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Ben Burr, Executive Director

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U.S. Forest Service
19777 Greenley Road
Sonora, CA 95270

BlueRibbon Coalition (BRC) is writing to provide feedback for the Stanislaus Hazard Tree Management Project. BRC is a national non-profit organization that champions responsible recreation and encourages a strong conservation ethic and individual stewardship. We champion responsible use of public lands and waters for the benefit of all recreationists by educating and empowering our members to secure, protect, and expand shared outdoor recreation access and use by working collaboratively with natural resource managers and other recreationists. Our members use motorized and non-motorized means of recreation, including OHVs, horses, mountain bikes, snowmobiles, and hiking to enjoy federally managed lands throughout California, including those of the United States Forest Service. Many of our members and supporters live in California or travel across the country to visit California and use motorized vehicles to access USFS managed lands throughout the state. BRC members visit these areas for motorized recreation, snowmobiling, sightseeing, photography, rockhounding, hunting, wildlife and nature study, camping, observing cultural resources, and other similar pursuits. BRC members and supporters have concrete, definite, and immediate plans to continue such activities in the future.

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Organized Events

Many of our members hold organized events that include organized rides in this area. A significant portion of the education mission of organizations like ours and the fundraising that supports organizations like ours comes from these organized events, and we see the continuation of these events as an integral expression of protected rights including freedom of speech and freedom of assembly. We believe these events are protected by the First Amendment and believe they are crucial to clubs and organizations. These events can only continue if treatment moves forward. BRC recommends treatment on the full 125,278 acres and all levels of roads totalling 2,049 miles.

Wildfire

BRC supports the broad project objectives to keep forests healthy and reduce the risk of wildland fires. We recommend using commercial treatment in the maximum amount of land possible. Best available science should be used in making these decisions. Past forest fires that have burned rampant because of the lack of forest projects should be looked at when making decisions. The removal of hazardous trees will benefit the overall future of the forest.

Roads and Trails

BRC commends the USFS in their efforts to have a sustainable and healthy forest for all to use while improving access and roads in the system and to not address decommissioning roads or changing road designations in this planning process. We strongly encourage the USFS to fully analyze and consider adapting any temporary or unauthorized roads into the road system. These roads will offer long term benefits to the forest. Roads act as a natural fire barrier and provide needed access to implement projects and for emergency response teams.

Economic Benefits

Local communities rely on motorized recreation for economic opportunities. There has been a surge of use throughout the nation on public lands as well as in this area. Local groups have worked hard to put the area on the map so that they could reap the economic benefits. Closing roads would greatly hinder economic opportunity. Many local organizations and businesses recognize the influx of traffic and believe that any user conflict can be mitigated through better signage and education.

Timber Harvest

Timber harvest and any sales from forest treatments will also help stimulate the local economy. We believe the USFS should move forward with timber harvest. The proposed project provides local jobs and brings in local revenue. BRC supports these efforts and supports any comments made by locals and members who approve these projects for local economic benefit. Wildfire is the largest threat to habitat loss. One wildfire could cause an entire species to go extinct. We support the Forest Service in properly managing the forests to prevent wildfires that could cause harm to wildlife.

Public Health and Safety

The removal of hazard trees is a matter of public health and safety. Not only can hazard trees prevent access for the general public but it can cause harm, prevent access for emergency response teams and act as fuels for wildfire. “It is well documented that exposure to wildfire smoke is associated with adverse respiratory, cardiovascular, and birth outcomes, and premature mortality.”¹ Over the last three decades, the acreage burned annually by wildfire across the United States has doubled. This trend is driven by western states such as California, which experienced a fivefold increase in annual acreage burned from wildfire over the last half- century (Williams et al., 2019).

“In the United States, the overall population experiencing wildfire smoke will continue to increase due to projected increases in wildfires. Considering climate change projections through 2050, it is estimated that more than 82 million people in the United States will be subject to a 57% and 31% increase in the frequency and intensity of smoke waves, respectively (Liu et al., 2016a).”

Conclusion

We would like to close by saying we support “shared use”. As long as overall visitation numbers are appropriate for the affected resources, motorized and non-motorized users can be compatible with one another so long as individual users understand designations and plan their activities accordingly. Indeed, motorized and nonmotorized recreation use often overlap as OHV’s often increase accessibility to non-motorized recreational activities such as hiking, camping, equestrian use, etc. We also hold that responsible recreational use of public lands can exist in harmony with ecosystem needs.

1

https://www.lung.org/getmedia/fd7ff728-56d9-4b33-82eb-abd06f01bc3b/pse_wildfire-and-prescribed-fire-brief_final_2022.pdf

BRC would like to be considered an interested public for this project. Information can be sent to the following address and email address:

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Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of stylized initials 'BB' followed by a long horizontal line.

Ben Burr
Executive Director
BlueRibbon Coalition

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Simone Griffin' in a cursive script.

Simone Griffin
Policy Director
BlueRibbon Coalition