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Organization: The Sierra Club, Lone Star Chapter
Title: Forest Management Issue Chair
Comments: December 11, 2019

Mr. Jeff Stoney

Acting District Ranger

Sam Houston National Forest

394 FM 1375 West

New Waverly, Texas 77358

Dear Jeff,

The Houston Regional Group and the Lone Star Chapter of the Sierra Club (Sierra Club) submit these scoping comments under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) for the U.S. Forest Service (FS) proposed Sam Houston National Forest (SHNF) Prescribed Burn Project for the federally endangered Red-cockaded Woodpecker (RCW).

1) The Sierra Club requests initiation of official "collaboration" with the FS for the SHNF Prescribed Burn Project and Environmental Assessment (EA). The Sierra Club notes that an "interdisciplinary team" (IT) was put together for this proposal. The Sierra Club used to be invited to IT meetings for proposals by SHNF. This has stopped and is a sign that the FS is not practicing collaboration like it used to.

The Sierra Club received a document entitled "Response to Scoping Comments, SHNF Prescribed Burn EA" on November 21, 2019 and received the scoping letter and proposal explanation, dated November 19, 2019, via email on December 5, 2019.

The documents enclosed with these public scoping comments include:

1. The Sierra Club December 11, 2019 public scoping comments for the SHNF RCW Prescribed Burn Project.

2. The November 19, 2019 FS public scoping letter and explanation of the SHNF RCW Prescribed Burn Project.

3. The SHNF Prescribed Burn EA "Response to Scoping Comments, November 2019.

4. The September 28, 2018 Sierra Club public scoping comments for the SHNF 10-year Prescribed Burn Project.

5. The November 22, 2019 Sierra Club email to Jeff Stoney, Acting District Ranger, SHNF about the SHNF RCW Prescribed Burn Project.

Please see and respond to the four information requests in this comment letter.

2) The Sierra Club has concerns, issues, and questions about the project. The Sierra Club is very concerned about how our comments were and were not addressed and misleading and incorrect statements found in the "Response to Scoping Comments" and throughout the public scoping letter and proposal explanation, particularly in the Public Involvement and Proposal Development section of the public scoping letter.

Collaboration is defined as "to work jointly with others or together, especially in an intellectual endeavor", Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, 11th Edition. The Sierra Club pledges to work collaboratively with the FS on this project and believes that agreed upon changes can be made that will make it more protective of SHNF natural resources.

3) The Sierra Club is concerned that the FS wants an EA decision to be open-ended with no limit to the number of years that it is used. The Sierra Club calls this a "Forever EA" or "Forever NEPA document". There is a trend in the FS to limit public participation and collaboration. Recent FS proposed changes to its' NEPA regulations would make "Forever NEPA documents" the standard by the FS for most actions or activities that occur on the national forests and grasslands in the United States.

A vague "valid until such time that new information or changed conditions or circumstances indicate a new analysis and decision are warranted" is used in the "Response to Scoping Comments" and in the "Public Involvement and Proposal Development" Section of the November 19, 2019 public scoping notice. This language can mean anything or nothing for the public who want periodically, as required by NEPA, to review and comment on FS actions, activities, and plans.

The FS reference given to remove public participation and collaboration for decades for this proposal is found in the direction that the Forest Service Handbook 1909.15, Chapter 10, Section 11.23, 18, and 18.1 provides. This reference and the Sections referred to, 11.23 Review of Existing Decisions, 18 Correction, Supplementation, or Revision of environmental Documents and Reconsideration of Decisions to Take Action, and 18.1 Review and Documentation of New Information Received After Decision Has Been Made, provide no criteria that will be used by the FS to determine when an action, activity, or plan can be implemented with no end date.

This means the FS can act in an "arbitrary and capricious" manner in deciding the important question of when the public gets to review and comment on its actions, activities, and plans. This leaves the public without participation and collaboration in FS actions, activities, and plans even though the NEPA and other laws or policies require public participation. The Sierra Club requests that the FS not use a "Forever NEPA" document and decision for this project.

