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**Date:** December 9, 2020

**Subject:** Forest Order No. 05-15-00-20-22 – Sierra National Forest,  
Creek Fire Closure Order

**From:** Dean Gould, Forest Supervisor



This document explains my rationale and the regulatory basis for implementing Forest Order 05-15-00-20-22, hereby closing lands and trails within the Sierra National Forest as a result of the Creek Fire. This Forest Order will be effective from December 10, 2020 through January 6, 2021. This Order supersedes Forest Order No. 05-15-00-20-20.

On the evening of September 4, 2020, a wildfire ignited below Camp Sierra on the High Sierra Ranger District, in the Sierra National Forest. By December 7, 2020, the Creek Fire had grown from its original size of 3 acres to more than 379,895 acres and is currently at 96% containment. The Creek Fire grew so quickly one afternoon that it encircled a popular boat launch and lake area. As a result, 224 people were entrapped by the fire and had to be evacuated by helicopters from the Army National Guard. The Fire has burned across both the Bass Lake and High Sierra Ranger Districts, within Madera and Fresno Counties. Popular corridors associated with forest visitor use on both districts were heavily impacted by the fire in areas that include Sky Ranch, Beasore, Central Camp, Mammoth Pool, Huntington Lake and Kaiser Pass roads. Popular reservoirs including Huntington Lake and Mammoth Pool Reservoir and their surrounding areas also sustained severe burn over. Also affected by the blaze were several recreational residences, resorts, fire stations, facilities, designated recreation sites and private communities. The Creek Fire's rapid rate of spread early on and its growth beyond 300,000 acres has required two "Type 1" (the largest) Incident Management Teams working together on suppression efforts.

With the Creek Fire now at 96% containment, it has low potential for growth given the current winter conditions. The fire activity on the Forest has significantly decreased and the Creek Fire management team has since transitioned to a Type 3 organization, local to the Sierra National Forest. Although fire activity has significantly decreased, there is a continuous need for restoration. The Forest is currently occupied by emergency personnel and equipment actively engaged in rehabilitation efforts within the Forest closure. Forest personnel continue to engage in active restoration efforts, including the use of tree falling, construction, rehabilitation, and maintenance of fuel breaks. Soil erosion and rockslides are a cause for concern within burn areas. Numerous dead standing trees across the Forest are a result of the fire's destruction, California's recent prolonged drought, and insect infestation. For these reasons, a significant area of the Forest will remain closed under this Order until conditions improve.

Restoration efforts in and around the Creek Fire's burn scar have continued under the current and past Incident Management Teams to allow access to certain areas. Several County, State and Forest corridors within the burn scar have been mitigated for standing tree hazards and erosion



threats, enabling safe access by Incident Management personnel. Several corridors such as Jose Basin, Peterson, Dinkey Creek and Huntington Lake Roads, including State Route 168 through the communities of Shaver and Huntington Lake, have been cleared to support vehicle traffic. Forest Service-approved public access for property recovery and winterization within the burn scar have been authorized using the Forest Service 7700-48 form, authorizing the use of Forest Service roads restricted by Order. Road access to recreational residences, resorts and organizational camps including those leading to private residential communities were granted access into the burn scar by Forest Service authorities over the past several weeks. Forest Order 05-15-00-20-22 will continue to allow public access in the Huntington Lake Basin for travel to and from recreational residences and to allow for seasonal recreational activities. The Huntington Lake Basin, including the China Peak Mountain Resort, have undergone hazard tree mitigation efforts and have been cleared for public access. The Huntington Lake Basin and China Peak Mountain Resort will continue to be open to seasonal recreational use, including over-snow vehicles on designated and groomed trails within the Huntington Lake Basin. Furthermore, to accommodate public access in certain areas outside of the burn scar, this Forest Order 05-15-00-20-22 will continue to allow for public access within the lower elevations of the High Sierra Ranger District. Additionally, the closure boundary within the Bass Lake Ranger District will continue to accommodate additional public access west of the Beasore Road corridor.

This Forest Order includes an exemption for persons with 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.

Scoping regarding this temporary closure involved discussions with multiple local, state, and federal agency cooperators. 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 CFR 220.6(d)(1) – 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.