The MFSC prepared a letter in response to these comments from these organizations, which is also included in Appendix J.

In response to those comments, the September 2010 MCCWPP was revised to address them. However, during Monterey County's review of the September 2010 MCCWPP, Monterey County and various environmental organizations requested additional changes to the document. The MFSC amended the September 2010 MCCWPP to respond to the additional comments, which are also included in Appendix J, resulting in the November 2010 MCCWPP. The November 2010 MCCWPP was further amended to this version 2 (v2), after Monterey County again deferred signing the MCCWPP.

9.1 Recommendations to the Secretary of Agriculture

Pursuant to sections 101(3)(B), 103, 104 and 105 of the HFRA,[81] this MCCWPP recommends the following to the Secretary of Agriculture:

9.1.1 Maintain the Ventana Fuelbreak (Big Box Firebreak)

Background: The Ventana Fuelbreak (formerly the Big Box Firebreak), which generally surrounds much of the Monterey District of the LPNF, protects the following at-risk communities from fires originating in the LPNF, and protects the LPNF from fires originating in the following at-risk communities:

- Arroyo Seco
- Big Sur
- Big Sur, South Coast
- Bryson-Hesperia
- Cachagua
- Carmel Highlands
- Carmel Valley
- Carmel Valley Village
- Indians
- Jamesburg
- Lockwood
- Palo Colorado
- Pine Canyon (south)
- Rancho San Carlos
- Rancho San Clemente
- Reliz Canyon
- San Antonio Lake
- Tassajara
- White Rock

[81] 16 USC 6511(3)(B)), 6511(16)(A), 6513 & 6514.

The image below shows the Basin Fire burning toward Carmel Valley in 2008. The Basin Fire was stopped on the north at the Big Box/Ventana Firebreak. Most of the northern portion of the Big Box/Ventana Firebreak (near Carmel Valley) is in the Ventana Wilderness. The photo was taken from the Los Tulares area in Carmel Valley, looking generally southward, on or about July 15, 2008. The fog in the foreground is over the valley floor.

Recommendation: Reduce the risk to communities by maintaining the Ventana Fuelbreak, and treatment on both sides of it in a condition and for such distance that will ensure a high probability the fuelbreak or other treatment will be effective under adverse weather conditions and permit effective tactical suppression actions. The fuelbreak should serve to allow firefighters to work safely in the area; to change fire direction; to drop fire to the ground; and to stop the spread of wildfire under adverse fire conditions. The width of treatment should be determined utilizing such factors as fuel loads, topography, predominant winds, values at risk and fire behavior modeling. To the extent the Ventana Fuelbreak and the treatments on both sides of it are on non-federal land, this recommendation should be construed as recommending that federal funds be made available for their maintenance (e.g., through grants). The location of the Ventana Fuelbreak is shown on the map in Appendix B-7 by the line representing the Big Box Firebreak.

Rationale: The Big Box Firebreak was used to protect at-risk communities surrounding the LPNF from the 178,000 acre Marble Cone Fire in 1977, the 86,000 acre Kirk Complex Fire in 1999, and the 163,000 acre Basin Fire and 81,000 acre Indians Fire in 2008.

The Basin Fire burned on the west side of an 8 mile segment of the western portion of the Big Box Firebreak, consuming 26 homes and 32 other structures in the Big Sur at-risk community, and threatening approximately 300 homes in the Palo Colorado at-risk community. Maintaining and defending the Ventana Fuelbreak and treatments on both sides of it will reduce the threat of harm to firefighters and to the communities surrounding the Los Padres National Forest. As noted in Section 3.3.1.2., "Due to the extreme hazard of fires in the Los Padres National Forest" Congress has provided special management language for wilderness areas in the Los Padres National Forest, including allowing pre-suppression measures such as those recommended in this MCCWPP.[82]

The recommendation to maintain the Ventana Fuelbreak and its side-treatments before fire starts is to help ensure they can be used effectively and safely without delay to stop the spread of fire, to protect lives, property and the environment. However, it is important to note that a fire, whether natural or human-caused could occur outside fuelbreaks/firebreak, which would make the fuelbreaks/firebreaks ineffective for slowing or stopping fires.