4) The Sierra Club looks forward to working with the FS on this project and having our concerns, issues, and questions addressed. This would certainly be an improvement than the current situation where the Sierra Club has been told by the FS that we oppose this project when our comments did not say this. Please contact me as soon as you can so we can set-up a meeting to begin our mutual collaboration on the SHNF RCW Prescribed Burning Project EA. Thank you.

5) The Sierra Club is concerned about the misleading way the FS has referred to its initial comments, issues, and questions submitted on September 28, 2018 during the Categorical Exclusion public scoping comment period. The FS in the "Response to Scoping Comments" and the November 19, 2019 "Public Scoping Notice" refers to the Sierra Club's comments as being "primarily opposed". This is an incorrect and untrue statement.

The Sierra Club provided the FS with 8 pages of comments, issues, and questions about the proposal. Never once in those comments, or these comments, did the Sierra Club say it was opposed to the project.

The Sierra Club did say, "The Sierra Club supports the use of prescribed fire so that fire disturbance can be put back on the landscape and affect forests in a way that is similar to what occurred before Anglo settlers came to East Texas in the 1800's. The Sierra Club supports the management of SHNF for the federally endangered Red-cockaded Woodpecker (RCW) on uplands. However, the Sierra Club is concerned that the proposed 10-Year Project will not be as effective as it should be. These comments reflect those concerns."

The Sierra Club went on to say, "It has been 31 years (1987) since the Sierra Club and Texas Conservation Alliance (formerly, Texas Committee on Natural Resources) filed a lawsuit against the FS because its' management of the National Forests and Grasslands in Texas (NFGT) was sending the RCW on the path to extinction. It has been 27 years since the Fifth Circuit Court in New Orleans (1991) upheld the Federal District

Court's ruling that the FS must change management of the NFGT so that the RCW would be protected, not go extinct, and recover."

"A lot has occurred since that time. The FS now manages for RCW in SHNF with thinning, midstory removal, cavity inserts, restrictor plates, and prescribed burning. After 27 years, all RCW clusters and foraging areas do not have a grass and herbaceous groundcover. In some places, this groundcover exists or is close to existing. In other places, particularly on the East Side of SHNF, this has not occurred. The FS must tell the public why the model of grass and herbaceous groundcover has not appeared in all parts of SHNF after almost 30 years of prescribed burning. The FS must say how the prescribed burning program can be better managed to meet this and or other goals."

This is a request for information, an analysis, and review of the SHNF RCW prescribed burning program for the past 30 years and not opposition to the project. This is not an unreasonable request when the FS said the project would last 10 years and now says it will last for an indefinite length of time, "Forever NEPA", with no required NEPA public collaboration and input or analysis and review. The public, which funds the FS, deserves better than this and an explanation about the success or failure of the SHNF RCW prescribed burning program which this project is based upon.

The Sierra Club requests a summary document that reviews the successes and failures of the SHNF RCW prescribed burning program for the past 30 years. This summary document should be released to the public for review and comment as a part of this project's NEPA process.

6) The FS should provide a discussion about the interaction of the SHNF RCW Prescribed Burn Project with prescribed burning done for other purposes in SHNF including Management Area 1, Upland Forests Ecosystems, and other programs, proposals, projects, actions, activities, and plans which result in prescribed burning in SHNF for any other reason. The FS should explain the synergy or conflict between these different prescribed burning programs, proposals, projects, actions, activities, and plans.

7) This project is based upon an outdated and incorrect edition of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (FWS) RCW Recovery Plan. The foundation for this SHNF RCW Prescribed Burn Project is the 1985 Recovery Plan as stated on Pages 1, 5, and 12 (References), of the public scoping notice. The current edition of the RCW Recovery Plan is dated January 27, 2003. The FS must use the 2003 RCW Recovery Plan for the SHNF RCW Prescribed Burn Project. The FS must revise this project so that it uses and agrees with the 2003 RCW Recovery Plan.

8) Page 1, Public Involvement and Proposal Development, the FS states that "In July 2019, the responsible official chose to prepare an EA for this project instead of a CE, and to not limit the project to a 10-year timeframe." The Sierra Club was not notified about this decision. This lack of communication with the Sierra Club indicates that the FS has not shown an interest in collaboration for this project. It would make sense to let

the public know when this decision was made, particularly those who commented, that a "Forever NEPA" project was being pursued. The Sierra Club objects to this lack of public participation and collaboration.

