

CACHE CREEK NATURAL AREA NOXIOUS WEED MOWING AND SEEDING

Environmental Assessment CA-340-02-017

Mechanical Mowing of Noxious Weeds and Seeding of Native Species

April 15, 2002

United States
Department of the Interior

Bureau of Land Management
Ukiah Field Office

Ukiah, California

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Date: April 15, 2002

Project Title: Cache Creek Natural Area Noxious Weed Mowing and Seeding

Name and Address of Applicant: BLM Ukiah Field Office

Project Location: Cache Creek Natural Area - Lake, Colusa and Yolo Counties, Ca.
Portions of T.13N., R. 5 & 6 W., T.12N., R.4 & 5W.

Land Status Verified: Yes.

Affected Surface Area: 150 acres

Authorization for the Action: Taylor Grazing Act, 1934, as amended; Carson-Foley Act of 1968; Federal Noxious Weed Act of 1974, 1990 Amendment; Federal Land Policy and Management Act (1976); Public Rangelands Improvement Act (1978).

Conformance with Applicable Land Use Plan: This proposed action conforms to the conditions and guidelines of the Management Framework Plan Update, Clear Lake Resource Area, which was approved in October 1984, in accordance with 43 CFR 1610.5-3.

See also the Cache Creek Tule Elk Wildlife Habitat Management Plan (1985) and the Draft Cache Creek Coordinated Resource Management Plan (2002)

Remarks: Large known populations of noxious weeds such as medusahead (*Taeniatherum caput-medusae*), yellow starthistle (*Centaurea solstitialis*) and barb goatgrass (*Aegilops triuncialis*) are found in portions of the Cache Creek Natural Area. These areas include areas known as County Line (old Leal property), Pluth Ranch, Payne Ranch, Wilson Valley and Fiske Creek (old Johnson Ranch). Portions of these areas are level enough to allow mowing as a tool to control weed populations. Seed production of these weeds can be controlled if the mowing is conducted at the proper time of the growing season and the proper growth stage of the plant. Mowing by itself may not eradicate these weeds but in conjunction with other tools such as biological control, burning, livestock grazing, and herbicide use they can be greatly reduced. Reducing noxious weed populations will improve native species populations, bio-diversity and wildlife habitat.

Affected Environment: The areas which lend themselves best to mowing are valley or dry meadow areas surrounded by rolling hills vegetated with oak woodlands. Many of these areas are currently dominated by noxious weeds (medusahead, barb goatgrass and yellow starthistle) mixed with other native and naturalized native annuals (not considered as noxious weeds). Occasional oak seedlings can be found on the valley bottoms.

Need for the Proposed Action: Mowing of medusahead, barb goatgrass and yellow starthistle at the appropriate time can greatly reduce seed production and reduce the vigor of these species. Controlling yellow starthistle, barb goatgrass and medusahead will reduce competition with native grasses and forbs (wild flowers), improve biodiversity and improve wildlife habitat. This project should be integrated with other methods of noxious weed control and eradication such as biological control, burning, livestock grazing and herbicide application. A major portion of the project is in the the Bear Creek Integrated Weed Management Program Area (a portion of the Cache Creek Natural Area). This program is a partnership of government agencies, education and research institutions, and private land owners in the eradication of noxious weed species in the Bear Creek Watershed.

Description of Proposed Action: This project is an initial step in controlling yellow starthistle and medusahead in Cache Creek Natural Area. The control method to be used involves mowing medusahead and barb goatgrass in the doe stage (emerging seed) and yellow starthistle when the plants are in the bolting stage (fast growth stage). The mowing will take place approximately in mid-May for medusahead and barb goatgrass and mid-June for yellow starthistle. Mowing may be conducted by the BLM Operations Crew, Craig Thomsen, UC Davis Department of Agronomy and Range Science or by a contractor. Mowing would be conducted on weekdays to reduce conflicts with visitor use. The mowing may need to be repeated for 3 years and should be integrated in the future with biological control, burning, livestock grazing and herbicide use.

