

Final Report 5GS14142 our # 271

Summary

The American Valley Hazardous Fuel Reduction (HFR) project was initiated by the Plumas County Fire Safe Council (PC FSC) to reduce the volume of hazardous fuels that occur within the communities of Quincy, East Quincy, and Galleppi Ranch and to strengthen local awareness and community involvement around fire resilience.

This project, funded with CAL FIRE SRA Fire Prevention Funds, treated 135 acres of a targeted 150 acres. It creates a near-continuous arc of fuel reduction around the American Valley, from the northwest to the southeast, by providing continuity with various other HFR projects undertaken in the area by the Forest Service and private landowners.

The grant agreement, in the amount of \$317,856, for the American Valley Hazardous Fuel Reduction Project was executed on April 23, 2015.

Treatment was conducted from September 2016 to March 2017.

Project Milestones

4/23/2015	Grant agreement executed
May 2015	Press release published
May-Oct 2015	Landowner outreach and project development (see attached outreach materials)
6/17/2016	Notice of Exemption issued by Deputy Director, CDF
6/9/2016	Advance Request for \$76,500 submitted to CAL FIRE
6/23/2016	Bid prospectus issued
6/30/2016	Pre-bid tour
7/8/2016	Licensed Timber Operator (LTO) proposals due
8/11/2016	LTO contract signed for mastication with Winningham Forest Management
8/29/2016	LTO contract signed for hand-thin and chipping with Bella Wildfire & Forestry
Sept 2016	Treatment commenced
3/8/2017	Total project area – 135 acres – completed and approved by RPF
3/30/2017	Project tour

Project Identification

The *Plumas County Hazardous Fuels Assessment and Strategy* (2004) describes the pre-treatment condition of the communities of American Valley:

East Quincy

Dominant Historic Large Fire Behavior by Community:

No large fire history on north facing slopes adjacent to town.

Tactical Considerations:

Valley-edge location exposes community to large-scale winds.

Fuels Comments/Recommendations:

Developed areas with slope are highest priority for thinning.

Fire Behavior

Moderate Fire Behavior surface fire.

Quincy

Dominant Historic Large Fire Behavior by Community:

No large fire history on north-facing slopes adjacent to town. Slash-driven uphill runs for one burning period on southwest slopes, highway and railroad ignitions.

Tactical Considerations:

The Forest Service has done considerable work around Quincy, many DFPZ's have been completed.

Fuels Comments/Recommendations:

Many DFPZ's have been completed around Quincy. Emphasize clearance of fuels around individual structures and thinning understory fuels in forested vacant lots.

Fire Behavior

Surface fire with moderate fire behavior.

American Valley is in the Wildland Urban Interface and is a populated area requiring fuels treatment as outlined in the *Plumas County Wildfire Protection Plan* developed by the Fire Safe Council.

Contract and Bidding History

In 2015 the Plumas County Fire Safe Council applied for CAL FIRE SRA FPF funding for the project. Grant agreement 5GS14142, for \$317,856, was executed April 23, 2015.

At the Plumas County Fire Safe Council's June 11, 2015 meeting, the Council accepted a proposal to waive the customary \$250/acre cost-share requirement for participating landowners. This proposal was supported on the grounds that the grant was SRA fee funded.

The PC FSC retained forester, Sara Taddo Jones (RPF 2979), accepted the project. The RPF and her agent designed the project, developed the environmental background and analysis, and oversaw the on-the-ground work of the LTO contractors.

At the request of Greenville Rancheria, the forester's cultural resources survey was sent to their department for review. No further comments were provided.

Landowner contracts were issued to 45 participating property owners. Signed contracts were received between February and April 2016.

A Notice of Exemption was signed June 17, 2016.

The project prospectus (attached) was issued June 23, 2016. A required pre-bid tour was conducted on June 30, 2016. Three contractor bids were received by the July 8th deadline. One of the bids was considered non-responsive. A contract, not to exceed \$111,392, for mechanical mastication on 108.4 acres (\$95,392) and contingency road repairs (\$16,000) was executed with Winningham Forest Management on August 11, 2016. A contract, not to exceed \$ 117,894.53, for hand-thinning and chipping on 29.6 acres was executed with Bella Wildfire & Forestry on August 29, 2016.