9) Page 1, Need for the Proposal, if the FS is going to use as a purpose of this project the maintenance or restoration of fire regime condition classes it must describe what these are and how this will be done in the public scoping notice and the EA. If the FS is going to use as a purpose of this project the reduction in the risk of potential catastrophic fire" then the FS should describe what that risk is now and its probability. One way to do this is to provide to the public the risk probability of wildfire in SHNF (the FS has historical data to do this) and how often catastrophic fire has occurred in SHNF in the past. The EA should cover these topics thoroughly particularly since this is a "Forever NEPA document".

10) Page 3, Need for the Proposal, the FS refers to "interagency prescribed fire implementation guidelines" that this proposal will be based upon and in compliance with.

1. Information request: The Sierra Club requests a copy of these "interagency prescribed fire implementation guidelines".

11) Page 3, Need for the Proposal, the Sierra Club requests that the FS, in the EA, tell how burning in Management Area 4, Streamside Management Zones, supports "The primary goal for this area is maintenance of the role and function of aquatic, riparian, and wetland ecosystems."

12) Page 3, Need for the Proposal, the FS refers to Management Area 3, Grassland Ecosystems, and blackland prairies in SHNF. The Sierra Club supports burning of these blackland prairies. The FS should list Management Area 3 with Management Areas 2, 4, 9a, 9b, 10a, and 20b that are covered in this project.

13) Page 4, Need for the Proposal, the FS should state the goal(s) for this project in the public scoping notice and EA as it applies to "substantial groundcover for fire-maintained openings and woodlands" and where these goals come from and are documented.

14) Page 4, Proposed Action and Page 7, Project Design Criteria, Soil, Water, and Aquatic Resources, the FS refers to no plowing with dozers within 50 feet of ephemeral streams and 100 feet of perennial and intermittent streams and 100-foot equipment exclusion zones. These zones could be larger depending on the size of the secondary zone of streams as documented on Pages 145 through 161, 1996 Revised Land and Resource Management Plan (RLRMP). The FS should particularly take note on Page 152 about how primary and secondary zones are delineated. The FS should not plow dozer fire lines within the primary and secondary zones of any stream and these zones should be delineated in the EA via map and known to all personnel who work on fires before burning is done.

15) Page 5, Project Design Criteria, RCW, the FS states "In Management Areas 2 and 4, maintain an open park-like structure through regular prescribed burning". This statement violates the RLRMP because Management Area 4 is a riparian area that is to be managed for "This management area provides contiguous and diverse habitat for riparian area and wetland dependent species [hellip] These areas will be managed to provide diverse stands of hardwoods and some pines, with a wide variety of understory vegetation. These developing habitats include riparian dependent species, many of which need mature or old growth forest conditions."

Management Area 4 forests are not "fire-maintained" forest ecosystems and can be damaged by forced or continued burning. They are not "park-like" and often have dense concentrations of tree and shrub species. The FS must remove Management Area 4 from being burned and managed like Management Area 2.

16) Page 5, Project Design Criteria, RCW, roads are not "natural firebreaks" and this reference to this as such should be removed.

17) Page 6, Project Design Criteria, Bald Eagle, the FS should remove the "shoulds" from this section and replace them with "wills". Like "will occur outside the breeding season", "will occur to prevent crown fire", "these activities will be conducted only when neither adult eagles nor young are present", and "FWS will be consulted". The FS should commit to Bald Eagle protection and not be tentative.

18) Pages 6 and 7, Project Design Criteria, Botany, the Sierra Club supports burning of blackland prairies, not staging equipment or constructing fire lines in these areas, and cleaning equipment before bringing it onsite. The FS should define what "off-site equipment" is for the EA.

19) Pages 5 through 12, Project Design Criteria, in the EA, if the FS is going to use the "National Best Management Practices for Water Quality Management on National Forest System Lands, Volume 1: National Core BMP Technical Guide", then it should explain clearly to the public which specific BMP's will be used, under which specific circumstances they will be used, and for which specific actions and activities in the SHNF RCW Prescribed Burn Project each BMP will be used.

