

**UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT  
CENTRAL COAST FIELD OFFICE**

**ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT  
Smith Mountain Land Sale (Disposal)  
DOI-BLM-CA-C090-2016-0025-EA**

**CONTROL NUMBER:** DOI-BLM-CA-C090-2016-0025-EA

**CASE FILE/SERIAL NUMBER:** CACA-054618

**PROPONENT:** Bureau of Land Management

**PROJECT:** Direct Land Sale (Disposal)

**LOCATION:** T.21S., R.13E., Sec. 29, NE¼NW¼ MDBM

**AFFECTED ACREAGE:** 40 acres

**USGS 7.5' QUADRANGLE:** Smith Mountain

**LAND STATUS:** Public Land

**SPECIAL DESIGNATION AREA:** None

**AUTHORITY:** Federal Land Management Policy Act of 1976 (FLPMA)

**LAND USE PLAN CONFORMANCE:**

The proposed action is subject to the Record of Decision (ROD) and Approved Resource Management Plan (RMP) for the Southern Diablo Mountain Range & Central Coast of California: Approved September 7, 2007

The Central Coast Field Office administers approximately 284,000 acres of Bureau of Land Management (BLM) public lands, primarily located in Monterey, San Benito, and western Fresno counties. Some of these public lands are small, scattered parcels with little to no public access. The Approved RMP (BLM 2007) identifies a total of approximately 46,500 acres of public lands for disposal on Figure(s) 22-27.

**Relationship to Other Plans, Policies, or Regulations**

Statutory authority for sales is found in Section 203 of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (43 U.S.C. 1716) and implementing regulations are found in 43 CFR 2700.

**I. PURPOSE AND NEED STATEMENT**

There is a 40-acre parcel of BLM-administered public land located on top of Smith Mountain approximately 32 miles southeast of King City, California, and 14 miles west southwest of Coalinga, California. The subject parcel is in the southern Diablo Range and overlaps the jurisdictional boundary of Monterey County and Fresno County.

The purpose of the proposed action is to reduce conflicts with private landowners and to provide more consistency and logic in land use patterns within the Central Coast Field Office. The proposed action is needed to dispose of lands which are difficult and uneconomic to manage as part of the public lands.

**II. DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES**

**A. Proposed Action**

The proposed action is a direct sale of an approximately 40 acre public land parcel described as: T.21S., R.13 E., Sec. 29, NE¼NW¼, Mount Diablo Meridian.

The adjacent property owner would purchase the parcel from the United States (U.S.) for not less than the appraised fair market value of the land. The sale would include the conveyance of both the surface and mineral estate, although, the U.S. would retain reservation for ditches and canals. The subject parcel would also be sold subject to an existing right-of-way that exists for a communication facility operated by the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CALFIRE).

**B. No Action Alternative**

The proposed land sale would not be undertaken. Existing management and use of the site would continue subject to applicable statutes, regulations, policy and land use plans.

**III. AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT**

Critical Element	Affected		Critical Element	Affected	
	Yes	No		Yes	No
Air Quality		X	Native American Values		X
ACEC/RNA		X	T & E Species		X
Cultural Resources		X	Vegetation		X
Environmental Justice		X	Water Quality		X
Fish and Wildlife		X	Invasive Weeds		X

The following elements of the human environment, subject to review specified in statute, regulation or executive order, are not located within the project area: Ecologically Critical Area, Floodplains, Prime or Unique Farm Lands, Wetlands and Riparian Zones, and Wild and Scenic Rivers.

**Lands & Realty**

The California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CALFIRE) maintains a communication site (authorized by the BLM on March 27, 2013) and access road to the summit of Smith Mountain. The private land owner that shares a boundary with the BLM-administered lands on Smith Mountain expressed interest in purchasing the 40-acre parcel of public lands to consolidate ownership and reduce conflicts associated with trespass and other illegal activities on the BLM lands.

The adjacent privately-owned property is zoned AR, or Agricultural Rangeland. The property is subject to the provisions of and is in compliance with the Land Conservation Agreement (Williamson Act). These private lands are used for primarily used for livestock grazing and hunting.

## **Biological Resources**

### Fish and Wildlife

The 40-acre parcel of public lands atop Smith Mountain contains relatively little wildlife habitat for common native species due to the location of the mountain peak in an arid region that regularly gets prolonged exposure to wind and rain. However, there is no aquatic habitat on the BLM public lands or adjacent private lands.

These lands are in the range of the federally Endangered California condor. Other sensitive species with potential to occur in the Smith Mountain area include Cooper's hawk (*Accipiter cooperii*, California Species of Special Concern), prairie falcon (*Falco mexicanus*, California Species of Special Concern) and several sensitive bat species. Nonetheless, the wildlife habitat(s) on Smith Mountain are also common throughout the region and do not constitute outstanding examples of these resources.

### Vegetation

Vegetation on Smith Mountain is primarily chaparral with a scattered overstory of foothill pine (*Pinus sabiniana*) and Coulter pine (*Pinus coulteri*). Approximately 10% of the area consists of sandstone rock outcrops and barren shale talus. The dominant chaparral shrub species are chamise (*Adenostoma fasciculatum*), live oak (*Quercus agrifolia*), and interior live oak (*Quercus wislizenii*). Common subshrub species include California buckwheat (*Eriogonum fasciculatum*) and California broom (*Acmispon glaber*).

