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First name: Leah

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Organization:

Title:

Comments: To: Tara Jones, District Ranger

Weaverville Ranger District, Shasta-Trinity National Forest

360 Main Street, Weaverville, CA 96093

Re: Public Comment in Support of the North Trinity County Community Risk Reduction Project (PALS 66894)

Dear District Ranger Jones,

I am writing as a community member who lives along the State Route 3 corridor in northern Trinity County to express my strong support for the North Trinity County Community Risk Reduction Project.

I stare at the 2021 River Complex fire scar every day. The devastation it caused to the Coffee Creek community, the federal disaster declaration that followed, and the continued hazardous conditions within that burn area are a constant reminder of what is at stake for those of us who live here. The EA describes those conditions accurately - degraded habitat, elevated surface fuels, dense shrub layers limiting natural regeneration, and ongoing vulnerability to reburn. I see this firsthand.

I want to be direct about what life looks like in a community like ours. Many of our homes share a boundary with National Forest land. When fire season arrives, that is not an abstract concern - it is our backyard. When disaster strikes, many residents here know from hard experience that they may have to defend their own property themselves. They know that by the time help arrives, if it arrives, the window to protect what they have built may already have closed. That fear is real, it is rational, and it is shaped by watching what happened to our neighbors in 2021. This project directly addresses the conditions that create that fear. Treating the forest at our doorstep - reducing the fuels, clearing the ladder fuels, opening the canopy - changes the calculus for every family living on that boundary.

What the EA also captures, and what I want this comment to emphasize, is the compounding reality of living here. Trinity County ranks among the highest wildfire-risk counties in California and the nation. As the poorest county in the state, residents here often struggle to obtain affordable homeowners insurance, meaning that when fire comes, recovery is not just difficult - for many families it is impossible. With 73% of the County federally owned, we cannot solve this problem from the ground up. Coordinated action by the Forest Service is not optional; it is essential. This project is exactly the kind of cross-jurisdictional response our community needs and has been waiting for.

The forest conditions driving this risk are severe and well-documented in the EA. Current stands average 354 trees per acre - deeply overcrowded conditions that have developed over more than a century of fire exclusion. This is not a forest in balance. It is a forest under enormous stress, and without treatment, that stress will be resolved by wildfire.

SR 3 is the only evacuation route for many of our communities. Several neighborhoods have a single access point to that road, with alternate routes that are narrow, steep, and lined with heavy fuels. The Fuel Management Zone treatments proposed along this corridor are not an abstraction - they are the difference between a community that can evacuate and one that cannot.

The post-fire recovery work in the River Complex scar is also long overdue. Without reforestation and site preparation, the EA notes that natural recovery will proceed slowly, raising the potential for type conversion and

vulnerability to reburn. Those of us who live near this scar want to see it recover. We also cannot afford to watch it burn again.

The fire behavior modeling in this EA makes the stakes plain. Proposed treatments are projected to produce approximately a 99.8% reduction in high-intensity fire behavior and a 99.9% reduction in crown fire potential. That is the difference between a fire firefighters can safely engage and one that overruns our homes.

I recognize that this project carefully balances community protection with ecological values, and I appreciate the detailed design criteria developed to protect Northern Spotted Owl habitat and Late-Successional Reserves while still achieving meaningful fuel reduction. That balance is appropriate and I support it.

This project reflects years of collaboration with local partners including the Trinity County Collaborative Group, the Trinity County Fire Safe Council, and the Trinity Center Volunteer Fire Department. It reflects genuine, documented community need. I urge the Forest Service to move forward with a decision as quickly as possible.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Sincerely,
Leah Groves
Coffee Creek/ Trinity Center Resident