20) Page 8, Project Design Criteria, Soil, Water, and Aquatic Resources, the EA should have the maps of the 619 acres of exclusion zones" and invite the public to review and comment on them.

2. Information request: The Sierra Club requests a copy of the maps that show the 619 acres of "exclusion zones".

21) Page 8, Project Design Criteria, Soil, Water, and Aquatic Resources, the dozer fire lines should not be allowed in the primary riparian zone and in the secondary riparian zone. Damage to riparian vegetation and other resources like water quality will occur if the secondary zone is plowed.

22) Page 8, Project Design Criteria, Soil, Water, and Aquatic Resources, fire lines should not be plowed in streamside management zones, along lakes, perennial or intermittent springs and streams, wetlands, or water-source seeps. If a fire line is needed in these areas, hand lines should be used only.

23) Page 9, Project Design Criteria, Soil, Water, and Aquatic Resources, the FS should state in the EA how the slope will be determined for calculation of water bar spacing.

24) Page 9, Project Design Criteria, Soil, Water, and Aquatic Resources, the public scoping notice and EA should document what the state regulations are for municipal water supply reservoirs that it will comply with.

3. Information request: The Sierra Club requests a copy of the state regulations for municipal water supply reservoirs that the FS must comply with.

25) Page 9, Project Design Criteria, Soil, Water, and Aquatic Resources, the EA should list the sensitive soil areas and provide maps where they are located in SHNF. A ceiling should be established that limits the size of access and staging areas.

4. Information request: The Sierra Club requests a copy of the sensitive soil areas and maps of these areas.

26) Page 10, Project Design Criteria, Soil, Water, and Aquatic Resources, the EA should state why debris would be added to stream channels due to prescribed burning. The FS should not allow actions that purposefully add debris to stream channels during prescribed burning. A tree that naturally falls into a stream during prescribed burning should be left in the stream.

27) Page 11, Project Design Criteria, Recreation, remove the word "Generally" and require use of green, wet, and foam lines rather than dozer fire lines or plowing in recreation areas.

28) Pages 11 and 12, Project Design Criteria, Recreation, the entire Lone Star Hiking Trail, 128 miles, (it is not called the Lone Star National Recreation Trail), should be protected from damage due to prescribed burning, not only the part that is a "National Recreation Trail" (found on the east side of SHNF, from Butch Arthur Road to Winters Bayou Scenic Area, about 26 miles). The equestrian trail that is being built on the west side of SHNF should also be added in the EA as a trail system that should be protected from damage due to prescribed burning.

The entire Lone Star Hiking Trail (it is not called the Lone Star National Recreation Trail), from October 1 through February 1, should have site-specific assessments conducted to determine whether additional protection for this trail or notification to the public is needed.

29) The Sierra Club believes that some areas in SHNF do not fit the grass and herbaceous groundcover model that the FS and FWS insist upon. This model is found in the Decision Notice and Finding of No Significant Impact, RCW Recovery Plan Non-significant Forest Plan Amendment #7, April 2006, for the 1996 RLRMP and Page 189, January 27, 2003, RCW Recovery Plan, which states, "c. Groundcovers of native bunchgrass and/or other native, fire-tolerant, fire-dependent herbs total 40 percent or more of ground and midstory plants and are dense enough to carry growing season fire at least once every 5 years."

Page 3, Need for the Proposal, the FS states "mature pine-dominated forest with diverse grass and forb groundcover [hellip] maintain herbaceous understory vegetation [hellip] Reduced fire frequency in this region results in dense forests, woody-dominated groundcover, and reduced herbaceous cover. In such cases, overall ecosystem health declines [hellip] Native, grass-dominated groundcover [hellip] with substantial groundcover of native much grasses and forbs [hellip] growing season fires are more favorable for herbaceous groundcover".

The Sierra Club does not believe that because woody plants establish dominance in the understory in some of SHNF that "ecosystem health declines". The FS should document this statement and provide this documentation to the public for review and comment.