The mowed areas may have locally collected native seed planting with species such as purple needlegrass (*Nassella pulchra*), blue wild rye (*Elymus glaucus*), meadow barley (*Hordium brachyantherum*), California oniongrass (*Melica californica*) and one-sided bluegrass (*Poa secunda secunda*) the following fall. The seed will be tilled in with a Anotill-drill. No disturbance to the soil surface is anticipated with mowing. Seeding accomplished with a Anotill drill which slices the seed into ground will little surface disturbance. Seeded areas may be fenced temporarily if livestock use is anticipated prior to the establishment of the seedlings (2 growing seasons required).

Description of the Alternatives including No Action:

Environmental Impacts:

Proposed Action:

Critical Element	Affected? yes no		Critical Element	Affected? yes no	
Air Quality (CAA, 1955) Frank Arriaza		X	T&E Species (ESA, 1973) Gregg Mangan		X
Water Quality (Surface and Ground; SDWA amend 1996, CWA 1987, EO=s 12580, 12088, 12372) Frank Arriaza		X	ACEC's (FLPMA, 1976) Gregg Mangan		X
Wetlands/Riparian Zone (EO-11990) Pardee Bardwell		X	Wastes, Hazardous/Solid (RCRA, 1976; CERCLA, 1980) Dave Fatch		X

Floodplains (EO-11988) Pardee Bardwell		X	Farm Lands (SMARA, 1977) Charles Whitcomb		X
Environmental Justice (EO-12898) Julie Burcell		X	Wilderness (FLPMA, 1976; WA, 1964) Jeff Wilbanks		X
Native American Concerns (AIRFA, 1978) Julie Burcell		X	Wild and Scenic Rivers (W&SRA, 1968) Jeff Wilbanks		X
Cultural Resources (NHPA, 1966) Julie Burcell		X	Invasive, Non-Native Species (Lacey Act, Federal Noxious Weed Act of 1974) Pardee Bardwell	X	

Describe the impacts (direct, indirect, and cumulative), if any, to all resources. If a Yes@ box is checked in the Critical Element table, explain how the Critical Element is affected:

By mowing at the appropriate times it is anticipated that yellow starthistle, barb goatgrass and medusahead populations will be reduced. It is also anticipated that there will be an increase in native grasses and forbs with the reduction in competition from these noxious weeds. Biodiversity will be increase by reducing the thick mat (dry litter) of medusahead, barb goatgrass and yellow starthistle that has developed in project areas. The reduction in weed species will also improve forage for wildlife species and also improve biodiversity.

Wildlife will be displaced for a short period of time when mowing and seeding equipment are working in the area.

The areas seeded cannot be grazed by livestock for two full growing seasons (BLM Policy) to allow for seeding establishment and may fenced if it is anticipated that livestock will be in the area. Areas proposed for seeding and fencing will be evaluated on a site by site basis by the Ukiah Field Office Archeologist to determine if the disturbance caused by the fencing and the Ano till drill@ seeding method will affect cultural resources. The Field Office will also work closely with local tribal groups to inuse that any cultural values effected by the action are taken into consideration. Those areas that it is determined that cultural resources will be affected will not be not included as proposed seeding/fencing sites.

The mower can produce sparks if the blades strike a rock and ignite dry grass. At the time of the mowing an assessment will be made on the fuel moisture content and whether a fire engine should be placed on standby at the mowing operation for fire prevention. The Ukiah Field Office has a 100 gallon slip-in pump unit which can be maintained at the site. In addition the mower operator will maintain a back pack pump in the transport vehicle. A large portion of the area is adjacent to the Ca. Dept. of Forestry, Wilbur Springs Station (Junction Highway=s 20 and 16). The local Calif. Dept of Forestry battalion chief will be notified during the mowing operation.

No Action Alternative: There would be no mowing of medusahead or starthistle and no native seed planting.

