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Organization: Forest Service Employees For Environmental Ethics

Title: Executive Director

Comments: Dear Ms. Eberlein,

Thank you for this opportunity to comment on your R5 Post Disturbance Hazardous Tree Management Project.

You state that [ldquo]the Forest Supervisors will decide whether to implement the proposed actions on each Forest, implement an alternative action that meets the purpose and need, or take no action.[rdquo] This skips over the primary purpose of an environmental assessment [ndash] to determine whether there are likely to be significant effects that require preparation of an environmental impact statement. Thus, it appears you have pre-judged the outcome of this analysis, which violates NEPA on its face.

The scope and magnitude of this Project argues for an environmental impact statement. The Project maps suggest that this could be the largest national forest logging project in California history, whether measured by trees and timber volume removed, or by acres affected by logging. The Forest Service has documented that post-fire logging of a much lesser scale and scope compared to your proposal has significant environmental effects. In 1993, the Willamette National Forest disclosed significant environmental effects associated with salvage logging 39 million board feet on 1,197 acres burned by the Warner Fire. In 2015, the Klamath National Forest assessed alternatives and disclosed significant environmental impacts in an EIS for the Westside Fire Recovery Project that includes 320 miles of roadside salvage totaling 14,320 acres. In 2004, the Deschutes National Forest disclosed significant environmental effects in the 18 Fire Recovery Project FEIS associated with salvage logging 1,886 acres of fire-burned forest and, in the Davis Fire Recovery Project FEIS, with salvage logging of up to 6,335 acres. In the Toolbox Fire Recovery Project FEIS the Fremont National Forest disclosed significant effects associated with salvage logging of approximately 21,500 acres in the Silver Creek, Silver Lake and Summer Lake Watersheds and removal of hazardous trees along open roads and at recreational facilities. It is inexplicable that a logging project that dwarfs these others in scope and scale is assumed to have no significant direct or cumulative impacts.

You also assert that the trees you propose logging [ldquo]pose a safety risk to human life, including public visitors and forest workers who use the road, trails, and facilities.[rdquo] However, you provide

no factual evidence to support this assertion; in fact, it is simply not true. As explained in the attached declaration by Professor Travis Heggie, a world-class expert in backcountry safety hazards and the former Public Risk Management Specialist and Tort Claims Officer for the National Park Service, [ldquo]the odds of being hit by a falling tree are so miniscule, trees are not generally considered to be hazardous let alone a recreational hazard.[rdquo] Hiking and climbing are the leading cause of backcountry deaths (40%), while avalanches account for 15%, drowning incidents 10%, and heart attacks 10%. Trees account for the same number of fatalities as do bears [ndash] 1%, i.e., about 1 person per year. And of that 1%, dead, dying, or damaged trees (i.e., the trees you claim are [ldquo]hazardous[rdquo]) account for fewer deaths than do live, healthy trees.[1] Thus, by your logic, the Forest Service ought to cut down all trees. After all, as Dr. Heggie points out, [ldquo]it is an inescapable fact of entropy that all trees fall down at some point during their existence.[rdquo] It appears the Forest Service[rsquo]s solution to this basic physics fact is to log every tree before it falls down, no matter the de minimus risk to public safety.

NEPA requires the Forest Service assess the benefits of its proposed action, in addition to its environmental costs. We ask that the Forest Service calculate the expected fatalities associated with taking no action as compared to the proposed Project. How many lives will be saved? In making this analysis, the Forest Service should incorporate the fact that cutting trees is among America[rsquo]s most dangerous occupations, and cutting

dead trees is particularly deadly. As Dr. Heggie points out, [ldquo]When fallers cut a tree, the chance they are in the potential kill zone is a 100% certainty. When extreme weather or other natural forces cause a tree to fall, the odds that anyone is in the potential kill zone are minimal.[rdquo] In essence, the Project turns what is a very small safety risk to the general public into a major safety risk to loggers. Your analysis should quantify and disclose these facts so that you and the public can assess whether the Project makes any sense.

Sincerely,

Andy Stahl  
Executive Director

[1] Three days ago, a live maple tree fell killing a camper in Olympic National Park. Also this month, a 14-year-old volunteer with Friends of Trees was killed by a falling branch from a live tree while planting seedlings in the Forest Service[rsquo]s Sandy River Delta, a part of the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area. A 10-year-old boy was killed in August when the car he was riding in with his family on U.S. 276 in the Pisgah National Forest was hit by a live oak tree. In 2020, a windstorm felled an Ochoco national forest live tree onto a camp trailer, crushing and killing the occupant. In June, 2021, a windstorm felled a live tree in the Boise national forest[rsquo]s Antelope Campground, killing one person. In 2013, high wind uprooted a live, 200-foot tall tree, in an Idaho Panhandle national forest campground, killing one person. In 2015, a 15-year-old attending Bible camp at Minister Creek Campgrounds in the Allegheny National Forest was killed when strong storms blew over a live tree.