The FS should tell the public about difficulty achieving the grass and herbaceous groundcover model in general and particularly in different parts of SHNF. The reasons for this difficulty in parts of SHNF may be soil related.

In the "Field Guide Ecological Classification System for the National Forests and Adjacent Areas of the West Gulf Coastal Plain: 2nd Approximation", February 2007, pages 14-5 through 14.7, Big Thicket Landtype Association, there are Loblolly Pine-White Oak/Callicarpa-Chasmanthium Sandy/Loamy Dry-Mesic Slopes and Uplands and Laurel Oak-Loblolly Pine/Callicarpa Loamy Mesic Lower Slopes and Terraces Landtype Phases. The latter landtype phase (Laurel Oak-Loblolly Pine) has more soil moisture and a greater diversity of silt, loam, and clay top- and subsoils and naturally grows hardwood trees and other woody plants better.

In the "Trees Shrubs, and Woody Vines of East Texas", first and second editions, by Elray S. Nixon, Page 8, Nixon states that in East Texas there are "Mesic Upland and Mesic Creek Bottom Communities" which botanically resemble the two landtype phases mentioned above. Woody plants are much more likely to be resilient, stable, and assertive in these forests. The grass and herbaceous groundcover model may not work well in these parts of SHNF. The goals for prescribed burning should be changed to reflect what the landscape (topography), soils, and vegetation will accept and not what we want it to accept when prescribed burning.

This issue relates to the concern that the Sierra Club and Texas Conservation Alliance (TCA) have brought to the FS's attention in the past. Mr. Larry Shelton, with the TCA, has stated on several occasions that he has discussed with the FS how some RCW goals have pushed management for RCW into areas where hardwood tree and not pine tree dominance would naturally occur.

The FS would be better served if it focused on topography, soils, and vegetation that historically respond to fire and created a grass and herbaceous groundcover naturally rather than use this model to force change on areas that are not good for and resist this change. It would be best for the RCW to have prescribed burning and other management actions focused on better RCW historic areas which grow grass and herbaceous groundcover naturally and will result in better quality RCW habitat and healthier and larger RCW populations.

30) The Sierra Club believes that the FS has not conducted enough late season growing burns (June, July, August, and September). The FS rarely conducts late season growing burns. The literature documents that late season growing burns happen when natural lightning fires occur and have a greater suppression effect on the growth and survival of woody plants.

The use, almost exclusively, of helicopters to burn SHNF has resulted in a burn window of a few months which excludes, in most cases, possible late season prescribed burns. Helicopter burns can have impacts on areas that should not be burned, like riparian areas. The Sierra Club has been told by FS personnel that it is difficult not to drop the ping-pong fireballs in riparian areas. The Sierra Club has found ping-pong fireballs in riparian zones which documents this problem.

The Sierra Club wants to bring these issues to the FS's attention early in the process. This massive, long-term, project, is the opportunity for the Sierra Club to bring this issue up before the FS commits to the implementation of this project with little or no public review and comment. This is not good for the public, the FS, or the public's forests.

31) The Sierra Club told the FS on several occasions that large projects, like the SHNF RCW Prescribed Burn Project, are difficult to respond to. This is because they are large in geographic size and scope. The Sierra Club likes to go into-the-field and look at the area that may be affected before providing comments. When the 30-day

public scoping notice is released it is difficult for the Sierra Club to visit enough sites in a large project area to gather information and provide comments on the project in a reasoned and learned manner. The SHNF RCW Prescribed Burn Project covers 124,200 acres of SHNF's 163,045 acres. This project covers about 76.18% of SHNF. This is a huge project area and is long-term because it will be in effect for unlimited number of years but probably decades with no additional public, review, comment, collaboration, participation, and input.

This is one reason why the Sierra Club requested a copy of the five-year plans for all national forests and grasslands in the NFGT. The Sierra Club believed that this would give it a heads-up on future potential projects. Unfortunately, the information that the Sierra Club received about five-year plans was not comprehensive. The five-year plan information was not very helpful in the Sierra Club's attempt to be aware and provide early public input into the FS's project formulation process. The only project on the SHNF five-year plan list was the Montgomery County Wildlife Habitat Improvement Project, which had a public scoping period and which the Sierra Club provided comments. The SHNF RCW Prescribed Burn Project was not on the five-year plan list.

