



June 10, 2016

Matt Dias
Acting Executive Officer
Board of Forestry and Fire Protection
P.O. Box 944246
Sacramento, CA 94244-2460

Re: White and Black Oak Woodland Management Special Prescription

Dear Matt:

During my 16 year career in Cooperative Extension, one of the strongest requests I have heard from landowners is for policy changes to enable oak woodland management and restoration efforts.

Our office, in conjunction with a team of researchers from UC Berkeley and Humboldt State University, has just completed a three-year research project that quantified the effects of Douglas-fir conifer encroachment into Oregon white oak and California black oak woodlands. The study included ten sites (90 plots) across Humboldt and Mendocino counties, and looked at age structures of oaks and conifers, tree health, and understory diversity across a spectrum of open to encroached oak stands.

Preliminary project findings show clear patterns of encroachment in Oregon white oak and California black oak systems throughout the North Coast region, with oaks being consistently and significantly older than neighboring conifers. Even conifers that are much bigger than these oak species are typically much younger. Our data show that Douglas-fir stand dominance can occur in as little as fifty years, and leads to accelerated oak mortality. Further, preliminary findings demonstrate decreased understory diversity and severely compromised oak health in encroached stands, supporting previous work by others throughout the range. To learn more visit:

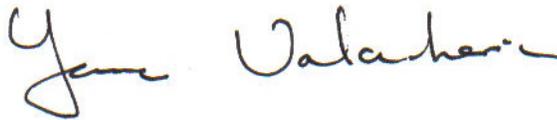
http://ucanr.edu/sites/oak_range/Conifer_Encroachment/

Some say that landowners should accept conifer encroachment because it is a natural succession process in these landscapes. However, while conifer establishment is natural, it would naturally be limited by disturbances like fire, which have been largely eliminated from these forest types. Rather than dwell on historical reference conditions and definitions of what's natural, I would like to focus on the values that we want to maintain on the landscape, and support landowners to actively conserve and promote those values into the future. Oak woodlands are hotspots of biodiversity, providing essential habitat for a wide range of flora and fauna, and they are also fire- and drought-resilient communities. Landowners are seeking restoration tools to be able to manage conifer encroachment in their oak woodlands in order to promote and protect the great ecological and economic values of these important ecosystems.

The draft “White and Black Oak Woodland Management Special Prescription” creates a clear direction that post-project stocking can be met with two Group B species (i.e., Oregon white oak and California black oak), defines the amount of oaks required to be eligible for the prescription, and eliminates the need to restock the stand with conifer seedlings. This option would most likely be utilized when other THP activities are occurring and when there are conifers of merchantable size, as the full THP development elements and costs apply. I have heard tremendous landowner enthusiasm and appreciation for this Oak Woodland Special Prescription and they see it as a critical tool to help achieve their management goals.

Thank you for taking up this important topic. If our research can answer any of your questions, please don’t hesitate to ask.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Yana Valachovic". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Yana Valachovic, RPF #2740
Forest Advisor and County Director