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# Sierra Forest Legacy

*Protecting Sierra Nevada Forests and Communities*

July 20, 2011

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**RE: Implementation Plan for the R5 Ecological Restoration (3/2011) (formerly the Leadership Intent White Paper (5/2010))**

Dear Randy, Dan and Deanna:

We have independently talked to Randy, Dan, Joe Stringer, and, to some extent, Deb Whitall regarding implementation of the R5 Ecological Restoration Initiative paper. The topic was also broached at the Sierra Nevada (SNFCI) Coordinating Council June 22 whose attendance included Bruce Goines, Chris Nota, and Mike Chapel. We are concerned that there is no visible implementation plan yet to, in-part, rapidly show a pathway to ramp-up the pace and scale of fuels reduction to a landscape scale in the Sierra Nevada Mountains.

Our organizations, along with the Sierra Nevada Conservancy and SNFCI, are fully committed to assisting you in taking the necessary actions to achieve the objectives of the Ecological Restoration Initiative. Even though there is downward pressure on the Interior 2012 budget, we believe it's possible that the Forest Service will have at least national flat funding levels in NFTM, NFWW, NFFW, and WFHF, which are the backbone of the fuels reduction program in R5. The massive wildfires in AZ, NM, Texas, and recent starts in Georgia and Florida are causing renewed interest in Congress on both the House and Senate sides to sit-up and take notice that the 60-80 million acres of National Forest productive forest lands in Condition Classes II and III have to be addressed.

Closer to home here in R5, we have been in a structured dialog session with Deb Whitall and Gina Bartlett. We find that we have lots of areas of commonality on how R5 can move forward quickly and make rapid changes to the tools, methods, and scale of the work being

accomplished. This includes a number of projects that have been developed in a collaborative manner with strong support from diverse interests that should move forward as soon as possible. At the same time, we believe there is much work to be done in programmatic planning to lead to a long-term successful outcome on-the-ground.

We find that the National Forests in the Sierra Nevada have quickly embraced General Technical Report (GTR)-220 ("An ecosystem management strategy for Sierran mixed-conifer forests") because it provided a needed synthesis of the available resource science to rapidly move toward desired vegetative conditions and return the forests to a state of being resistant to insects, disease, and uncharacteristic wildfire while maintaining diverse and robust plant and wildlife populations.

At the same time, we see limited movement on the Forests toward increasing the scale of the projects. We believe there are several other themes that require GTR's or a similar instrument to help the Forests achieve the rapid increase in pace and scale called for in the R5 Ecological Restoration document. These ideas necessitate close coordination and integration with PSW.

The programmatic planning we believe that is necessary is:

- 1) Take on several additional thematic issues that are common throughout the Sierra Nevada's and needed for the Forests to rapidly adjust pace and scale. The additional thematic issues that we believe need to be addressed include:
  - ❖ How does biodiversity respond to or are enhanced by different fire intensities and fuel loading conditions?
  - ❖ How can existing tools, including fire and mechanical means, move Condition Class 2 and 3 watersheds to Condition Class 1 watersheds?
  - ❖ How do we improve social acceptability of under burning in the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) or in Wildlands?
  - ❖ How does vegetation ecology respond to natural processes like wildfire, insects, and disease in a changing climate scenario?
  - ❖ While working to limit uncharacteristic fire, what is the scientific consensus on managing burned landscapes? What are the implications and decision options when considering vegetation ecology when considering interventions such as salvage logging, snag removal and reforestation?
  - ❖ What are the economic implications, both locally and regionally, of interventions like fire salvage, snag removal, and reforestation?
  - ❖ How to restore aquatic and meadow systems (both wet and dry); how do we prioritize in a changing climate?
  - ❖ How do we restore sugar pine and red fir?
  - ❖ GTR Knowledge Transfer (Scientists-Managers-Public) general marking principles and photo gallery as a regional guide for restoration
  - ❖ Scaling up knowledge and methods for 200-300,000 acre projects.
  
- 2) These thematic issues, we believe, are well suited to bringing the best scientific experts and experienced forest project experts together to develop additional GTRs (i.e., scientific synthesis of current knowledge). The syntheses could be captured in GTRs as follows:
  - ❖ FIRE: Fire Ecology, Fuels Reduction and Fire Use, Benefits to Biodiversity and Restoration of Burned Landscapes;
  - ❖ Aquatic Conservation-Restoration of Meadows and Riparian Habitats;
  - ❖ Wildlife Ecology-Conservation Strategies for at-risk Species and addressing wildlife in a multiple objective context;
  - ❖ Sustainability Measures-Monitoring and Adaptive Management;

- ❖ Sustainable Biomass Utilization;
- ❖ Collaboration—Tool and Techniques for Successful Planning and Implementation;
- ❖ Integration of new science and scientists in planning and project design;
- ❖ Assessing and anticipating Climate Change effects with proactive planning and monitoring; and
- ❖ Engaging in Community-based Restoration-foster people working together.

(Timeframe July 2011-July 2012)

- 3) Though we don't have perfect science (and never will have), we believe there is sufficient scientific evidence to generate informed hypotheses that need experimental field testing rapidly. The experiments would then be followed by rapid assessment and adjustment (the adaptive management approach). (Timeframe summer 2012-summer 2014).
- 4) Following development of these thematic documents, a rapid regional assessment would be undertaken and completed. We believe the Assessment needs to include ecosystem services and climate change. (Timeframe April 2012-December 2012).
- 5) The thematic documents and regional assessment would then be the foundation for and inform rapid forest plan revisions. (Timeframe – complete 3 Forest Plan Revisions per year with the first set of 3 completed by spring 2014).

We believe the above approach would: 1) be the logical replacement for the Sierra Nevada Framework; 2) lead to informed, coherent, and consistent forest plan revisions across the Sierra Nevada Mountains; and 3) provide a pathway to rapid increase in pace and scale at the project level. This is, of course, a huge undertaking for both the Region and PSW but we believe absolutely vital to successfully revising R5 Forest Plans.

We, along with Jim Branham, would like to meet with you at your earliest convenience to determine a pathway to reach desired vegetative conditions in a timely manner in R5.

Sincerely,



Craig Thomas  
Executive Director  
Sierra Forest Legacy



Steve Brink  
Vice President- Public Resources  
California Forestry Association

Cc: Joe Stringer  
Deb Whittall  
Mike Chapel  
Chris Nota  
Jim Branham