USDA United States Department of Agriculture | Forest Service | Shasta-Trinity National Forest Supervisor's Office | 3644 Avtech Parkway Redding, CA 96002 530-226-2500 TDD: 530-226-2490

File Code: 1900
Date: May 16, 2018

The Lower Canyon Test Pit project is a collaboration between the Department of Interior's Trinity River Restoration Program and the US Department of Agriculture's Forest Service.

Dear Interested Party:

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Forest Service, Shasta-Trinity National Forest (Forest), in partnership with the Trinity River Restoration Program (TRRP), proposes the Lower Canyon Test Pit project. In order to conduct river restoration activities, it is necessary to determine the underlying geology and groundwater flow by digging test pits in the Trinity River floodplain. In anticipation of three upcoming river restoration projects upstream of the Junction City, California area, test pits are proposed to be dug in the Chapman Ranch, Evans Bar and Dutch Creek channel rehabilitation areas (Figure 1), within the boundaries of their corresponding environmental study limits (ESLs).

Background/Proposed Action

The Trinity River currently supports fall and spring-run Chinook salmon (*Oncorhynchus tshawytscha),* steelhead (*O. mykiss*) and federal and state Endangered Species Act-protected Southern Oregon and Northern California Coasts (SONCC) coho salmon (*O. kisutch*). On December 29, 2000, the Secretary of the Interior signed the Record of Decision (ROD) for the Trinity River Mainstem Fishery Restoration Environmental Impact Statement/Environmental Impact Report (EIS/EIR). The ROD directs the Bureau of Reclamation to restore the Trinity River fishery through a combination of variable and relatively high flow releases from Lewiston Dam, floodplain infrastructure improvements, channel rehabilitation projects, fine and coarse sediment management, watershed restoration, and an Adaptive Environmental Assessment and Management Program. The recommended flow evaluation alternative of the EIS/EIR requires restoration of 47 mainstem Trinity River channel rehabilitation sites. At these selected locations, excavation and removal of elevated lands will reconnect the river with its floodplain to provide needed slow-water habitat for juvenile salmonids. Subsequent grading of the site and revegetation of selected areas will promote return of historic alluvial river processes along the river and will increase locally available juvenile salmonid habitat at low and intermediate river flows. The lower canyon restoration projects (three of the 47 sites) will increase habitat for salmonids by adding complexity to the channel and restoring functional floodplains.

In order to conduct channel rehabilitation, excavation of geologic test pits is required. The proposed designs include excavation in areas that are assumed to be non-bedrock. Geologic test pits (5-15 feet in depth, as required to reach groundwater) will be excavated (by an excavator or backhoe) and evaluated at

the Chapman Ranch, Evans Bar and Dutch Creek channel rehabilitation areas (Figure 2). The test pit areas are located near the Trinity River mainstem near Junction City, California on public lands managed by the US Forest Service (USFS) and Bureau of Land Management (BLM). The Forest Service proposes to allow TRRP to access the test pit area and to dig and refill 2-15 test pits per site on National Forest System lands.

Your Involvement

The purpose of this scoping letter is to invite you to participate in the analysis process for the project by providing comments, suggestions, or concerns you may have about this proposal during this public scoping period. If you have information you feel the agency may not be aware of, or feel you have issues (points of dispute, debate, or disagreement) regarding potential effects of this proposal, please send those issues in writing to the Forest at the address listed at the close of this letter. The Dutch Creek, Evans Bar and Chapman Ranch projects are being proposed on lands that are administered by the Forest Service as well as by the Bureau of Land Management. This decision will only authorize treatments on lands administered by the Forest Service.

Project Locations

The Dutch Creek, Evans Bar and Chapman Ranch channel rehabilitation sites are located upstream of Junction City, California. Access will be gained via Trinity County's Dutch Creek and Evans Bar Roads. Access to the Dutch Creek test pit area will require a low-water crossing of the Trinity River just upstream of the Evans Bar boat launch at approximately River Mile 85.15 (Figure 1, inset). Crossing of the seasonally dry Carr Creek will also be required, and will be conducted at a location where the creek recedes below the ground surface in summer and fall.

The sites are found on the Junction City, California 7.5-minute USGS quadrangle, Township 33 North, Range 10 West, Sections 19, 20, 29 and 32, MDB&M.

Purpose and Need for Action

The purpose of the test pits is to more accurately ascertain the true nature of the underlying substratum and validate previous geologic explorations. Should it prove to be other than predicted, excavation costs would be prohibitively expensive and alternative restoration designs would need to be considered. Digging geologic test pits prior to project implementation is a standard practice that supports design completion and implementation safety, cost-effectiveness and efficiency. Excavated material and the test pits themselves will be qualitatively evaluated and logged/mapped by visual examination to determine substrate quality (e.g., soil or rock type present) and groundwater depth, in order to understand the geological characteristics of each of the test locations. At several test pit locations, piezometers may be installed during the process of refilling the pits in order to evaluate long term ground water table elevations. Piezometer data will provide site-specific information on pre-restoration sub-surface water movement. Collected data will be used for designing and refining site-specific restoration features, including riparian ground cover contours and species-specific planting locations, which require exact elevation details. The information will also be used to validate site-specific water elevation estimates in order to ensure that benches and floodplains are inundated at desired intervals and flows.

