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First name: Kent

Last name: Reid

Organization:

Title:

Comments: At one of the first public meetings this summer in Las Vegas about the HPCC Recovery Project, neither prescribed fire, thinning unburned or lightly burned stands, nor timber sales were mentioned. After the formal meeting ended, I asked a Forest Service employee specifically about prescribed fire, and they said prescribed fire was being excluded as a treatment option from the Recovery Plan. If true, that is a mistake. Given the mosaic pattern of the fire, large portions of unburned forest lie within the fire boundary. The black boundaries around these areas provide excellent control against escape, and reintroducing fire into areas of frequent-fire forests where fire still has been excluded will improve forest health and reduce future wildfire risk. In addition, herbaceous plant growth has been prolific in some areas, and the only reasonable way to reduce these fine fuels will be with prescribed fire.

I understand the strong social resistance to prescribed fire within the burn area, but the ecological value of applying fire outweighs this resistance.

I did not ask about thinning and timber sales within the burn area, but those options should also be included in the Recovery Plan. More mechanical thinning pre-fire would have reduced fire severity. If dense areas within the fire boundary did not burn, thinning those areas now will help protect them. And if timber sales are excluded from the Plan, local wood-using industry may cease to exist within the next 5 years.