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Organization: Liberty and Justice for All

Title: Executive Director

Comments: Dear USDA Forest Service Representative,

I write today on behalf of the organization Liberty and Justice for All to urge the USDA Forest Service to reject the Draft Environmental Assessment (EA) and Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) for the Pactola Reservoir-Rapid Creek Watershed Withdrawal. There are two critical reasons for our request.

First, this area holds deep cultural and spiritual significance for the Native American Tribes whose ancestral lands are intertwined with these grounds. The failure to engage in meaningful tribal consultation before arriving at this draft assessment is not only a disservice to these communities but also a violation of the principles of environmental justice and the government's trust responsibilities. Sacred land, such as that within and around the Pactola Reservoir, must be respected, and consultation with tribes is not only essential but legally required. We urge you to reconsider and engage in appropriate consultation with the affected Tribes.

Second, from a purely practical standpoint, it is self-evident that protecting the watershed is in the best interest of the entire region. The aquifer around the Pactola Reservoir is the primary source of clean drinking water for many communities. One does not need to be an environmental scientist to understand that risking the purity of this water source for commercial interests is shortsighted and irresponsible. Water is life, and it is a necessity that transcends any temporary profits that might be gained from exploiting these lands. Our common sense should guide us toward protecting such a vital resource for the generations to come.

In conclusion, we strongly urge the USDA Forest Service to reject the draft EA and FONSI for the Pactola Reservoir-Rapid Creek Watershed Withdrawal. It is both a matter of honoring Tribal sovereignty and safeguarding a critical natural resource that sustains life in the region.

Thank you for your time and consideration.