Initial review of this project suggests that these activities may be categorically excluded from further analysis and documentation in an Environmental Impact Statement or Environmental Assessment due to the apparent lack of extraordinary circumstances related to the proposed action and the fact that the project is likely within category 36 CFR 220.6 (e)(8). That category applies to "Short-term (1 year or less) mineral, energy, or geophysical investigations and their incidental support activities that may require cross-country travel by vehicles and equipment, construction of less than 1 mile of low standard road, or use and minor repair of existing roads."

The Forest Plan for the Shasta-Trinity National Forest includes the Forest goals to 1) "maintain and restore the distribution, diversity, and complexity of watershed and landscape scale features to ensure protection of the aquatic systems to which species, populations and communities are uniquely adapted"; 2) "maintain and restore spatial and temporal connectivity within and between watersheds"; and 3) "maintain and restore the physical integrity of the aquatic system, including shorelines, banks, and bottom configurations"[1]. By facilitating river restoration, this project will help meet Forest goals.

The Planning Process and How You Can Participate

The decision-making process provides opportunities for interested parties to provide their ideas and comments regarding resource management proposals. This input will help the Forest identify issues that will shape the proposed action and lead to a decision. You are encouraged to submit project-specific written comments related to the proposal during the scoping period. Comments received by June 1, 2018 will be fully considered and are most useful in helping the agencies evaluate the proposal. The most useful comments provide new information or describe unwanted environmental effects potentially caused by the proposal. If you reference scientific literature in your comments, you must provide a copy of the entire cited reference and explain how you feel it is pertinent to the project.

Written comments can be submitted using one of the following methods:

1. Email: submit comments electronically to STNF-comments@fs.fed.us. Attachments may be in the following formats: plain text (.txt), rich format (.rtf), Word (.doc, .docx), or portable document format (.pdf). Include the words "Lower Canyon Test Pit Project" in the subject line.
2. Fax: send to (530) 226-2475
3. Postal Mail: send letters to Deputy Forest Supervisor, Shasta-Trinity National Forest Headquarters, 3644 Avtech Parkway, Redding, CA 96002, ATTN: Chris Losi
4. Hand delivery: deliver to address above during normal business hours (8:00 am to 4:30pm, Monday-Friday, excluding holidays).

Please be aware that the comments received, including names and addresses of those who comment, will be part of the public record for this proposed action. Comments submitted anonymously will be accepted and considered; however, anonymous comments will not provide the Agency with the ability to provide the respondent with subsequent environmental documents.

Additional information about this proposal may be found at: www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=53698. If you have questions about this proposal or need additional information, you may contact Chris Losi at 530-226-2425 or at christopherjlosi@fs.fed.us.

We appreciate your interest in the management of our National Forests.

Sincerely,

Terri Simon-Jackson

TERRI SIMON-JACKSON
Deputy Forest Supervisor

[1] USDA Forest Service, 1995, Shasta Trinity National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan, pg. 4-53.

Figure 1: Location of Lower Canyon test pit areas and project Environmental Study Limits (ESLs)

