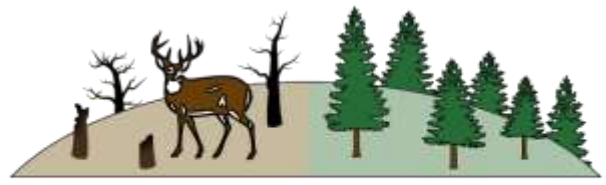


TuCARE



Tuolumne County Alliance for Resources and Environment

May 29, 2023

Director
Policy Office
201 14th Street, SW, Mailstop 1108
Washington, DC 20250-1124

RE: Call for Public Comment from USDA Forest Service on Strengthening the Nation's Forests

To Whom It May Concern:

With tree mortality at the highest level in 50 years, our nation's forests need immediate restoration. Stocking levels must be reduced before our forests can once again be fire and pest resilient. Tuolumne County Alliance for Resources & Environment, (TuCARE), supports drastic reduction of over stocked timber and woody biomass on all National Forests, especially those in California and the Sierra Nevada Mountains. According to the Chief of the Forest Service, Randy Moore, in an interview in *Evergreen* early this year, "...the challenges we are facing were years in the making. Not just five or 10 years, but decades in which national forests, especially in the West, were undermanaged." It is time to correct this grievous situation.

TuCARE is a community based non-profit organization founded in 1988. Our membership is made up of a cross-section of our community including local businesspersons, educators, and those actively engaged in working daily with our natural resources. TuCARE supports the wise use of the many resources on our federal lands. Multiple-use policies allow for everyone to benefit. TuCARE believes that man must play an active role to ensure our resources are available both now and in the future.

To remedy our current predicament, funds that have been allocated to the Forest Service, \$10 billion from Congress, must be used to hire the staff needed to complete the work that must be done. In addition, according to Chief Moore in the recent interview, the Forest Service will partner with local communities, with assurances of timber supply that will support "additions to the wood industry infrastructure." Moore also states that the Forest Service must be willing to "effectively use all of the forest management tools Congress has given us, including those like categorical exclusions and the Good Neighbor Authority."

While it is good the USDA Forest Service is seeking public input on ways to strengthen our forests, it is obvious that our current Forest Service Chief knows what needs to be done. The question remains, does he and the rest of the Forest Service have the will to do it. Communities like ours in Tuolumne County, California, have long known what needs to happen. We have been asking for decades for an increase in woody resources to be removed from our forest. Since the late 1980's, we have witnessed a drastic decline in board feet removed each season. This has resulted in such severe overstocking, it was inevitable that the Bark Beetle infestation that killed massive amounts of trees on the Stanislaus National Forest, happened. Fires, like the 2013 RIM FIRE, wiped out 257,000 acres of carbon sequestering "machines" and devastated our local economy.

Thankfully, Tuolumne County, which is a model for other forested counties, did not take any of this lightly. Our county supervisors immediately started working with our local Forest Service, and collaborating with all partners, utilizing the opportunities to aggressively turn our forest in the right direction. With the recent plans of work being set in motion, the Stanislaus National Forest is on a path to resiliency. TuCARE looks forward to the increased pace and scale our forest will experience in the next several years. Our **SERAL, Social and Ecological Resilience Across the Landscape project**, is a long-term investment in the health and resiliency of the Stanislaus National Forest. TuCARE hopes other forests and forest supervisors will follow the example that Jason Kuiken, Supervisor of the Stanislaus, has set.

TUCARE is committed to supporting the excellent work that has been done, is being done and will be done on our nation's forests. We believe that what is good for the forest will be good for the people of this nation. We ask that the Forest Service support Chief Moore's recommendations and kick up the pace and scale, restore as many acres as possible, as quickly as possible, using the American workforce to get it done.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Melinda Fleming".

Melinda Fleming, Executive Director
Tuolumne County Alliance for Resources & Environment