No Action:

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Critical Element	Affected yes no		Critical Element	Affected yes no	
Air Quality (CAA, 1955) Frank Arriaza		X	T&E Species (ESA, 1973) Gregg Mangan		X
Water Quality (Surface and Ground; SDWA amend 1996, CWA 1987, EO=s 12580, 12088, 12372) Frank Arriaza		X	ACEC's (FLPMA, 1976) Gregg Mangan		X
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Describe the impacts (direct, indirect, and cumulative), if any, to all resources. If a Yes@ box is checked in the Critical Element table, explain how the Critical Element is affected:

If no mowing occurs it is anticipated that the yellow starthistle, barb goatgrass and medusahead populations will continue to expand and native grasses and forbs (wildflowers) will continue to decline due to the competition from these noxious weed species. Other approaches to integrated weed control (biological control, livestock grazing, herbicides, burning) would be considered without mowing although these methods of weed eradication tend to be more controversial.

Residual Impacts: None

Cumulative Impacts: As discussed in the proposed action beneficial cumulative impacts would be that exotic weed populations would be reduced and native species populations would expand and replace the exotic weeds. The biodiversity in both flora and fauna would be improved.

Monitoring Plan:

The project sites will be visited periodically after mowing to determine what regrowth has occurred and if another treatment is required during the same season or in subsequent years.

People/Agencies Contacted:

Craig Thomsen, UC Davis Dept. of Agronomy and Range Science

Cortina Rancheria
Cachil Dehe Band of Wintun
Rumsey Rancheria
Scott Koller, Calif. Dept. of Fish and Game
Paul Hofmann, Calif. Dept. of Fish and Game
Bill Klebe, Battalion Chief, Calif. Dept. of Forestry, Wilbur Springs Fire Station

Preparer Signature Page*(Each Preparer should sign off on this page when they are satisfied with the EA)***Title of Project:** Cache Creek Natural Area Noxious Weed Mowing and Seeding**Preparing Office:** Ukiah Field Office**Project Leader:** Pardee Bardwell**Title:** Rangeland Mgt. Spec./ Wildlife biologist**List of Preparers:**

Position	Signature	Position	Signature
Wildlife Biologist, and Rangeland Mgmt. Spec.	Pardee Bardwell	Recreation Planner, and Visual Resources Mgmt.	Jeff Wilbanks
Realty Specialist	Alice Vigil	Operations	Steve Myers
Archaeologist	Julie Burcell	Engineering, and Realty Specialist	Bill Dabbs
Fire/Fuels	Jim Dawson	Geologist	Charles Whitcomb
Cache Creek Natural Area Manager	Gregg Mangan	Hazardous Materials	Dave Fatch
Recreation Planner	Jonna Hildenbrand	Law Enforcement Supervisor	Walt Gabler
Soil, Water, and Air Specialist	Frank Arriaza		

Project Leader_____
Date

Project: Mechanical Mowing of Noxious Weeds and Seeding of Native Species in the Cache Creek Natural Area.

1. FONSI

I have reviewed Environmental Assessment CA-340-02-017 and have determined that the proposed action results in a Finding of No Significant Impact on the human environment. I find that proper consideration has been given to all resource values and that this assessment is technically adequate. Therefore, an environmental impact statement is not required to further analyze the environmental effects of the proposed action.

Reviewed by:

Environmental Coordinator

Date

Supervisory Resource Management Specialist

Date

2. DECISION RECORD

I have reviewed the proposed action addressed in Environmental Assessment CA-340-02-017 and approve the proposed action as the decision of the Bureau of Land Management. The decision is to conduct yellow starthistle, barb goatgrass and medusahead control by mowing and seeding of native species beginning in 2002 and continue the program as indicted by monitoring in future years . The spread of noxious weeds on public land is of great concern to land managers due the loss of biodiversity and native species.

This decision is consistent with present land use decisions and local government policy. The decision to mow noxious weeds to reduce their populations and plant native species is not an irretrievable commitment of resources. Site specific impacts have been addressed and impacts are minor. None of the impacts of this decision are considered of significance nor highly controversial on the human environment so that an environmental impact statement is needed.

Gregg Mangan and Pardee Bardwell, Ukiah Field Office, will adhere to the Monitoring Plan.

Approved by:

Manager, Ukiah Field Office

Date