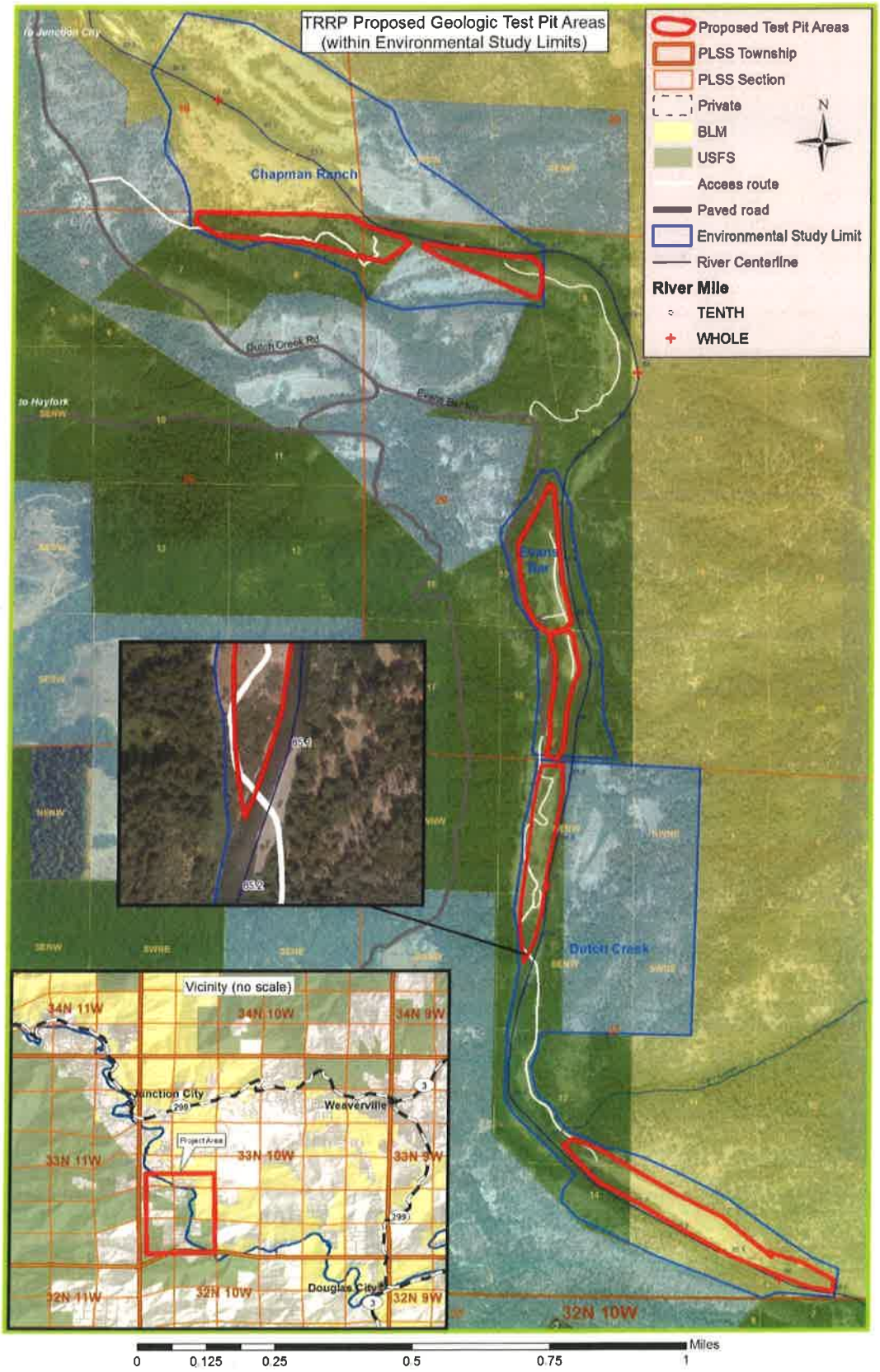
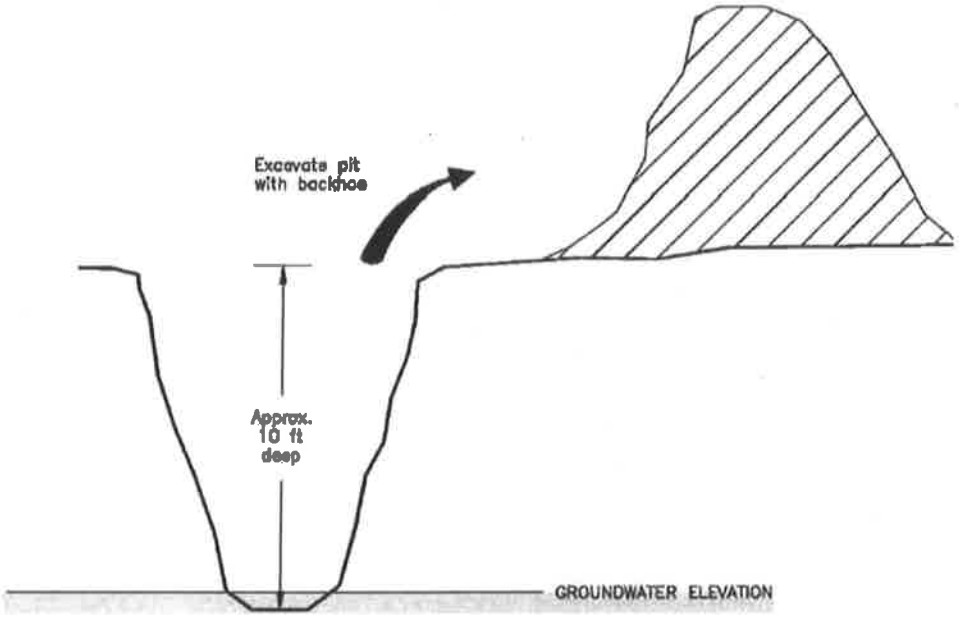


Figure 2. Test Pit Excavation (1) and Piezometer Placement (2)
After evaluation, excavated material will be placed back in the hole and the pit filled to pre-disturbance conditions. Piezometers may be installed at several test pit locations.

1) TEST PIT EXCAVATED TO GROUNDWATER TABLE



2) BACKFILL SO THAT PIEZOMETER REMAINS VERTICAL