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Comments: Comments from the County of Fresno

The County of Fresno is pleased to provide comments on the United States Department of Agriculture Forest Service's (Forest Service) Post Disturbance Hazardous Tree Management proposal. By way of background, the County of Fresno (County) has been in a locally proclaimed state of emergency regarding tree mortality since September 2015. The County has also been in a locally proclaimed state of emergency due to the 2020 Creek Fire since September 2020. These unprecedented circumstances have required the County to develop response plans that have never been necessary to be implemented in the modern history of the County. Our primary response objectives have been and continue to be:

- 1) Ensuring public and community safety,
- 2) Promoting long-term actions that will improve forest health,
- 3) Engaging the public through outreach and education, and
- 4) Coordinating projects and actions with other responsible agencies.

The County has been working collaboratively with the Forest Service, California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, California Department of Transportation, Pacific Gas and Electric, Southern California Edison, local Fire Safe Councils, and many other public/private partners to coordinate hazardous tree removal and ground fuels disposal projects. The County fully supports the hazard tree felling and removal proposal that will reduce public safety hazards along portions of roads, trails and facilities within the Sierra National Forest located in Eastern Fresno County. The proposed Hazardous Tree Management project is not only consistent with the County's response objectives, but it is necessary to remove as many tree hazards as possible to provide reasonable levels of community protection.

The County respectfully requests Forest Service to consider adding to your roads selected for hazardous tree management that portion of Huntington Lake Road from the Forest Service Lands border, approximately 1.6 miles northerly and along Huntington Lake Road from State Route 168, through the community of Big Creek and to its intersection with State Route 168 east of the community of Lakeshore. For that portion of Huntington Lake Road from State Route 168 to the community of Big Creek, the County has identified upwards of 1,000 dead or dying trees that pose a potential fall hazard to the road and traveling public. A majority of those trees are located on Forest Service Land and outside of the existing County right-of-way. This route is a key travel way and during winter months is often the only access to State Route 168 for members of the community of Big Creek and the workforce for Southern California Edison Company, which operates hydro-electric power generation facilities along the San Joaquin River downstream of Huntington Lake.

Given this addition to the roads selected for hazardous tree management, the County fully supports the U.S. Forest Service's approach to the removal of hazardous trees and looks forward to assisting Forest Service where we can.