MINUTE ITEM
This Calendar Item No. 31
was approved as Minute Item
No. 31 by the State Lands
Commission by a vote of 3
to 0 at its 10.5.79
meeting.

CALENDAR ITEM
31.

10/79
W 22275
Bjornsen
PRC 5753

INTERAGENCY AGREEMENT FOR FUEL MANAGEMENT,
STATE SCHOOL LANDS IN SECTION 36,
T17S, R7E, MDM, MONTEREY COUNTY

The United States Bureau of Land Management, Folsom District has requested State Lands Commission authorization to manage an excess fuel problem existing on a parcel of school land in Monterey County in conjunction with their 5-year fuel management plan for federal lands located within Monterey and San Benito Counties. A total area of 3,050 acres is proposed for a prescribed burn this fall. An objective of this prescribed burning program is to minimize disturbance to the surrounding area by making use of existing roads and fire breaks on 1,340 acres of BLM land, 820 acres of private land, 560 acres of State school land and 290 acres of National Park Service land. In order to provide a vehicle for Commission authorization of the fuel management program, the staff has developed an Interagency Agreement for fuel management on State school lands. This agreement form meets the needs of the BLM so federal funds may be expended on non-federal land. The agreement does not convey any interest in real property, but provides for what amounts to a cooperative agreement whereby the State provides a portion of its land and the BLM provides for the construction and maintenance of fuel breaks and for prescribed burning on certain portions of the land under the Commission's jurisdiction. The benefits accrue to all land owners in the area, including the State, in the reduction of risk and severity of wildfires.

In this case, the proposed fuel management program on school lands embraces the W½, NE¼, W½ of SE¼, Section 36, T17S, R7E, MDM, containing 560 acres. The proposed agreement is for a period of 5 years from October 29, 1979; it may be terminated on 60 days written notice by either party. The BLM shall indemnify and save harmless the State to the extent allowed by law, subject to the availability of appropriate funds.

OTHER PERTINENT INFORMATION:

1. An Environmental Assessment Record (EAR) for a 5-year burn plan for San Benito County, of which this project is a segment, was prepared by staff of the Bureau of Land Management pursuant

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to the requirements of NEPA and circulated to adequately meet the requirements of CEQA. In addition, an EAR for the South Pinnacles/Chalone Creek prescribed burn plan, which specifically addresses the proposed burn project, has been prepared and circulated by BLM staff pursuant to CEQA and implementing regulations. No adverse comments were received. Copies of both EARs are on file in the office of the State Lands Commission and available for public review.

2. This project is situated on State land identified as possessing significant environmental values pursuant to P.R.C. 6370.1, and is classified in a use category, Class B, which authorizes Limited Use.

   Staff review indicates that there will be no significant effect upon the identified environmental values. This project is being proposed in an effort to manage fuels and wildlife habitat in an orderly, well-defined manner.

3. Those agencies and organizations nominating the site as containing significant environmental values were consulted throughout preparation of the proposal. They have found this project to be compatible with their nomination.

4. The proposed Interagency Agreement for fuel management on State school lands has been reviewed and approved by the Commission's staff. A copy of the proposed agreement is on file in the Office of the Commission.

EXHIBITS: A. Location Map.
B. Environmental Assessment Record.

IT IS RECOMMENDED THAT THE COMMISSION:

1. DETERMINE THAT AN EAR (CA-040-9-125), WHICH HAS BEEN PREPARED FOR THIS PROJECT AND CERTIFIED BY BLM ON OCTOBER 3, 1979, INDICATES THE PROJECT MEETS THE INTENT AND PURPOSES OF CEQA.

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2. CERTIFY THAT THE INFORMATION CONTAINED IN THE EAR OF THE BLM HAS BEEN REVIEWED AND CONSIDERED BY THE COMMISSION.

3. DETERMINE THAT THE PROJECT WILL NOT HAVE A SIGNIFICANT EFFECT ON THE ENVIRONMENT. THE PROJECT IS AN EFFORT BY BLM TO ENHANCE WILDLIFE HABITAT AND THE ENVIRONMENT BY IMPLEMENTING AN ORDERLY, WELL-DEFINED FUEL MANAGEMENT PLAN.

4. FIND THAT GRANTING OF THE AGREEMENT WILL HAVE NO SIGNIFICANT EFFECT UPON ENVIRONMENTAL CHARACTERISTICS IDENTIFIED PURSUANT TO SECTION 6370.1 OF THE P.R.C.

