This document explains my rationale and the regulatory basis for implementing an Order addressing food and refuse storage in developed recreation sites within the Sierra National Forest. The purpose of Forest Order No. 05-15-00-22-04 is to provide for public safety and to protect natural resources by prohibiting the possession or storage of any food or refuse within a developed recreation site, in a manner that allows bears or other wildlife to gain access. This Order will be effective from April 1, 2022, through April 1, 2024. I will consider terminating the Order early if conditions change.

Each year black bears get access to human food and refuse on the Sierra National Forest. This often leads black bears to become brazen, attempting to enter vehicles, tents and/or facilities. These instances create bear addiction and habituation to humans and human food. Brazen bears ultimately pose a potential threat to forest visitors and forest administrators. In 2020 and 2021 alone, there were numerous instances of visitors contacting the Sierra National Forest administrative offices to report bears gaining access to food and damaging private property. Forest visitors also reported bears approaching humans within close distances. These instances not only caused financial and emotional costs to visitors, but they also posed a threat to public safety. Left unchecked, these instances will continue and may potentially escalate to a higher level of threat to personal life and/or property.

Sierra National Forest has several administrative processes (e.g. educational pamphlets and signs) for helping reduce bear and wildlife access to human food and refuse, however, enforcement tools are also needed to help reduce human and wildlife conflicts. This Forest Order provides Forest Service employees an effective tool for administering proper food and refuse storage, thus reducing chances of future property damage and/or threats to public safety and wildlife.

Scoping efforts included discussions with California Land Management, which concurred with the limitations. I have concluded that this decision may be categorically excluded from documentation in an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) or Environmental Assessment (EA) under the National Environmental Policy Act. This action falls within the category identified in 36 C.F.R. § 220.6(d)(l) - prohibitions to provide short-term resource protection or to protect public health and safety - and does not require documentation in a decision memo, decision notice, or record of decision. I have determined that there are no extraordinary circumstances associated with this temporary closure. Implementation of the decision may begin immediately.
This Order includes an exemption for persons holding a Forest Permit for Use of Roads, Trails, or Areas Restricted by Regulation or Order (Form FS-7700-48). Authorization under this exemption will only be provided if I or my delegate determine that the risk to personal health and safety is reasonable considering the circumstances of the request. We may also require appropriate personal protective equipment and other necessary safety measures. I hereby delegate the authority to sign Form FS-7700-48 granting an exemption to this order to the District Rangers of the Sierra National Forest.