

FOBTC Comment Letter
Stanislaus National Forest

Attn: STF Hazard Tree
19777 Greenley Road
Sonora, CA 95370.

May 1, 2023

Dear Ms. Katie Wilkinson,

This comment letter is submitted on behalf of and officially representing the views of the Friends of Berkeley Tuolumne Camp (FOBTC) in regards to the developed, high use, recreation value Berkeley Tuolumne Camp (BTC) located within the Stanislaus National Forest and in response to the request for comments from the Stanislaus National Forest on the Hazard Tree Mitigation Project (Project). The purpose of this letter is to provide our support for the Project and to request that the Forest Service make the BTC and its environs a priority area for hazard tree identification and removal due to the high visitor and camper use of BTC. A description of BTC and previous hazard tree removal projects at the camp, its developed trails and environs to ensure visitor, staff, and camper safety follows.

We understand that this proposed Project was evaluated per the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and reviewed using a Determination of NEPA Adequacy (DNA). A DNA is a determination that an action is adequately analyzed in an existing NEPA document and conforms to the approved land use plan. For this effort, the R5 Southern Sierra Post-Disturbance Hazard Tree Management Environmental Assessment and Decision Notice (signed in January 2023) were used to assess to determine NEPA adequacy. We further understand that the purpose of the Project is to "provide for safe use of National Forest System roads, high use motorized trails, and facilities such as trailheads, administrative sites, and dispersed and developed recreation areas" by removing hazard trees. Left unabated hazard trees fall and block roads, motorized trails, and facilities and cause either direct injury or death to people (such as a tree falls on a tent with a family sleeping inside) or indirect injury or death (a tree falls across a road and a driver strikes the downed tree after coming around a blind curve). Hazard tree felling and removal is proposed by the Project to reduce safety risks to the public, firefighters, and Forest Service personnel along portions of certain roads, trailheads and facilities across the Stanislaus National Forest.

The City of Berkeley Tuolumne Camp (BTC) is a 100-year-old family camp located within the Project area and built on land leased from the US Forest Service by the City of Berkeley (City) within the Stanislaus Forest, Groveland Ranger District at 31585 Hardin Flat Road in Tuolumne County, California. The BTC is about 20 miles east of Groveland, California off Highway 120 and about 8 miles from the northern entrance to Yosemite National Park. Located along the South Fork of the Tuolumne River, BTC is designated as a Recreation Site and serviced by FS Roads on the Stanislaus National Forest Hazard Tree Management Map.

Founded in 1922, the BTC was used as a family institution since its inception. Though not the first public municipal camp established on the Stanislaus National Forest, it is the only camp dating to the 1920s that remained in continuous use by a single municipality until being substantially destroyed by the Rim Fire in August 2013. Only 19 of the previously existing 128 structures in the Camp survived the fire.

Friends of Berkeley Tuolumne Camp (FOBTC) is dedicated to preserving and enhancing the Camp experience for present and future generations through education, volunteer efforts, and financial support.

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For the previous 91 years, BTC was enjoyed by thousands and has become a generational tradition for many families from Berkeley as well as from locations throughout California, the U.S. and abroad. In order to bring back this popular and much cherished institution, the City rebuilt BTC over a two-year period (2020-22) and re-opened in June 2022.

Berkeley Tuolumne Camp traditionally and currently functions as a family camp for much of the summer season but also serves as a youth camp part of the summer with specific outreach programs for at-risk children and youth with disabilities. In addition, the City of Berkeley has also created programs that target communities that have not been traditional camp users and successfully brought a greater diversity of users to camp in 2022. After the Rim Fire, the City removed hazard trees, the destroyed structures, and installed erosion control. Even though some large trees survived the Rim Fire, most were found to be critically weakened or too vulnerable to winds and were removed to make the main camp area safe for planning assessments and eventual re-construction. Despite this, a week before camp construction was to commence in 2020, a large tree fell triggering additional removal of the remaining large trees within the developed camp area to make the site safe for redevelopment and visitor use.

FOBTC has been supporting efforts to plant more trees and other native vegetation to help forest recovery. Additionally, FOBTC has been involved in efforts to reconstruct trails to cherished local destinations. While FOBTC are keenly interested in restoring the forest as quickly as possible, we are also aware that there may be trees in the vicinity of BTC and along restored trails that have been heavily impacted by the Rim Fire and damaged over time by other conditions such as drought, disease and insects. FOBTC supports the Project and the identification and removal of hazard trees.

Due to its high use, public access and recreation values and location adjacent to other developed areas and FS Roads, we believe that the Berkeley Tuolumne Camp and its environs deserves special consideration by the Forest Service as a high priority area for potential hazard tree identification, abatement and removal. We believe that consideration and review of BTC as a priority area for potential hazard trees will serve to increase public and FS service personnel safety and reduce fuel loading and future wildfire risk. Thank you for the opportunity to submit these comments.

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