32) Because SHNF is next to and or included in the Houston-Galveston-Brazoria Metropolitan Statistical Area and Ozone Non-attainment Area the impacts due to air pollution (particulates, nitrogen oxides, volatile organic compounds, carbon monoxide, carbon dioxide, toxic air pollutants, and ozone, to name a few) and public health are important for the EA to cover.

The FS has stated to the Sierra Club that it is difficult to burn in SHNF due to smoke and air pollution restrictions. Safety is an important topic to consider. This is particularly true since the public's negative experience with fires in the wildland-urban interface during the drought years of the early 2010s. Many regional and or major roads, like Interstates 45 and 69, and significant local roads like FM 1375, FM 149, FM 945, and FM 2025, may be affected by prescribed burning. There are many people who live next to or are surrounded by SHNF whose health may be affected by prescribed burning.

These concerns and potential impacts argue for not only an EA but possibly an environmental impact statement (EIS). This does not mean the FS must stop burning during the preparation of an EA or EIS for the SHNF RCW Prescribed Burn Project. The FS has for years successfully, on a yearly basis, submitted public scoping notices for prescribed burns on a smaller basis with a 30-day comment period. The public has been afforded the opportunity to comment on these proposals. This can be continued until the EA or EIS process has been completed for the project. The Sierra Club requests that preferably an EIS be prepared for the project.

This is a project that is so large that a programmatic EIS is needed. The Sierra Club is very concerned that the public will be locked out of public review, comment, participation, input, and collaboration processes for decades when talking about prescribed burning on over 75% of SHNF. For the public, this is a high price to pay for this project. The FS should examine the lack of public participation in the project as an issue in detail in the EA or EIS.

Houston Regional Group and the Lone Star Chapter of the Sierra Club Comments, Questions, and Issues for the SHNF Prescribed Burn Project

The Houston Regional Group and the Lone Star Chapter of the Sierra Club (Sierra Club) provide these public scoping comments to the U.S. Forest Service (FS) for the environmental assessment (EA) for the SHNF RCW Prescribed Burn Project (PBP) which covers most of our comments, issues, and questions for collaboration on the PBP.

These comments, issues, and questions are in addition to any others provided in previous public scoping or other communications with the FS and other comments made in this comment letter that are not part of this section of this comment letter.

The comments, issues, and questions below, break-down mostly (along with some additional added input) the Sierra Club's September 28, 2018 public scoping comments and put them into simple and more easily understood public input.

1. The Sierra Club supports the use of prescribed fire so that fire disturbance can be put back on the landscape and affect forests the way the landscape was before Anglo settlers came in the 1800's.
2. The Sierra Club supports the management of SHNF for the federally endangered Red-cockaded Woodpecker (RCW) on uplands.
3. The Sierra Club is concerned that the proposed PBP will not be as effective as it should be.
4. All RCW clusters and foraging areas do not have a grass and herbaceous groundcover after 27 years of burning.
5. The FS should tell the public in the EA why the model of grass and herbaceous groundcover has not recovered in all parts of SHNF after almost 30 years of prescribed burning.
6. The FS should provide a summary in the EA which states what prescribed burning has accomplished for the past 30 years, what has not been accomplished, why it has not been accomplished, and how the PBP will improve the PB program to better meet its goals.

7. The PBP is a programmatic project.

8. The FS should provide an assessment, analysis, and evaluation of where we are, where we need to be, why we are not there, and how we are going to get there.

9. The PBP EA should state how the SHNF RCW prescribed burning program needs to change and get better.

10. An environmental impact statement (EIS) is needed if the FS is going to implement programmatic projects for SHNF RCW PBP.

11. Some areas of SHNF do not fit the grass and herbaceous groundcover model.

12. The Sierra Club does not believe that because woody plants establish dominance in the understory in some of SHNF that "ecosystem health declines". The FS should document this statement in the EA and provide this documentation to the public for review and comment.

13. The FS should tell the public in the EA about the difficulty achieving the grass and herbaceous groundcover model in general and particularly in some parts of SHNF.