A remaining 8.8 acres was expected to be contracted, via amendment, to Bella Wildfire & Forestry. However, the contract with Bella Wildfire & Forestry was formally terminated on December 2, 2016 leaving the additional 8.8 acres, as well as 3 acres (Unit 1A) under contract, untreated. The termination

was a result contractor being unable to continue to support a crew to work in Quincy due to financial issues.

The remaining hand-thin acres were partially treated by CAL FIRE SRA funded fuels crews. A total of 3 acres (Unit 1A) received no treatment. A contract addendum with Winningham Forest Management was drafted to treat those 3 acres. However, the contractor’s existing priorities, along with wet soil conditions from an unusually wet winter, meant the additional acres were never contracted. The Fire Safe Council plans to address the remaining acres, and several remaining burn piles, with the assistance of SRA funded crews in the coming months.

Challenges

The Council gained several lessons from the American Valley project. First, there was a significant loss in efficiency executing a large project across many small-acre parcels. It was particularly time intensive for the forester.

On April 7, 2016 the PC FSC requested an extension to the CEQA compliance deadline – from April 21, 2016 to July 30, 2016. The project was substantially more complex than anticipated, with 45 individual landowners requiring nearly 300 hours of forester time *before* treatment commenced (of a budgeted 400 hours) devoted to landowner contact.

The difference between the expected 150 treatment acres and the contracted 138 was a result of some landowners, for whom applications had been received, opting out of the program.

Additionally, the short grant contract period, with no potential for extension, didn’t provide leeway for unusual weather, or other circumstances. As a result, Winningham Forest Management worked up until the final week of the grant period yet was not unable to treat 3 acres due to wet soil conditions.

Also, due to the tight deadline, a public tour of the project was not conducted before the expiration of the grant. However, a tour was conducted on March 30th. There were a total of 14 attendees, including 7 members of the public, 2 PC FSC Board members, 2 PC FSC employees, a reporter for the local newspaper, and the project forester and her agent.

Financial Summary

Project costs totaled \$274,439.90. A match of \$1,320, of a guaranteed \$1,200, was provided by the Plumas County Fire Safe Council - providing 22 hours of outreach and coordination. The final invoice accompanies this report. The remaining \$44,736.10 in grant funds are disencumbered by the PC FSC.

	SRA FPF	Title III	Total Cost	Percent of Project Costs
Registered Professional Forester	\$36,296.88		\$36,296.88	13.2%
Licensed Timber Operator	\$203,307.23		\$203,307.23	74.1%
Coordination	\$8,686.71	\$1,320.00	\$10,006.71	3.6%
Administration	\$24,829.08		\$24,829.08	9.0%
Total	\$273,119.90	\$1,320.00	\$274,439.90	100.0%

The project averaged \$1505.98 per acre treated. The LTO costs were contracted at \$880/acre for mastication and \$3,982.92/acre for hand-thin and chip. The high cost of the hand-thin operations were justified by the steep slopes and high densities of the hand-thin units.

The \$16,000 road repair contingency funds that were contracted to Wunningham Forest Management were not used by the contractor. \$180 of those funds were appropriated for driveway repairs addressing water damage on a property neighboring PC FSC's American Valley treatments. It could not be confirmed that the damage was due to the mastication work upslope of the property or just the result of the unusual wet weather. Because PC FSC liability could not be entirely ruled out, the Council contracted road repairs for the driveway.

The remaining unused funds are a result of:

- 1) the 3 acres that remained untreated, and the areas treated– free of cost – by SRA funded crews
- 3) unused coordination time (*note: because it was apparent early in the project that the forester would need to devote more time than anticipated to the project, the PC FSC coordinator started using additional Title III funds for their time devoted to the American Valley project. Not all of these hours were captured in the recorded match.*)
- 4) administrative costs budgeted at 12%, while actual costs were only 10% of amounts invoiced