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Comments: On behalf of the Rural County Representatives of California (RCRC), I write to offer RCRC's support for the proposed Region 5 Post Disturbance Hazardous Tree Management Project in the United States Department of Agriculture's Forest Service Pacific Southwest Region (Region 5). RCRC is an association of thirty-seven rural California counties, and the RCRC Board of Directors is comprised of an elected supervisor from each member county.

RCRC member counties contain much of California's forested lands, including more than 70 percent of the state's national forest lands. Our counties have been devastated not only by the direct impacts of catastrophic wildfires on national forest system lands, but by the lingering, long-term effects that damage to national forest landscapes and infrastructure has on communities dependent on recreation and tourism on those lands. RCRC and our members have long been engaged with Region 5 and its national forests to help facilitate pre- and post-wildfire collaboration to advance the mitigation of impacts from high severity wildfires.

RCRC recognizes the urgent need to mitigate the potential public safety impacts from hazard trees in previously burned areas on national forest lands and offers our support for the proposed project. The project areas in the proposal are comprised almost exclusively of RCRC member counties and abut numerous communities that would benefit significantly from the mitigation activities enumerated in the scoping document. Not only would hazard tree felling, removal and fuels reduction in the project areas mitigate the potential for future wildfires and public safety hazards from damaged trees, but the proposal is vital for the economic vitality of rural communities that depend on those lands for tourism and recreation.