14. One of the reasons for this difficulty in some parts of SHNF may be soil related (mesic upland soils).

15. The goals for SHNF RCW PBP and EA should be changed to reflect what the landscape (topography), soils, and vegetation will accept and not what we want it to accept.

16. Some SHNF RCW goals may have pushed management into areas where hardwood tree and not pine tree dominance would naturally occur.

17. The FS should in the EA conduct more late season growing burns (June, July, August, and September).

18. The literature documents that late season growing burns happen when natural lightning fires occur and have a greater suppression effect on the growth and survival of woody plants.

19. The use of helicopters to burn SHNF has resulted in a burn window of a few months which excludes many possible late growing season prescribed burns.

20. Helicopter burns can have impacts on areas that should not be burned, like riparian areas.

21. The Sierra Club wants to bring these issues to the FS's attention early in the EA process.

22. The sudden EA public scoping period for this massive, long-term, project, means that the Sierra Club is not able to bring these issues up effectively before the FS commits to a certain project.

23. This is not good for the public, the FS, or the public's forests.

24. The Sierra Club is concerned that the FS is not committed to collaboration as much as it was or as it says it is.

25. The Sierra Club was not contacted for the EA by SHNF, the project and its goals were not explained, and early input was not solicited.

26. Large projects, like the PBP, are difficult for the Sierra Club and public to respond to.

27. The PBP EA covers 124,200 acres of SHNF's 163,045 acres which is about 76.18% of SHNF.

28. This EA PBP is large and long-term because it will be in effect for decades if not forever, "Forever NEPA", with no additional legally required public, review, comment, collaboration, participation, and input.

29. The PBP was not on the five-year plan list.

30. For NEPA significance, context, and intensity help determine if an EA/EIS are required or qualify as a "major federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment".

31. The PBP is significant in size and duration for the RCW because it covers over 75% of SHNF's 163,045 acres forever or decades.

32. The context is significant for the largest management forest unit in the NFGT and all of East Texas.

33. SHNF has the largest population of RCWs in Texas.

34. The PBP impact will be great since 1,000's of acres are managed in the same way, including prescribed burning, in Management Area 1 for pine-dominated forests.

35. The intensity of the PBP impacts will be large and severe since mesic uplands may not fit the grass and herbaceous groundcover model and ecosystems, vegetation, and wildlife may be negatively impacted.

36. Baygall and other vegetation communities may be negatively affected by the PBP.

37. SHNF is within or next to the Houston-Galveston-Brazoria Metropolitan Statistical Area.

38. Impacts due to air pollution (primarily particulates and ozone) and public health are important.

39. It is difficult to burn in SHNF due to smoke and air pollution restrictions.

40. Safety is an important topic when dealing with SHNF and prescribed burning.

41. Fire in the wildland-urban interface during drought years is an EA issue.

42. Many regional and or major roads, like Interstates 45 and 69, and significant local roads like FM 1375, FM 149, FM 945, and FM 2025, may be affected by the PBP.

43. Many people who live next to or are surrounded by SHNF, may have their health affected by the PBP.

44. These concerns and potential impacts argue for an EA/EIS.

45. The Sierra Club requests that an EA or preferably an EIS be prepared for the PBP.

46. There was no scoping notice for the EA until the Sierra Club pressed this issue.

47. The Sierra Club did not and does not oppose the PBP EA but brought up comments, issues, and questions.

48. The Sierra Club is concerned that the public will be locked out of public review, comment, participation, input, and collaboration processes forever or for decades with the PBP EA.

49. The FS should examine the lack of public participation in the PBP as an issue in an EA/EIS.

50. The FS should conduct a probability estimate of risk and provide this for public review and comment in the EA.

51. Why are Management Areas 9a, 9b, 10a, and 10b included and subject to RCW prescribed burning in the EA?

52. Why is Management Area 1 not included in the PRP EA?

53. The FS should clearly state the prescribed burn goals for Management Areas 9a, 9b, 10a, and 10b as part of the PBP EA.

54. The FS should document where the one-year burn rotation will occur in SHNF, why it will occur, and the environmental impacts this causes in the EA.