Note 1: Firebreak vs. Fuelbreak – Comments on the January 2010 MCCWPP included concerns over the use of the term, "firebreak" instead of the term "fuelbreak". In an attempt to reach consensus, this November 2010 MCCWPP deleted the recommendation to maintain "firebreak" in its recommendations. The USFS and BLM have stated that as a matter of policy, the agencies can only maintain strategic fuelbreaks, and not firebreaks. These agencies state that firebreaks are, instead, opened and/or created during a wildfire. This MCCWPP recommends measures to allow mechanized equipment into wilderness areas, when necessary, to open and/or construct firebreaks and fight wildfire without any procedural delays.

Note 2: Use of Fuelbreaks – Fuelbreaks typically contain vegetation, though at reduced volume. Fuelbreaks are generally maintained over substantially wider distance than firebreaks, depending upon such factors as topography and vegetation type and density. Due to their vegetation, fuelbreaks must be properly designed and maintained for such distance as will ensure a high probability the fuelbreak or other treatment will be effective under adverse weather conditions and permit effective tactical suppression action.

Fuelbreaks may be improved with heavy equipment to be firebreaks during fires, if time allows and resources are available. During catastrophic events like the 2008 Lightning Siege in California, which started over 2,000 fires statewide[83] including the Basin Fire, availability of resources can be problematic.

Note 3: Wilderness Expansion – The Ventana Wilderness was created in 1969 encompassing approximately 98,000 acres.[84] The 1968 report from the Secretary of Agriculture to President Johnson on the proposed Ventana Wilderness states, "The boundary of this proposed Wilderness is very important and has been intentionally established wherever possible to allow the construction of peripheral fuelbreaks, and fire control access. Approximately 70 percent of

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[82] Section 3.3.1.2.2, quoting Senate Report 95-490 on H.R. 3454 (The Endangered American Wilderness Act of 1978), 95th Congress 1st session October 11, 1977, Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources.

[83] http://www.fire.ca.gov/index_incidents_overview.php

[84] Public law 91-58, August 18, 1969.

the boundary of this area would be located 250 feet below the crest of the ridge to permit the machine construction of effective fuelbreaks."[85]

The boundary of the Ventana Wilderness has been expanded four times, and now encompasses over 236,000 acres. In 2002, wilderness boundaries in the Monterey Ranger District of the LPNF were expanded in twelve areas, in some locations to within 30 to 100 feet of roads. Some of the roads serve as escape routes in event of fire and some double as firebreaks. In at least one location, wilderness was expanded over the Big Box Firebreak.

Because of past procedural delays in obtaining authorization for using mechanized equipment in wilderness, and to help avoid such procedural delays in the future, this MCCWPP makes recommendations for additional training and communication, and expedited procedures, for improving and/or creating firebreaks without procedural delay once wildfire has started.

Note 4: Sierra Club's Expert's Support for Maintaining Existing Firebreaks – As part of the comments to the January 2010 MCCWPP,[86] the Ventana Chapter of the Sierra Club included as an exhibit, an opinion memo by Dr. Scott Stephens, Associate Professor of Fire Science at the University of California, Berkeley. Mr. Stephens stated in his memo the following: "The CWPP specifies where existing fire and fuel breaks are located throughout the county (Pg 72, 73 & 74). Since these are already installed maintaining them into the future makes sense. They can act as anchor points for fire suppression operations and safety areas for fire fighters." As acknowledged by Dr. Stephens, the existing Big Box Firebreak should be maintained, before fire starts, and treatments should be provided on each side to help ensure the firebreak can be safely manned and effectively used during wildfires.

9.1.2 Maintain the Bixby Mountain Fuelbreak

Recommendation: Reduce the risk to communities by maintaining the Bixby Mountain Fuelbreak, and treatments on both sides of it in a condition and for such distance as will ensure a high probability the fuelbreak or other treatment will be effective under adverse weather conditions and permit effective tactical suppression actions. The fuebreak should result in a high probability that the fuelbreak will serve to allow firefighters to work safely in the area; to change fire direction and spread; to drop fire to the ground; and to stop the spread of wildfire under adverse fire conditions. The width of treatment should be determined utilizing such factors as fuel loads, topography, predominant winds, values at risk and fire behavior modeling. To the extent the Bixby Mountain Fuelbreak or its side-treatments are on non-federal land, this recommendation should be construed as recommending that federal funds be made available for their maintenance (e.g., through grants). The location of the Bixby Mountain Fuelbreak is shown on the map in Appendix B-7 as the Bixby Mountain Firebreak.

Rationale: The Bixby Mountain Firebreak protected the Palo Colorado at-risk community from the Basin Fire in 2008. This community contains almost half the residential population in the greater Big Sur at-risk community. Much of the land on which the Bixby Mountain

[85] 90th Congress, 2d Session, House Document No, 292, Part 9.

