



For Immediate Release

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Collaboration Yields Results on OCFR Project



Orleans – Power outages and cold weather did not deter the Orleans community, the Karuk Tribe of California, local community groups, and three environmental organizations from meeting Tuesday with Tyrone Kelley, Forest Supervisor for the Six Rivers National Forest, to seek a collaborative solution for managing 2700 acres proposed for treatment in the Orleans Community Fuels Reduction and Forest Health (OCFR) Project.

Facilitated by Will Harling, director of the Orleans/Somes Bar Fire Safe Council, a collaborative alternative was finalized after seven hours of deliberation and approved by Kelley to be analyzed in the NEPA process for the OCFR Project. A Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) is scheduled to be available for public review in late February.

“A lot of work went into creating an alternative that the local community, the tribe and key stakeholders could live with,” said Harling. “We applaud Tyrone Kelley for ultimately accepting this collaborative proposed action. Not everyone got everything they wanted, however I think everyone wanted to contribute to something finally happening on the ground.”

“It was clear that the sacrifice and hard work by the community, Tribe and District will contribute greatly to the successful implementation of the project,” said Kelley. “What may be more important, the stakeholders now have a benchmark collaborative process to build upon.”

After initial scoping in March, the Forest Service developed and presented a second proposed action in November under the Healthy Forest Restoration Act of 2003, which encourages collaboration with the local Fire Safe Council. A proposal by the Karuk Tribe through the Tribal Forest Protection Act (TFPA) to, among other things, provide additional funding and oversight by the Tribe on the OCFR project, was denied by the Forest Service shortly after the OCFR re-scoping letter came out, prompting the Tribe to withdraw from participation in OCFR Inter-Disciplinary (ID) Team meetings.

“Our TFPA proposal addressed the economic and political realities that exist for this project, such as the low cost of saw logs,” said Leaf Hillman, ceremonial leader and vice-chairman for the Karuk Tribe. “The objectives of the Tribe are to protect the values of the Panamnik Ceremonial District [which encompasses the OCFR project], reverse the trend of fire suppression, and support the creation of local jobs. In order to meet that challenge and accomplish our goals, we need to utilize every authority available to us, including real collaboration and the use of stewardship authorities.” The Tribe supports the current collaboratively proposed action, but is waiting to see the results of a meeting next week with the USFS and other stakeholders on the potential for local stewardship opportunities to give their ultimate approval for the project.

“It appears that we have now resolved many of the issues relating to roads on this project, and we have provided a framework upon which to move forward,” said Bill Tripp Eco-Cultural Restoration Specialist. “Now we have to reach agreement on how to proceed with a stewardship mechanism that will not only ensure a locally led community based approach to adaptive problem solving, but bring in additional funding and local resources to assist with site specific planning, implementation, monitoring, and the identification of additional needs.”

Two years ago, District Ranger Bill Rice, began holding roundtable public forums on the OCFR project to listen to local issues and concerns. Yesterday’s landmark meeting between the Orleans/Somes Bar Fire Safe Council, Karuk Tribe of California, Klamath Forest Alliance, Northcoast Environmental Center (NEC), Environmental Protection Information Center (EPIC), local loggers, private landowners adjacent to the project, and Mid Klamath Watershed Council, was the result of almost two years of meetings.

“Collaboration takes time, but to get things done on the ground, we all need to share responsibility for success,” said Rice. “That’s what happened on Tuesday.”

Participating environmental groups are cautiously optimistic of the recent collaborative effort. “This collaborative proposed action is a stretch for the NEC,” commented NEC director, Greg King. “This isn’t the type of proposal that we would submit on our own. Everybody in this room wants a good plan. Follow-up with fire treatment is essential. Without follow-up, we could have a worse problem.”

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