

ISHI FIRE RESTORATION WORKSHOP

BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR PARTICIPANTS

The Lassen National Forest, Friends of Plumas Wilderness, and Sierra Forest Legacy are hosting a collaborative workshop to gather stakeholder input to inform the Ishi Fire Restoration Project. If implemented, this project would apply prescribed fire to strategic areas in and adjacent to the Ishi Wilderness. A small group of stakeholders met in June 2019 to discuss the context and need for the Ishi Fire Restoration Project and offer initial project ideas. At this second workshop, the Forest is seeking input from a broader group of stakeholders to collect interests, questions, concerns and ideas regarding the use of fire as a management tool at different scales, and with different methods, in this landscape.

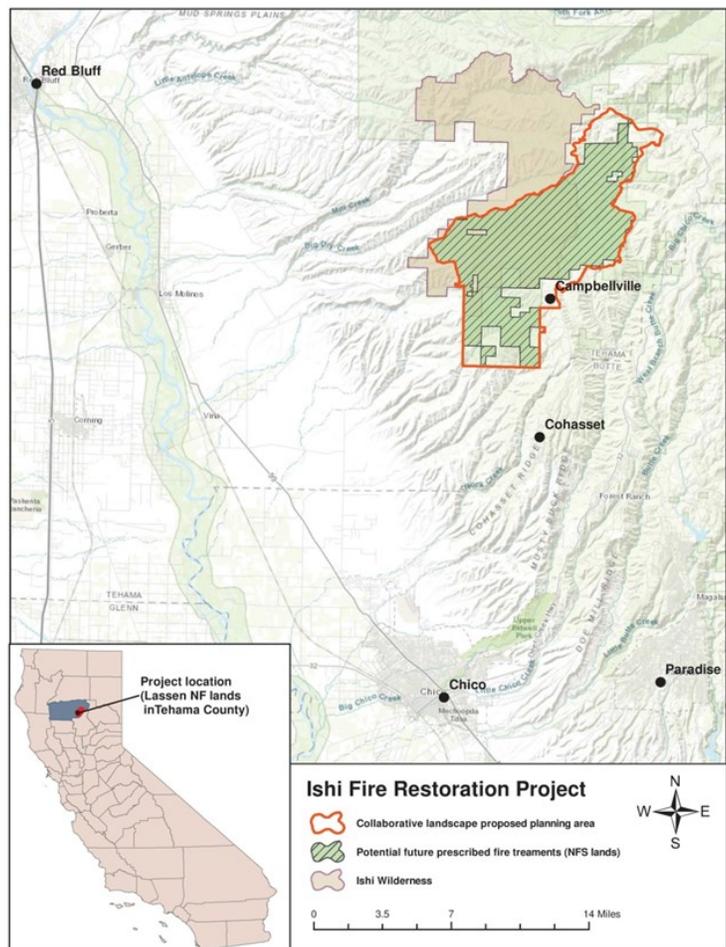
Overview of potential project landscape

The Ishi Fire Restoration Project encompasses a diverse and rugged landscape that includes a mosaic of conifer-dominated stands, oak woodlands, montane chaparral, and grasslands. The area also supports several unique old-growth pine stands (the “pineries”), sensitive plant and wildlife species, threatened anadromous fish in a key tributary to the Sacramento River, and many culturally significant sites.

Outside of the Ishi Fire Restoration Project area, the town of Campbellville lies less than one mile away and the town of Cohasset is less than ten miles away. These communities are situated on ridgetops, increasing their vulnerability to wind-driven fire moving upslope from the wilderness and surrounding Forest Service lands below. The combination of rugged terrain and the abundance of fuel loading makes wildfire management challenging within this area. Implementing controlled prescribed fire treatments within the project planning area would reduce potential wildfire behavior, resulting in decreased rates of fire spread with lower flame lengths.

Why is the Lassen National Forest considering using prescribed fire in the Ishi Wilderness?

At present, several of the ecological values within the proposed project area are at risk of degradation or loss. Fire has played, and will continue to play, a significant role in this landscape, by influencing vegetation structure, species composition patterns, and ecological processes. Prior to the modern era of fire control, fires ignited by lightning and Native Americans thinned trees and shrubs, reduced the continuity of vegetation and fuels, and lowered the likelihood of future high-severity fire.



Location of potential Ishi Fire Restoration Project

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However, decades of fire suppression have significantly altered the natural fire regime within the project area, resulting in dense and homogenous woody vegetation, infilling of gaps in historically open forests, and development of a more continuous fuel bed prone to rapid fire spread.

The old-growth pineries within the Project area are often cited as contemporary reference sites that contain a forest structure that is similar to what was likely present in many western conifer forests prior to European-American settlement. Recent fire modeling suggests that in the very near future a threshold will be crossed, where the low intensity fire that has historically maintained the heterogeneity and fire resilient structure that makes these stands unique, would no longer occur. It is anticipated that within the next ten years, crown fire could become the predominant fire behavior within the pineries, increasing the risk of irreparable damage to these important reference sites. Prescribed burning under controlled conditions would reduce fuel loads and maintain the structural diversity within these stands. The use of prescribed fire is also expected to increase these stands' resilience to future wildfire, insect and pathogen outbreaks, and drought.

Cultural Significance

The Ishi Fire Restoration Project area is renowned for its rich cultural heritage and is of great significance to local tribes who lived in this region for thousands of years prior to European settlement. Ishi, a Yana/Yahi, who lived in what is now the Ishi Wilderness, emerged from the area in 1911. Local tribes used fire to clear brush around village sites, create firewood, and promote the growth and productivity of wild plants for food, fiber, and forage for game. The proposed project area currently includes over 50 culturally significant sites, many of which contain elevated fuel loads and are at high risk of loss if a high intensity wildfire were to occur. Controlled burning that incorporates Traditional Ecological Knowledge to inform seasonality and frequency of treatment, will protect cultural sites, as well as restore vegetation types that were historically maintained by fire for thousands of years.

Ishi Fire Restoration Workshop

February 3, 2020

Chico Women's
Club

592 E. 3rd St.

Chico, CA 95928

Guidance from Wilderness Act and Forest Service Policy

The Ishi Wilderness was established by the Congress in 1984. Fire management within the wilderness is guided by the Wilderness Act itself, as well as Forest Service policy and local forest management plans. [The Wilderness Act](#) itself allows for a full range of fire suppression activities and allows land managers to intentionally light prescribed fires under certain circumstances and for certain purposes as “*necessary to meet the minimum requirements for the administration of the area*”. [Forest Service policy](#) further clarifies that wilderness fire management objectives must be to (1) permit lightning caused fires to play, as nearly as possible, their natural ecological role within wilderness; and to (2) reduce, to an acceptable level, the risks and consequences of wildfire within wilderness or escaping from wilderness. Both the Lassen National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan and the Ishi Wilderness Management Plan explicitly acknowledge the need for prescribed fire to reduce unnatural buildups of fuels and to reduce the risks and consequences of wildfire escaping from the Wilderness Area.