5. AUTHORIZE THE EXECUTION OF AN INTERAGENCY AGREEMENT FOR FUEL-MANAGEMENT ON STATE SCHOOL LANDS WITH THE UNITED STATES BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT TO PROVIDE FOR CONSTRUCTION AND MAINTENANCE OF FUELBREAKS AND FOR PRESCRIBED BURNING ON SCHOOL LAND DESCRIBED AS THE WEST ONE-HALF, NORTHEAST ONE-QUARTER AND WEST ONE-HALF OF THE SOUTHEAST ONE-QUARTER OF SECTION 36, T17S, R7E, MDM, CONTAINING 560 ACRES IN MONTEREY COUNTY.

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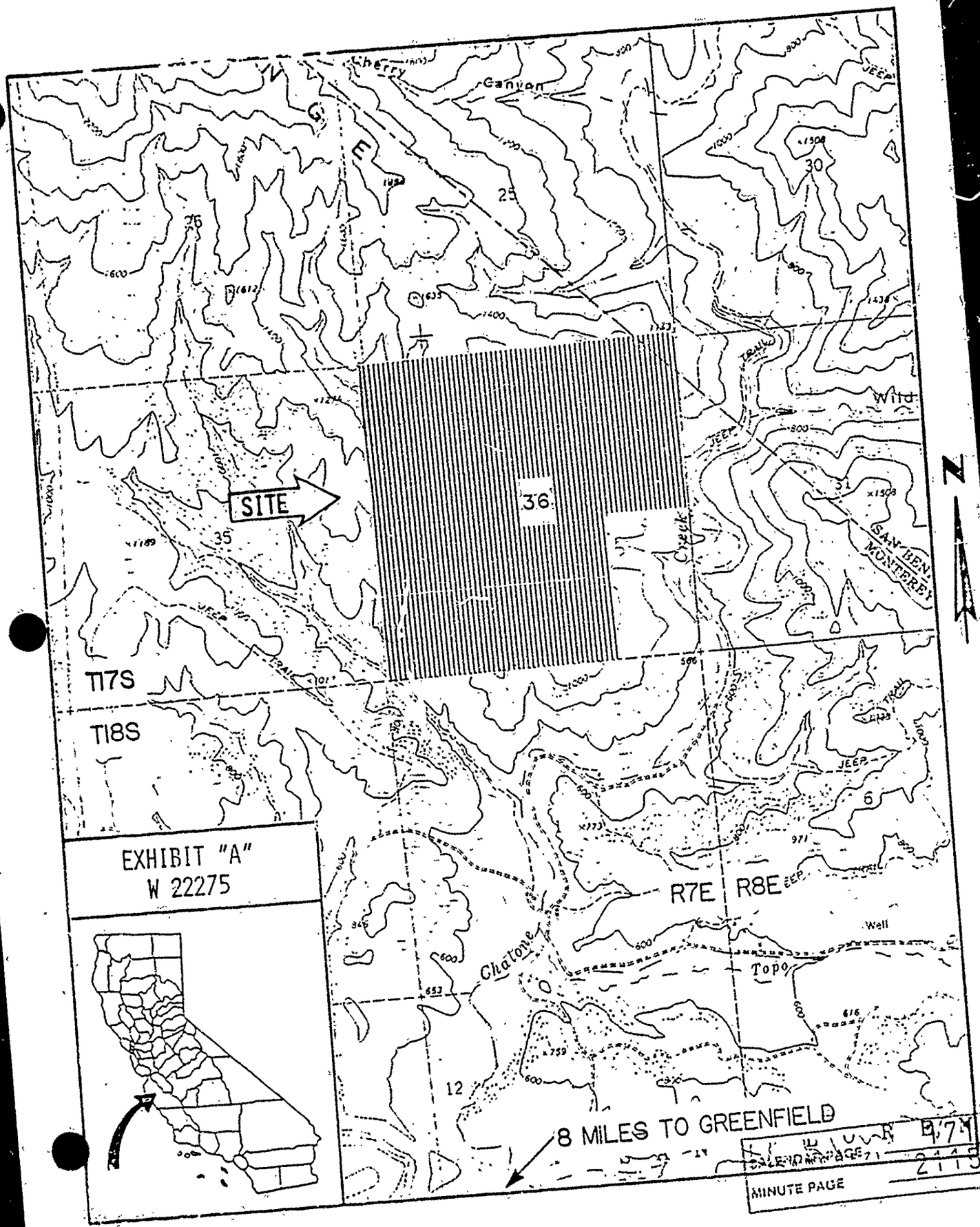

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EXHIBIT "B"

EAR No. CA-040-9-125

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT RECORD SUMMARY

I. Introduction

The following is a summary of an Environmental Assessment Record prepared by the Bureau of Land Management for the South Pinnacles/Chalone Creek Prescribed Burn, San Benito County.

II. Project Description

The Bureau of Land Management, National Park Service, Pinnacles National Monument, private property owners, and the State of California, are proposing a joint venture prescribed for brushland management burns. The primary objectives of the burn are to:

A. reintroduce fire into the chaparral ecosystem as a natural force;
B. reduce fuels that have accumulated over the past 30+ years;
C. eliminate chained and windrowed brush which was the result of unauthorized chaining by a private party in 1973/74, and
D. potential range improvement for livestock on private land.

