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Comments: On behalf of the Mariposa County Planning Department, the department that led the locally driven and interagency community planning process for the Merced River Trail Vision Plan, we would like to voice support for tree clearing and other activities that can support implementation of the vision plan.

The Vision Plan, which was unanimously adopted by the Mariposa County Board of Supervisors on 3/21/2023, is the product of more than four years of community engagement with Mariposa County residents and collaboration among federal agencies with jurisdiction on the Merced River corridor (BLM, USFS [Stanislaus NF and Sierra NF], and NPS). The plan establishes a community vision for the trail; identifies goals to support that vision; and recommends priority actions for achieving those goals.

Removing hazard trees in key areas of STF has the potential to advance several of these priority actions, including:

Action 4.6: Support agency partners in the study, evaluation, and future mitigation needs for issues of law enforcement, fire issues, human waste and trash, illegal camping, and trail degradation, and seek funding/personnel to provide future services, commensurate with future use

Action 6.3: Continue to collaborate with BLM, USFS, and NPS to identify opportunities for the Merced River Trail to align with and advance recreation, visitor use management, and forest health objectives in those jurisdictions

Most importantly, removing hazardous trees from areas that overlap with the Vision Plan's priority trail route would support implementation of the optimal route identified through the trail planning effort. Based on the route identified in the Vision Plan, this would include:

approximately .7 miles of Foresta Road east of the USFS boundary, near Foresta Falls where the proposed Foresta Bypass begins; and

approximately .25 miles of Old Coulterville Road // Davis Cut-Off southeast of Crane Flat.

For the proposed USFS action to be of the highest utility for the Merced River Trail Vision Plan, it will be important that implementation aligns with and does not undermine other priority recommendations of the plan, especially:

Action 3.3: Establish principles of trail maintenance that stress use of basic natural materials, and minimize scenic impacts for trails and bridges;

Action 3.5: Consult with the Southern Sierra Miwuk Nation and other concerned Native American communities to determine their preferences for protecting and, if desired, sharing their cultural heritage in the Merced River corridor; and

Action 4.5: Collaborate with agency partners to study, evaluate, and recommend mitigation measures for existing capacity, and limitations of current and future trail-supporting resources, including trash collection, bathrooms, and parking.

If the proposed action can be implemented in ways that promote the non-motorized recreational trail described in the Vision Plan while supporting (and not conflicting with) these priority recommendations, then it has the

potential to help implement the Merced River Trail Vision Plan, which the Mariposa County Planning Department would strongly support.