[86] July 13, 2010 Letter to Monterey Fire Safe Council from Lippe GaffneyWagner LLP.

Firebreak is located is currently in private ownership, and some of the land is owned by the USFS.

The Bixby Mountain Fuelbreak is the "backup" firebreak referred to in the rationale for Section 9.1.1, which was successfully used to stop the Basin Fire from burning into the greater Palo Colorado area. The Bixby Mountain Firebreak is strategically critical for wildfires burning north from the Los Padres National Forest southeast of Bixby Mountain. Recommendation 9.1.1 would restore the Bixby Mountain Fuelbreak to its historic role as a backup/secondary fuelbreak. For additional explanation, see the rationale discussion for the Ventana Fuelbreak above. However, it is important to note that a fire, whether natural or human-caused could occur outside fuelbreaks/firebreaks, which would make the fuelbreaks/firebreaks ineffective for slowing or stopping fires.

9.1.3 Establish Agreement with CAL FIRE to Defend the Bixby Mountain Fuelbreak/Firebreak

Recommendation: To the extent the Bixby Mountain Fuelbreak is on Federal land, establish agreements for CAL FIRE to defend the Bixby Mountain Fuelbreak during wildfires in a manner consistent with CAL FIRE's fire suppression policies.

Rationale: The USFS and CAL FIRE differ in their policies regarding defense of firebreaks and fuelbreaks that protect rural communities from wildfire. As noted above, the Bixby Mountain Firebreak is currently located primarily on private land, which is SRA over which CAL FIRE currently has jurisdiction. During the Basin Complex Fire, CAL FIRE successfully improved and defended the Bixby Mountain Firebreak, protecting hundreds of homes in the Bixby, Palo Colorado, Rocky Creek and Garrapata watersheds. Given that CAL FIRE has successfully defended the Bixby Mountain Firebreak, defense of the fuelbreak should be contracted out to CAL FIRE should the USFS acquire or own lands on which the fuelbreak is located, and the agreement should specify that defense of the fuelbreak will be consistent with CAL FIRE's suppression policies.

9.1.4 Pre-attack Planning by USFS in Cooperation with CAL FIRE and Local Fire Departments

Recommendation: It is recommended that the USFS prepare, and update as needed, a pre-attack plan that identifies the Ventana (Big Box) Firebreak and the Bixby Mountain Firebreak as critical strategic firebreaks. The Pre-attack plan needs to address the urgency and procedures for obtaining approvals to improving the firebreaks when a wildfire threatens communities at risk. It is further recommended that the pre-attack plan be prepared and updated in cooperation with local communities, CAL FIRE, and local fire departments responsible for wildfire suppression and/or structure protection in communities that may be impacted by wildfires originating in the Monterey Ranger District of the LPNF. It is also recommended that copies of the pre-attack plan and its updates be provided to CAL FIRE and to such local fire departments upon completion, in order that they may have them in their possession before fires start. The pre-attack plan should also be provided to Monterey County for incorporation into the County's Emergency Operational Plan.

Rationale: Pre-attack planning can be used to avoid delays improving firebreaks that are critical to protecting communities from wildfires that originate in the LPNF. See the Fire Frequency Map at Appendix B-3 for a graphical indication that most major wildfires in Monterey County start in the LPNF. Because of past procedural delays in obtaining authorization for using mechanized equipment in wilderness, and because of the potential for rapid spread of wildfires in the LPNF under severe fire conditions, and because incident commanders from outside the area may not be familiar with local conditions, it is important to prepare documentation in advance of wildfires that will avoid procedural delays improving critical firebreaks once a wildfire has started.

9.1.5 Letter of Delegation and Expedited Process to Open and/or Construct Firebreaks Upon Start of Wildfires

Recommendation: It is recommended that the USFS ensure that all fire management personnel while managing a wildfire will understand the process for requesting authorization to use mechanized equipment in wilderness to avoid any procedural delays. This process should be conveyed to the initial attack Incident Commander and Incident Command Team through a letter of delegation. It is further recommended that to the extent existing procedures have potential to delay the use of motorized equipment in wilderness during wildfires, the USFS should alter or supplement existing procedures to implement an expedited process to ensure that mechanized equipment can be used in wilderness in the Monterey Ranger District of the LPNF during wildfires, without procedural delay.

