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Designated Federal Official

July 24, 2012

Mr. Steve Teshara, Chair  
Lake Tahoe Federal Advisory Committee  
c/o US Forest Service  
Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit  
35 College Drive  
South Lake Tahoe, CA 96150

Dear LTBMU senior management and members of the Lake Tahoe Federal Advisory Committee,

I am writing to ask for your support for our sugar pine restoration efforts in the Tahoe Basin. This support would include:

- 1) Identifying opportunities to plant sugar pines on U.S. Forest Service lands to improve forest resilience, fire safety, wildlife habitat, recreation, and watershed health.
- 2) Collaborating to pursue grants that fund restoration of sugar pines and high elevation white pines. Despite the economic downturn, there is still funding available for tree planting that we could tap into together.
- 3) Partnering on community outreach efforts and activities that educate our local school children on forest health and fire ecology to foster an inspired, informed community of environmental stewards in the Tahoe Basin.

The Sugar Pine Foundation (SPF) works to restore sugar pines and other white pines in the Tahoe region and surrounding areas. Sugar pines are the biggest pines in the world and have the longest cones. They are considered to be an "at-risk" species in the Tahoe region due to the Comstock era logging, and more recently, fire suppression and the introduction of a non-native invasive fungus called white pine blister rust (*Cronartium ribicola*). Sugar pines formerly accounted for about 25% of Tahoe's mixed-conifer forest, but now account for less than 5% of the forest composition. Because blister rust is incurable and ineradicable, the only way to ensure healthy forests in the future is to plant trees with a natural genetic resistance to the fungus. Resistance occurs in only 3-5% of the sugar pine and western white pine populations, and has not been identified in whitebark pine yet. The SPF locates blister rust resistant seed trees, harvests their seed, and plants their progeny in restoration areas such as burn scars, eroded slopes and forest thinning projects on private and public lands.

Since 2005, the SPF has been working together with the U.S. Forest Service Forest Genetics Program and the USFS Placerville Nursery on white pine restoration. We have collected cones from over 500 healthy sugar pines, 150 western white pines, and 80 whitebark pines in the Tahoe Basin for blister rust resistance testing by the Forest Genetics Program. As a result, we have identified 65 blister rust resistant sugar pine seed trees in the Tahoe Basin from which we have planted almost 50,000 rust resistant seedlings in the past four years. In addition to identifying seed trees, the SPF harvests rust resistant seed every year and splits it with the USFS Placerville Nursery. To date, we have provided over 100 pounds of free sugar pine seed for use on LTBMU and Tahoe National Forest lands. All sugar pine seedlings planted in the Washoe and Angora Fire were grown from seed we collected.

Planting resistant seedlings is an important part of sugar pine (or any white pine) restoration strategy. All other tree species naturally regenerate in a forest opening (provided there is a seed source) but blister rust kills most susceptible sugar pine seedlings that sprout up. Therefore, the SPF believes that planting rust

resistant sugar pine seedlings in forest openings created by fire and forest thinning is the optimum strategy for bringing the forest closer in line with its historical composition and natural fire and pest resiliency. Mature sugar pines have fire resistant bark and in general, it is safer to have a healthy pine forest next to a community as opposed to a flammable brush field. In addition, stands of diseased white fir, lodgepole and Jeffrey pine in the WUI are often among the first identified for thinning as due to the safety hazard of dead trees. Since forest pathogens tend to be species specific, those areas offer a great opportunity to interplant some sugar pines to improve forest health. We have successfully partnered with California and Nevada State Parks, the California Tahoe Conservancy and local fire districts to plant over 40,000 seedlings on their lands. Particularly as USFS embarks on the South Shore thinning project, we would very much like to work with LTBMU on identifying suitable USFS locations for sugar pine plantings and support USFS' efforts to create a healthy, resilient and safe forest in the Tahoe Basin.

Last year, the LTBMU and the SPF collaborated on a planting project. With a recommendation letter from LTBMU, the SPF obtained National Forest Foundation funding to plant 1,200 seedlings (800 sugar pines and 400 cedars) on 20 acres at Dreyfus Estates. The Jeffrey pines in this area are heavily infected with mistletoe, so USFS crew thinned for forest health and fuel reduction purposes. The SPF then organized a community planting and a student planting with 70 sixth graders from South Tahoe Middle School. A USFS crew guided the students in their planting efforts, and then planted the remaining seedlings after the students left. The students also participated in a watershed activity lead by TRCD and an orienteering game. Community plantings are not only a restoration strategy but also a great way to educate and reach out to the public. About 1,000 school children and community members have helped us plant sugar pines in the past 2 years. At the planting events, they learn about forest health and composition, the role of fire in the ecosystem, how forest health and diversity can help decrease fire risk, and the importance of preserving native species.

We believe that such restoration projects are a successful way to diversify the forest composition and educate the community, so we ask your help to identify more planting sites. Fire scars and recent forest thinnings usually contain some forest openings that are good for sugar pine restoration. We would also like to ask for some assistance in identifying and applying for funding opportunities, such as the National Forest Foundation, the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and American Forests. We often need recommendation letters and forest mensuration data on the proposed project areas and sometimes an assessment from a botanist, wildlife biologist or regional ecologist. Finally, we would like to collaborate with the USFS and other agencies on public education at the plantings. It is helpful to have professional forest crews assisting volunteers with planting. These events are also a great opportunity to teach about other environmental subjects in the field, such as water quality, botany, ecology, wildlife and geography.

I would be happy to present an overview of the purpose and activities of the Sugar Pine Foundation to members of the LTFAC and then discuss ways that we might support each other's objectives.

The SPF is proud to be working to maintain the beauty and health of Tahoe's forests for the generations to come.

We respectfully ask for your support.



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