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Organization: Tuolumne Utilities District

Title: Community Affairs Specialist

Comments: January 20,2022

Mr. Jason Kuiken

Forest Supervisor

Stanislaus National Forest

19777 Greenley Road

Sonora, CA 95370

RE: Comments DEIS SERAL Project

Dear Mr. Kuiken:

The Tuolumne Utilities District wishes to reaffirm its Letter of Support dated, July 30, 2020, for the proposed Social and Ecological Resilience Across the Landscape (SERAL) project between the Yosemite Stanislaus Solutions and the Stanislaus National Forest. The project area envisioned by the Stanislaus National Forest and the YSS collaborative will enhance Tuolumne County by achieving resilience within forest landscape.

The District understands that the planned project area totals an estimated 118,808 acres on public and private lands, and that the proposed forest treatments outlined in the project will be restricted to Forest Service lands only. TUD would like to emphasize the importance of the proposed treatment area because within it lies critical infrastructure for Tuolumne County.

The District encourages the continued collaboration efforts on this project with the community partners of Sierra Pacific Industries (SPI) and the Pacific Gas and Electric Company. Protecting the District's watershed and infrastructure from the threat of wildfire is of great concern. 95% of the water supply serving the majority of Tuolumne County residents is conveyed through the PG&E Tuolumne Main Canal, a wooden flume roughly 16 miles in total length from Lyons Reservoir on the South Fork of the Stanislaus River to the Phoenix Forebay. The Tuolumne Main Canal water conveyance system is the only water supply delivery system serving Tuolumne County. Recent reports list Tuolumne County as the county having the highest wildfire risk in California and remains a major threat to the Tuolumne Main Canal.

The SERAL interdisciplinary team has used cutting-edge technology and science to formulate the proposed actions and has issued the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) with a 45-day comment period that ends on January 24, 2022.

TUD agrees with the Tuolumne County Board of Supervisors unanimous support for the SERAL project and the DEIS proposed actions listed as Alternative 1 designed to reduce wildfire risk and improve forest health and resilience. The actions proposed include forest thinning, fuel reduction, prescribed fire, limited salvage, fuel breaks, and non-native invasive weed control.

TUD supports Alternative 1 for the following reasons:

This Alternative was developed in close coordination with the YSS.

Alternative 1 proposes the highest number of acres to be treated, returning them to a condition more closely resembling NRV and making the forest more resilient to damage caused by insects, disease, and wildfire. Thus, water quality, wildlife, soils, recreation, air quality, and private property values will be enhanced and protected.

It recommends merchandizing the most sawlog and biomass material, supporting our local businesses.

Alternative 1 proposes more allowable treatments in and around California Spotted Owl Protected Activity Centers (PACs), helping address a longstanding survival issue with the owls - namely habitat destruction by catastrophic high-intensity wildfire.

Alternative 1 establishes a critical network of fuel breaks throughout the SERAL plan area

to help protect nearby communities, keep wildfires smaller when they start, and act as a boundary for future prescribed fire projects.

Alternative 1 authorizes the Forest Service be able to quickly salvage drought or firekilled trees on up to 500 acres per watershed while further NEPA analysis (if needed) is completed.

TUD commends the collaboration efforts of the SERAL project and is proud to be a supporting partner in this monumental achievement of resiliency for Tuolumne County.

Signature,

Don Perkins

General Manager

cc: TUD Board of Directors

Tuolumne County Board of Supervisors