Rationale: Use of motorized equipment in wilderness is generally restricted until after a fire has started. Even after a wildfire is burning delays obtaining authorization to use motorized equipment in wilderness have been known to occur. To avoid procedural delays obtaining authorization to use motorized equipment in wilderness during wildfires, the USFS should implement procedures to ensure that all fire management personnel understand the process for requesting authorization to use mechanized equipment in wilderness, or if needed to avoid potential for such delays, USFS should alter or supplement existing procedures to implement an expedited authorization process.

9.1.6 Support the Santa Lucia Fire Defense System (In Progress)

Background: The Santa Lucia Fire Defense System (in progress), including but not limited to the Ventana Fuelbreak, is a network of interconnecting fire lines and fuelbreaks that protects at-risk communities from fires originating in the LPNF (including those at-risk communities not protected by the Ventana and Bixby Mountain Fuelbreaks), and protects the LPNF from fires originating in at-risk communities. Development of the Santa Lucia Fire Defense System (SLFDS) is supported by private landowners adjacent to LPNF and BLM threat areas. Initial work was started on the SLFDS as part of the USFS FireScape Monterey (in progress), and the BLM Sierra de Salinas-Gabilan Fuel Reduction Project and Strategic Fuel Break System.

Recommendation: Support funding for installation and maintenance of fuelbreaks and fuel reduction buffer zones on Federal and non-federal lands within the SLFDS.

Rationale: New and existing firebreaks and fuelbreaks in the area proposed to be encompassed by the SLFDS were used to protect at-risk communities surrounding the LPNF from the 163,000 acre Basin Fire and 81,000 acre Indians Fire in 2008. The Ventana Fuelbreak will be part of the SLFDS.

For additional explanation, see the rationale discussion for the Ventana Fuelbreak, above. However, it is important to note that a fire, whether natural or human-caused could occur outside fuelbreaks/firebreak, which would make the fuelbreaks/firebreaks ineffective for slowing or stopping fires.

9.1.7 Manage Hazardous Fuels on National Forest System Lands to Protect All At-Risk Communities

Recommendation: Manage vegetation on National Forest System lands in Monterey County to protect all at-risk communities named in this MCCWPP. Recommended activities include modifying hazardous fuels and installing and maintaining effective fuelbreaks, SPLATS and fuel reduction buffer zones in a manner that will result in a high probability that wildfires originating on National Forest System lands can be kept from spreading to at-risk communities under extreme conditions.

Rationale: Though much of the LPNF burned over in the recent Basin, Indians and Chalk fires, much of the burned over areas still have dead vegetation that is capable of reburning. The risk of wildfire and danger to communities is therefore not eliminated on much of this Federal land. Moreover, given the favorable environmental conditions, vegetation will rapidly regrow, and the problem of overgrowth must be addressed.

9.1.8 Priorities for Hazardous Fuel Reduction Funding on Private Lands

Recommendation: Award grants and allocate other federal funding through the Department of Agriculture for hazardous fuel reduction work on private lands and lands owned by state and local government in Monterey County in accordance with the priorities of this MCCWPP in Table 13 and Appendix D, subject to compliance with all local, state and federal laws.

Rationale: Pursuant to the HFRA, one purpose of a CWPP is to prioritize hazardous fuel reduction projects to protect at-risk communities. The prioritization of hazardous fuel reduction projects in this MCCWPP is based upon community priorities, state of the art fire modeling analysis (e.g., FRAP fire threat analysis), on-the-ground fire threat assessment, and the expert opinion of fire professionals familiar with Monterey County's WUI areas.

9.1.9 Fund Emergency Ingress and Egress to the Los Padres National Forest (LPNF)

Recommendation: Fund fuel reduction work along roads that provide emergency ingress and egress to the LPNF and to at-risk communities near the LPNF.

Rationale: Access to the LPNF during a wildfire is critical to USFS firefighting operations. Where such access roads also provide emergency ingress and egress for at-risk communities, the

9.2.6 Priorities for Fuel Reduction Funding on Private Lands

Recommendation: Award grants and allocate other federal funding through the Department of Interior related to hazardous fuel reduction work on private lands and lands owned by state and local government in Monterey County in accordance with the priorities in Table 13 and Appendix D, subject to issuance of all necessary permits and compliance with all local, state and federal laws.

Rationale: Pursuant to the HFRA, one purpose of a CWPP is to prioritize hazardous fuel reduction projects to protect at-risk communities. The prioritization of hazardous fuel reduction projects recommended in this MCCWPP is based upon community priorities, FRAP analysis, on-the-ground fire threat assessment, and the expert opinion of fire professionals familiar with Monterey County's WUI areas.

