Attachment 10C(1)

Explanatory Note for DOI the Office of Wildland Fire Coordination Report
May 2, 2011

Attached is the Explanatory Note for Office of Wildland Fire Coordination's (OWFC) National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) Report as required under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) of 2009, Section 1609(c). The OWFC was approved for ARRA funding under one Treasury Appropriations Fund: Hazardous Fuels Reduction, WUI.

The data reported here are identical to those reported for the previous quarter. There have been no changes related to NEPA actions, project status, new projects or project withdrawals. Project obligations also remain unchanged: offices were committed to completing contract awards before the end of fiscal year 2010. Outlays did increase, although the data are not included in this report. Project implementation is typically reduced during the winter season, however, those projects requiring frozen ground surfaces, or a snowpack, have had opportunities to progress. As the fiscal year progresses, we anticipate that outlays will approach obligations, but that a small subset of those funds obligated may be returned if they are not needed for final project completion.

Projects Withdrawn in the OWFC Report – No projects were withdrawn in this reporting cycle. As previously reported, one project was withdrawn in the previous reporting cycle: International Border Fuel Break/Biomass Utilization (Line 33, Page 2). Consultation and mitigation for this EA required by the Endangered Species Act (Section 7) could not be completed within the ARRA timeframes and the project has been deferred. Another project was also reported as withdrawn in the fourth reporting cycle. For that project, it was determined that the land status changes resulting from passage of the Omnibus Public Lands Management Act of 2009 would have required new NEPA for the project, and that the class of NEPA would have been an EIS, which could not have been completed in the timeframe mandated by the ARRA (row 38).

New Entries in the OWFC report – No new project has been entered in the report since the previous report.

Consolidation of NEPA Actions – For increased transparency and because of the relatively limited number of projects, OWFC projects are listed individually; we have not grouped projects.

Compliance Documents Completed Prior to ARRA -- For some projects, compliance documents were completed several years ago. For each of these projects, we have confirmed that there are no significant new circumstances or information relevant to environmental concerns and bearing on the proposed action or its impacts, and that the conditions of and around the projects have not changed significantly.

Pending Categorical Exclusion Actions -- All NEPA actions have been completed for projects that were proposed to be implemented under categorical exclusions.

Pending Environmental Assessment Actions – No environmental assessment remains pending.

Change in Total Pending NEPA Actions Since Previous Report – No NEPA actions remain pending and no projects need completion of federal environmental reviews; these items remain unchanged from our previous report.

Class of Action Changes -- No project had a class of action change since the previous report.

Difference Between Appropriation and Total Obligations to Date – Obligations totaled $14.569 million of the $15.0 million appropriation. Savings in contract award costs allowed additional work to be completed on several projects. Most of the hazardous fuels projects are being implemented through contracts, which are not awarded until all environmental reviews and documents are completed. Implementation of the projects is usually depended on seasonal effects, such as weather conditions and wildlife habitat considerations. On-the-ground implementation occurs shortly after a contract is awarded. While most contract cost savings allowed additional work to be completed, $431,469 of these savings remain in the ARRA Hazardous Fuels Reduction account.

Examples of How NEPA for ARRA Projects Has Been Beneficial to Project Planning, Design or Implementation – Recovery Act Hazardous Fuels Reduction projects are a small, but highly visible, component of the Department's Hazardous Fuels Reduction Program. The Department implements several thousand hazardous fuel reduction projects annually. The 56 Recovery Act projects in Hazardous Fuels Reduction do not "break new ground", as they were generally "shovel ready", with much environmental planning underway or completed prior to the passage of the Recovery Act. The Bureaus integrated the NEPA process with other planning at the earliest possible time to ensure that planning and decisions reflect environmental values, avoid delays later in the process, and head off potential conflicts.

The ARRA Hazardous Fuels Reduction projects are model projects that serve as local high-profile examples in public outreach and participation, planning and implementation. Each project is used to showcase, within the local community, the potential benefits of utilizing woody materials that would otherwise be disposed of in landfills or burned in large piles during favorable weather conditions. At the same time, the projects showcase efforts to reduce hazardous accumulations of vegetation and woody fuel that pose potential wildfire risks to these same communities. A third major objective is the creation of employment within the community; biomass projects tend to be among the most labor-intensive of those that reduce hazardous fuels. Projects are identified either through the development of local, collaborative community wildfire protection plans, or to meet the objectives of land and resource management plans which often includes the protection of communities from the risk of wildfire as well.

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