### Special Status Species

No special status plant or animal species were observed and none are known to occur on the 40-acre parcel of public lands atop Smith Mountain.

### Invasive Plants

Although small patches of invasive annual grasses (*Bromus* and *Avena* sp.) are present, these species are regarded as naturalized in California and not typically controlled. No significant infestations of noxious, invasive plant species were observed, nor are known to occur.

## **Recreation and Public Access**

This parcel has no public access due to it being "land-locked" by private on all sides with no public easements or rights-of-way.

## **Cultural Resources and Native American Values**

The proposed project location is situated on the border of the tribal territories of the Salinan and Southern Valley Yokuts California Indians. There are no known or recorded sites within the proposed project location or within a mile of the proposed action. An inventory for historic resources conducted by CalFire in 1991; the report determined that the Smith Mountain Fire Lookout (owned by CalFire) was not eligible for listing to the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). This determination was based on a visual evaluation of modifications completed to the site over several

decades. The lookout facility is currently abandoned but the location is used as a communications center for regional San Benito-Monterey and Fresno-Kings CalFire Unit operations.

### **Environmental Justice**

No minority communities or low income communities are associated with the subject parcel of BLM-administered lands.

### **Minerals**

BLM completed a report in July 2014 that describes the potential for mineral resources on the 40-acre parcel. There are no active mining claims, mineral leases, or mineral material disposals on the parcel, or applications for development pending with the BLM or appropriate state or local agencies.

## **IV. ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES:**

### **A. Proposed Action**

#### **Lands & Realty**

The proposed action would provide minor long-term benefits BLM's lands and realty program because it would allow the Central Coast Field Office to dispose of a scattered parcel that is difficult and uneconomic to manage as part of the public lands. The proposed land sale would also implement a major goal of the RMP, to improve management of public lands.

Overall, the proposed actions would have a major long-term beneficial impact on lands and realty administration because it would assure more efficient management of public lands, reduce conflicts with other public and private landowners, and provide more consistency and logic in land use patterns within the Planning Area.

#### **Biological Resources**

##### Fish and Wildlife

The disposal of the 40-acre parcel of public lands would have no impact on wildlife habitat because the existing resource conditions would be maintained.

##### Vegetation

The disposal of the 40-acre parcel of public lands would have no impact on vegetation communities because the existing resource conditions would be maintained.

##### Special Status Species

The disposal of the 40-acre parcel of public lands would have no impact on special status species or their associated habitats because the existing resource conditions would be maintained, and no listed species are known to occur on Smith Mountain.

##### Invasive Plants

The disposal of the 40-acre parcel of public lands would have no impact on invasive plants because the existing resource conditions would be maintained.

### **Recreation and Public Access**

There would be no impacts on recreation opportunities because there is no public access.

### **Cultural Resources and Native American Values**

The proposed project area was inventoried for prehistoric and historic cultural resources with negative findings. The Smith Mountain Fire Lookout complex is in a similar physical condition to the 1991 CalFire inventory except for the addition of solar panels which power a communications array. As the lookout and associated elements are not eligible for listing to the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) there will be no adverse effects to cultural resources, paleontological resources, or Native American values under the proposed action.

### **Environmental Justice**

The proposed action would not result in disproportionately high or adverse human health or environmental effects on low income or minority communities.

### **Minerals**

There would be no impacts to federal minerals as a result of the direct land sale because the subject parcel has a low potential for locatable and saleable minerals and no potential for leasable minerals.

## **B. No Action Alternative**

### **Lands & Realty**

The 40-acre parcel would continue to be subject to public land laws and available for disposal.

### **Biological Resources**

#### Fish and Wildlife

No impacts to vegetation are anticipated under the no action alternative.

#### Vegetation

No impacts to vegetation are anticipated under the no action alternative.

#### Special Status Species

No special status species are known to occur. Therefore, there would be no impact under the no action alternative.

#### Noxious and Invasive Plants

No invasive plant species are present; therefore, there is no impact under the no action alternative.

### **Recreation and Public Access**

There would be no impact under the no action alternative.

### **Cultural Resources and Native American Values**

There would be no impacts to cultural resources, paleontological resources, or Native American values under the no action alternative.

**Environmental Justice**

The no action alternative would not result in disproportionately high or adverse human health or environmental effects on low income or minority communities.

**Minerals**

There would be no impacts to federal minerals because the subject parcel has a low potential for locatable and saleable minerals and no potential for leasable minerals.

**Mitigation Measures**

No additional mitigation is necessary because measures mitigating project impacts are formulated into the proposed action.

**CUMULATIVE EFFECTS**

The cumulative effects of past, present, and reasonable foreseeable use of the Smith Mountain Lookout are not likely to result in any measurable change in resource conditions as a result of the direct land sale because the existing facility would be maintained in operation. The conveyance deed would be subject to the communication site lease. BLM has been informed by the CALFIRE battalion chief and private landowner there is a tentative agreement to have the facility upgraded for CALFIRE’s continued use and operation. If the parcel is not sold to the adjacent property owner, the facility would not be upgraded.

**V. CONSULTATION:**

Salinan Nation Cultural Preservation Association  
Salinan Tribe of Monterey, San Luis Obispo, and San Benito Counties  
Tachi Yokuts Tribe of Santa Rosa Rancheria  
California Office of Historic Preservation

**LIST OF PREPARERS**

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**DOCUMENT REVIEW**

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Planning and Environmental Coordinator

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Date