS and CDF have been involved in planning for fuel breaks and prescribed burns on USFS lands. This project has been considered a very successful community and interagency endeavor: however, funding sources are limited. Much work remains to be accomplished with secured funding.

Project Location

The East Branch Community is located approximately 3 miles north of the town of Weaverville California in Trinity County (portions of Sections 18, 19, 29 and 30 T34N, R9W). The East Branch is a major tributary to East Weaver Creek, represents the northeastern most boundary of the community of Weaverville and contains one of the primary water sources for the community of Weaverville. This area is a relatively long narrow south-southwest slopes with an elevation range from 2,560' at the confluence of East Weaver and East Branch Creeks, to 3,670' at Mud Tunnel on Musser Ridge. These slope aspects contribute to extensive chaparral stands, while the bottom of the watershed contains a generally flat and heavily timbered stream canyon, where the majority of homes are located.

Summary of Project

The Forest Stewardship Program proposal for 1998 was to construct fuel breaks at strategic locations along the ridges and implement a prescribed burn utilizing Trinity River Conservation Camp crew. For emergency access improvement, this proposal intends to widen the road in 2 places (remove six tree stumps) and construct 3 turnouts, place 40 cubic yards of rock, 10 yard of rip rap, 20 yards of shale and install culverts. The road improvement amounts to 6/10 of a mile and was recommended by CDF for access improvement for fire protection and erosion control. Repairing storm damage to a double culvert creek crossing will prevent further erosion and sedimentation of East Branch Creek and improve access on East Branch Road. An emergency escape route is being constructed by CDF (utilizing a CDF tractor) and a gate (donated by Sierra Pacific Industries) was installed on this new road segment.

The TCRCD chipper and crew was utilized to chip material stacked along the road by landowners as part of the continuing effort to maintain fuels reduction work done in previous years.

Mark Lancaster, RPF, coordinated with the USFS regarding the planned wildlife habitat burn on Musser Hill which will extend over into the Garden Gulch drainage which already has Stewardship Incentive Program funding for some

fuels treatment. He ensured that fuels treatment was done in the Garden Gulch area as a preventive measure prior to the burn.

As part of an ongoing effort for education and outreach this project included the cost of printing additional color copies of the East Branch Forest/Fire Management Plan for distribution to interested individuals. It also provided for the development and printing of a color brochure that depicts the pertinent information about this project to inform other communities in the County about the success of a community-based fuels reduction and fire management plans. This project demonstrated an ecologically sensitive and economically viable method of fuels reduction that will reduce the risk of catastrophic fire and to promote future projects in other areas of Trinity County.

Number of Landowners and Acres Treated

There are 910 acres in the East Branch drainage with 31 private individuals, plus Sierra Pacific Industries (SPI) and the US Forest Service. Private rural residential lots range from less than one acre to twenty acres in size. SPI lands are zoned Timber Production Zone, which means that they are designated for long-term forest management and timber harvesting.



Neighborhood Meeting

Project Accomplishments

This project: 1) Upgraded road access and reduced erosion potential along the upper portion of East Branch Road, 2) Continued fuels reduction activities at homesites and along the primary access road, and 3) Continue education and outreach efforts. We attempted to treat fuel loadings by creating a recommended fuelbreak along the ridges identified on Forest Service lands and implement prescribed burns, but a new Survey and Manage requirement on Forest Service lands prevented our completing this portion of the project.

- Road Improvement Work and Erosion Control

Widened road, constructed turnouts to facilitate emergency access,
Installed culverts, placed rock and rip rap to minimize erosion,
Constructed emergency escape route (CDF) and install SPI donated gate.



Constructed turnout



Culvert installation

Fuel Modification

Organized and scheduled work crew
Chipped material along primary access road



Fuel Reduction Work along East Branch



Piles of material for chipping



RCD Chipper

- Education and Outreach

Printed 15 color copies of East Branch Forest/Fire Management Plan and developed brochure with highlights of the Plan for mass distribution to disseminate information about this successful community and inter-agency project.

Met with landowners in East Branch and other communities in Trinity County to continue education regarding fuel loading problems and fire hazard/risk situation.

Project Benefits

The benefits of this project include: improved forest health, reduced potential sedimentation, reduced risk of catastrophic fire destroying public and private lands and resources, and the continuation of another demonstration project for a community-based fuels reduction project on both private and public and industrial timberlands interface. This project continued implementation of the recommendations from the Fire Management Plan for the community that was developed as part of the 1996 Forest Stewardship Project. This Plan prioritizes the work in and around East Branch community. It also depicts the best location for community-wide fuel breaks to minimize the risk and potential damage of catastrophic fire. Recommendations of this Plan and input from community members are now being incorporated into the County-wide Strategic Fire Management Plan.

While the neighborhood has done a great deal to reduce the fuels buildup and improve access over the past several years, the harsh reality is that East Branch

Road is still an extremely narrow, dangerous road in a critical fire situation due to the limited access of a one lane road, limited turnouts, no safety zones, etc. There is more work to be done before we can consider East Branch a truly Fire Safe neighborhood.

Project Partners and Cooperators

- Doug Nowacki, TCRC D Director and East Branch resident, will provide equipment supervision, and serve as liaison between project and landowners
- John Condon, TCRC D, Project Manager, will provide oversight, supervision
- Bill Britton, Battalion Chief, CDF, Field Operations Coordinator and planning and implementation of Fuel breaks and prescribed burns
- Jim Spear, District Conservationist, Natural Resources Conservation Service, will consult on erosion control methods for the project
- Duane Shintaku, Area Forester, CDF, will assist in project planning, review, and implementation
- Steve Decker, US Forest Service, District Fire Management Officer, will consult on prescriptions, implementation of fuelbreaks and prescribed burns
- Pete Finnie, CDF Trinity River Conservation Camp Crews, will provide labor force
- Mark Lancaster, Registered Professional Forester, East Branch Forest/Fire Management Plan developer, will consult on prescriptions, education and outreach

The East Branch project had broad-based community and inter-agency support. This has been an on-going effort of several years and this project provided the funds to continue to develop and implement this important process.

Ongoing Efforts

Funds provided by the State Water Resources Control Board (Prop 204) are allowing additional fuels reduction work to take place in the East Branch community as well as to develop a Strategic Fire Plan for Trinity County and the creation of the Trinity County Fire Safe Council. This should assist in obtaining additional funds that are being made available through the Forest Service and BLM to implement the recommended fuels reduction treatments. The East Branch Fire Management Plan is being incorporated into the Trinity County Fire Management Plan. The fact that we had the East Branch Community Fuels Reduction Demonstration Project helped us to obtain this much needed funding source to develop a landscape scale fire management plan for public and private lands.

Financial Summary

TCRCD Project Manager @\$20/hr	\$ 917
TCRCD Chipper and crew @\$200/day	2,000
CDF Conservation Camp Crews 15wks @ \$65/day	1,041
Road and crossing Improvement	
Rock 40 cubic yards at \$150/load	150
Equipment-backhoe @ \$65/hr	1,320
Stumpgrinder rental @ \$90/day	193
Shale-20 cubic yards	362
Riprap-10 yds	
Concrete-4 yds	220
Gate installation for back "escape route"	
Fuel and supplies	120
Education and Outreach	
Color copies of the East Branch	
Forest/Fire Management Plan-15 copies	268
Brochure Development and Printing	137
RPF consulting/education and outreach	
TCRCD Indirect	1,009
Total Grant Amount	\$7,737