55. The Sierra Club believes that a one-year rotation for prescribed burning of certain compartments in SHNF may result in over-burning.

56. The FS should prepare a "glossary" for the public scoping notice and EA/EIS.

57. The Sierra Club believes that "sensitive areas", like baygalls, are "special features" and should be protected from dozer lines in the EA.

58. The FS should prepare a list of "special features" and "sensitive areas" in the EA.

59. The FS lists several mitigation measures that may cause natural resource damage that is avoidable in the PBP.

60. The FS should ban use of heavy equipment during wet ground conditions because soil damage will occur in the EA.

61. The "100-foot equipment exclusion zone" conflicts with the mitigation measure that allows "prescribed fire activities to cause or may cause deterioration of the streamside environment" before a physical structure is constructed to mitigate the damage.

62. Stay out of the riparian zone!

63. "Dozer fire lines will not be allowed within the primary riparian zone" conflicts with and contradicts the need for "100-foot equipment exclusion zones".

64. The FS must stay out of streamside zones because there is no need to go into them with prescribed fire equipment in the EA.

65. The FS should provide the public with a list and map in the EA which shows where these "exclusion zones" will be.

66. There is no definition for "minimal soil disturbance".

67. The Sierra Club opposes dozer lines in streamside zones or "exclusion zones" in the EA

68. The FS must keep dozers out of the riparian zone.

69. The FS should "Identify and protect wet sites, jurisdictional wetlands, bogs, and seepage zones" and show the public where these are in the EA.

70. The public may know where other sites are and could tell the FS about these sites in the EA.

71. The FS should state what state regulations protect municipal water supply reservoirs from prescribed fires that it must comply with in the EA.

72. The FS should make a list of desirable non-native plants and provide the list for public review and comment in the EA.

73. There should be no debris added to stream channels because prescribed fire actions (other than the fire) should not be allowed in or next to stream channels in the EA.

74. The Lone Star Hiking Trail, and all other trails, should be protected from prescribed fire equipment impacts as

much as possible in the EA.

75. Stay off the Lone Star Hiking Trail and other types of trails with heavy equipment in the EA.

76. The FS must list the USDA Forest Service 2012, Fire-2, as a reference in the EA.

77. There is no required NEPA proposed for the PBP after a certain time.

78. This is a "Forever NEPA" document that cuts the public out of review and comment.

79. The FS ignores the Sierra Club's comments, answers them obliquely, or provides a boiler plate response in the public scoping comment summary.

80. The FS should state what the changed conditions or circumstances are that would warrant or trigger a new analysis and decision in the EA.

81. The FS should provide the criteria used to determine changed conditions or circumstances in the EA.

82. The emphasis on regeneration and restoration for Management Area 1 is not only upland Longleaf and Shortleaf Pine forest communities but also Loblolly Pine forest communities which dominated SHNF historically.

83. The FS does not state what was learned due to the helicopter crash tragedy and will be applied to the PBP EA to make it better.

84. There are no associated Sierra Club public scoping comments. There are just comments that need to be addressed.

85. Breaking the Sierra Club's comments into categories that the FS creates does not adequately address the Sierra Club's concerns in the scoping comment summary.

86. The FS ignores the Sierra Club's concern about "risk of catastrophic fire" analysis in the EA.

87. What are the FS National Best Management Practices for Water Quality Management on National Forest System Lands, Volume I, National Core BMP Technical Guide, Aquatic Management Zone, Plan 3, Aquatic Ecosystem Improvements and Restoration Planning, AqEcol1, Operations in Aquatic Ecosystems, AqEcol2, and Use of Prescribed Fire, Fire 2?

88. What does "as much as possible" mean when referring to the protection of the LSHT from prescribed fire equipment impacts for the PBP EA?

89. What does "move passively into and through streamside management zone or riparian habitats" mean for the PBP EA?

90. What field visits does the FS refer to on Page 3?

91. The Sierra Club supports additional late growing season burns in SHNF.

The Sierra Club appreciates this opportunity to comment on the proposed 10-Year Prescribed Burn Project in SHNF.

Sincerely,

Brandt Mannchen

Forest Management Issue Chair

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