USFS Angora Fire environmental document up for review

The U.S. Forest Service Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit is seeking public comment on the environmental assessment for its proposed action to restore the Angora Fire area, including fuels reduction, wildlife habitat improvement, aquatic habitat and watershed restoration, road and trail system improvements and invasive weed control.

The EA marks the third round of public comment on post-fire restoration. During the last round of public input, concerns centered around providing sufficient wildlife habitat and the loss of a neighborhood recreational opportunity at Seneca Pond. Because of the benefits to water quality and wildlife habitat, the Forest Service is proposing to proceed with restoration of Seneca Pond, phased in over three years.

“We understand that some in the neighborhood will not agree with this proposal, even though recreational access to the area would remain the same,” Terri Marceron, forest supervisor, said in a press release. “During our analysis for this project, we learned that Seneca Pond is having a negative effect on water quality. Restoring it to a wetland will benefit Angora Creek, which drains to Lake Tahoe.”

The Angora restoration proposal calls for removing standing dead and downed wood on up to 1,398 acres, thinning of unhealthy live trees to improve the health of remaining overstory trees and construction of new roads and landings to facilitate fuel removal and forest management.

The Forest Service would use mechanical equipment on up to 951

acres on slopes less than 30 percent and aerial logging on up to 447 acres. Hand treatment could occur within any of these areas as a primary or follow-up treatment. The agency would reforest with a mix of native seedlings on a total of 1,100 acres and is currently seeking comment on a proposal that would allow expedited planting of seedlings scheduled for delivery this spring which is separate from this project.

Public comment emphasized the importance of burned forest as wildlife habitat, and the Forest Service would leave about 42 percent of the area (1,300 acres) untreated to fulfill this need. The agency also has incorporated areas with higher amounts of snags and downed wood into the untreated areas and adjusted fuels reduction prescriptions to maintain these components in areas where tree removal would occur. Aspen restoration and reforestation would also help to restore wildlife habitat.

In addition to restoring the wetland around Seneca Pond, the Forest Service would reconstruct 1,200 feet of Angora Creek channel through the meadow above Lake Tahoe Boulevard, and strategically place large woody debris within a two-mile segment of the creek and its tributaries to improve aquatic habitat.

The agency would also remove live conifers that are encroaching on Gardner Mountain meadow, fill in the incised channel and install structures to maintain the new channel elevation and plant riparian shrubs and sod to stabilize exposed soil.

The proposal also includes construction of new roads and trails, decommissioning and restoration of roads and trails, and improved access and wayfinding, as well as upgrades to stream crossings and other erosion control measures. The roads and trails work would provide for continued high-quality recreational access, as well as forest management access, while bringing roads and trails up to standards that would

reduce erosion and improve water quality.

The Forest Service encourage the public to review the EA and provide comment. The agency is particularly interested on comment on how well the proposed action meets the purpose and need for the project, whether there are other restoration activities not included in the proposal which the agency has not analyzed, whether there are issues regarding project operations not addressed in the EA and which areas the Forest Service should prioritize for fuels treatment if full funding for the project is not available.

For a copy of the EA, click here or call (530) 543.2694. Comments will be accepted until April 12.