9.2.7 Fund Emergency Ingress and Egress to Lands Administered by BLM

Recommendation: Fund fuel reduction work along roads that provide emergency ingress and egress to lands administered by BLM in Monterey County, and to at-risk communities that may be threatened by wildfires originating on such lands, in order that such roads may be used during a wildfire.

Rationale: Access to lands administered by BLM during a wildfire is critical to firefighting operations. Where such access roads also provide emergency ingress and egress for at-risk communities, the added benefit of protecting lives and property in at-risk communities justifies a high priority for fuel reduction work along such roads.

9.2.8 Incorporate CWPPs Into BLM's Pre-attack Planning

Recommendation: Incorporate the maps and community pre-attack strategic fire defense planning that may be prepared pursuant to this MCCWPP and local CWPPs into the incident management team's planning process. Essential maps that may be prepared include those showing firebreaks and fuelbreaks, evacuation plans, Safety Zones, those showing boundaries of communities at-risk and those showing WUI boundaries, as provided in CWPPs.

Rationale: This recommendation would promote effective support of, and communication and engagement with, communities that may be affected by wildfires originating on Federal land, and avoid unnecessary displacement and disharmony among residents.

9.3 Recommendation to Congress

9.3.1 Enact Legislation to Enable and Require that Fuelbreaks be Maintained, if Fuelbreak Recommendations to the Secretary of Agriculture are not Implemented Within Three Years

Recommendation: Should the fuelbreaks and side-treatments described in Sections 9.1.1 and 9.1.2 not be installed, maintained and defended as recommended, within three years from the date this MCCWPP is signed by the signatories required by the HFRA, it is recommended that

Congress enact legislation to clearly enable and require the recommendations in Sections 9.1.1 and 9.1.2.

Rationale: Though Congressional documents, for decades, have repeatedly stated that the USFS is free to use whatever presuppression methods and techniques it finds are necessary to manage wildfire fuels to protect communities near California's wilderness areas, and the Ventana Wilderness and Silver Peak Wilderness areas in particular,[89] little or no such preparation has taken place. When wildfires come, communities remain vulnerable, with their survival depending almost entirely on the weather and the location of random lightning strikes or human-caused ignition.

After fire starts, bulldozers, hydraulic excavators, trucks, chainsaws, and other motorized equipment must be approved for use in areas designated as wilderness. Obtaining such approval can be delayed as fire spreads.[90] Once approval is obtained motorized equipment is used in a race to reopen overgrown firebreaks and fuelbreaks. However, depending on the weather and where lightning strikes, there is no assurance that work can be done in time. This scenario plays out every 10 to 20 years in the Monterey Ranger District of the LPNF (e.g., Marble Cone Fire (1977), Kirk Fire (1999), Basin Fire (2008)).

9.4 Recommendations to all Federal, State and Local Regulatory Agencies with Jurisdiction in Monterey County

This MCCWPP makes the following recommendations to all federal, state and local regulatory agencies with jurisdiction in Monterey County, subject to compliance with all local, state and federal laws.

9.4.1 Establish an Annual Goal for Hazardous Fuel Reduction Work in Monterey County

Recommendation: An annual acreage goal for hazardous fuel reduction work in areas where such fuel presents a potential threat to lives, structures, infrastructure, access roads or watersheds in Monterey County should be established by agreement among fire organizations such as CAL FIRE, the Monterey County Fire Chiefs Association and the MFSC, for the purpose of restoring vegetation density and ecosystem fire resiliency to a state that approximates the condition an area would likely have (in the judgment of the FAHJ) had fire suppression not been practiced in the area.

Rationale: Hazardous fuels in certain areas of Monterey County present a potential threat to lives, communities, structures, infrastructure, access roads, and watersheds in the event of wildfire. Significant portions of Monterey County are rated by CAL FIRE's FRAP program as high, very-high or extreme threat from wildfire. Without an annual goal for performance of hazardous fuel reduction work in these certain areas that present a potential threat to lives,

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[89] See Section 3.3.1.2 in this MCCWPP, Wilderness Acts, for acts of Congress and Congressional reports related to wilderness areas in Monterey County.

[90] Reference: Chief Hutchinson's statement at September 21, 2010 Board of Supervisors Hearing. Other fire professionals who worked on the Basin Fire have reported that delays of several days occurred before approval for use of heavy equipment could be obtained for some areas.