The proposed burn will utilize existing jeep trails and old firelines as perimeter firebreaks. There will be no blading, dozing, chaining or brush piling as preparation for the burn. No rehabilitation is anticipated; however, if planting becomes necessary, no non-native species will be used.

In the chaparral ecosystem, it is not a matter of if it will burn, but when. With today's population pressures, particularly in the urban/wildland interface, land managing agencies have a responsibility to manage fire to protect life and property as well as assure that natural ecological processes can proceeed.

III. Environmental Setting

The area surrounding the proposed burn is very sparsely populated. Most of the local residents are in the livestock business. The closest towns are Soledad, located 8 miles to the west, and King City, located 15 miles to the south. There is not public vehicular access to the area, but hikers from Pinnacles National Monument can reach public lands from the north.

Topography is mountainous. Vegetation consists of scattered pockets of annual grass in rock outcrops and cliffs, heavy brush and grass along ridges, decadent chamise, grassland and grassland scrub. Annual grass species include wild oats, red brome, and fescue. Some remnant perennial grasses such as foothill stipa, desert needle grass and California melic are also present. No rare or endangered plants are located in the area to be burned.

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2116

Wildlife in the project area is typical of the chaparral/oak woodland ecosystem. Golden eagles have been sighted in the area. Although the Peregrine falcon and condor have inhabited the area historically, there have been no confirmed sightings in the project area of either species in recent years.

No cultural resources are known to be located in the area proposed for burning, BLM's District Archaeologist will check the area prior to and following the burn.

IV. Alternative Actions

A. Mechanical or herbicidal brush control.
B. No action.

V. Environmental Impacts

A. The burn, as proposed, will simulate what should be occurring in the chaparral ecosystem.
B. Vegetation will be set back to a seral stage and fire dependent brush species will be rejuvenated.
C. The potential for soil erosion is present, but the odds of it occurring are considered fairly low given a normal fall rain pattern.
D. Wildlife will generally benefit with a greater interspersion of cover and diversity of species.
E. Burning will benefit the habitat of the golden eagle and, if present, the habitat of the condor and Peregrine falcon.
F. A prescribed fire is desirable from the standpoint of both cost and potential resource damage.

VI. Adverse Environmental Effects

A. Temporary visual effects.
B. Potential heavy erosion following heavy rains.

VII. Mitigation Measures

- Burn under weather and fuel conditions that result in a low intensity.

- Leave sparsely vegetated areas on slopes greater than 50% unburned. Handlines, wetline, and night firing techniques can be used to protect these areas within the perimeter of a burn area.

- Leave Buffer Zones along water courses to reduce negative effects on streams.

- Burn at a season of year to minimize total vegetation removal such as during spring months or late fall periods.

- Burn on days permitted by California Air Resources Board.

- Burn when winds aloft will carry smoke away from population centers.

- Burn when inversions are not present or at elevations above the inversion layer.

- Strive for high dead to live ratios of standing brush.

- No mechanical line construction or other surface disturbance.

- Make use of existing ways, trails, firebreaks and natural terrain barriers for all line construction.

- Any revegetation needs must utilize native plant species. No water bar construction is permitted without further wilderness input.

VIII. Irreversible Commitment of Resources

Since fire is part of the natural process in a chaparral community, no resources are irreversibly committed. A fairly regular successional pattern develops following fire and the community returns to a climax state in about 20 years. Should heavy fall rains occur, severe erosion is possible on the burn site. This erosion loss would be irreversible.

IX. Relationship Between Short-Term Use and Long-Term Productivity

Accelerated erosion would be the major impact on both the short-term and long-term productivity of the site. However, this is a fire type vegetative community and the chances of such erosion have been and will continue to be risks associated with fire. Because of suppression of natural fire the risks are higher with heavy fuel buildups of having a more damaging wildfire in the near future. If not burned under controlled conditions, the area will most likely burn in a wildfire. In weighing one risk against the other, the best odds are with a prescribed burn. The lowest chance is with a winter burn with higher chances taken with a spring or summer burn. The fall burn more closely simulates the natural burn time and will be a cleaner burn in terms of fuel removal.

Given the better odds of a normal fall and winter, short-term use and productivity of the area will increase substantially for five to ten years. Thereafter brush succession will reduce the overall productivity of the area and the vegetation will proceed toward old age and decadence. In about 20 years the cycle will have been completed and the area will again be ready for a reburn. Any approximation of what is the natural sequence should not affect long-term productivity of the site.

X. Growth-Inducing Impact

No impact. The burn area is not within an area open for public access.