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14 **IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT**
15 **FOR THE NORTHERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA**

16 EARTH ISLAND INSTITUTE and
17 CENTER FOR BIOLOGICAL
18 DIVERSITY,

19 Plaintiffs,

20 v.

21 TOM QUINN, in his official capacity as
22 Forest Supervisor for the Tahoe National
23 Forest, DEAN GOULD, in his official
24 capacity as Forest Supervisor for the Sierra
25 National Forest, and UNITED STATES
26 FOREST SERVICE, an agency of the
27 Department of Agriculture,

28 Defendants.

Case No.

**COMPLAINT FOR DECLARATORY AND
INJUNCTIVE RELIEF**

INTRODUCTION

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2 1. Until the late 1980s, old-growth forests were pejoratively described as “decadent” and
3 “over-mature”, and U.S. Forest Service policy was to clearcut these forests to replace them with tree
4 plantations, which were seen as more productive and beneficial. Old-growth forests, prior to that time,
5 were generally viewed as having relatively little value, other than for lumber. By the early 1990s,
6 however, the ecological science had caught up with the Forest Service and it became widely known that
7 old-growth forests are highly biodiverse, with many rare and threatened wildlife species associated
8 with and dependent upon such forests. In the 1990s, the Spotted Owl became a household name, and a
9 new understanding of old-growth forests emerged—one that viewed this habitat as ecologically
10 valuable, and precious. The same transition is occurring right now with regard to “complex early seral”
11 forest—areas of mature conifer forest that experience patches of moderate to high-intensity fire,
12 wherein most or all trees are killed. While the Forest Service continues to portray such areas as
13 destroyed by, or lost to, fire, in order to justify post-fire logging (the Forest Service keeps 100% of the
14 revenue from post-fire logging, creating a powerful perverse financial incentive), there now exists an
15 abundance of ecological science, including the agency’s own, directly contradicting the Forest Service
16 on this point. This science shows that the Forest Service’s positions and assumptions are outdated and
17 fundamentally flawed. Just as the science caught up with the Forest Service on old-growth forests, it
18 has now caught up with the agency with regard to post-fire habitat, and we now know that these forests
19 affected by fire—especially the patches that burn hottest and create the most “snags” (fire-killed trees
20 that remain standing)—are ecological treasures. As an October 30, 2013, letter to Congress from about
21 250 scientists from across the nation explains: “This post-fire habitat, known as ‘complex early seral
22 forest,’ is quite simply some of the best wildlife habitat in forests and is an essential stage of natural
23 forest processes. Moreover, it is the least protected of all forest habitat types and is often as rare, or
24 rarer, than old-growth forest, due to damaging forest practices encouraged by post-fire logging policies
25” Yet, when this extensive body of knowledge was presented to the Forest Service during
26 comments on the challenged post-fire logging projects at issue in this case (the Big Hope Project and
27 the Aspen Project on the Tahoe and Sierra National Forests, respectively), the agency looked to the
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1 past, relying upon its decade-old forest plan (the 2004 Sierra Nevada Forest Plan Amendment), which
2 assumes that high-intensity fire patches represent “catastrophic” damage and loss (*e.g.*, Big Hope
3 Response to Comments, pp. 4-5). And, when presented by Plaintiffs with new scientific information
4 showing that complex early seral forest created by high-intensity fire is suitable foraging habitat for
5 California Spotted Owls, *that the owls preferentially select this habitat*, and that post-fire logging is
6 associated with loss of occupancy within Spotted Owl territories, the Forest Service again put on its
7 blinders and responded that the outdated 2004 forest plan assumes that such areas are non-habitat for
8 Spotted Owls, and that impacts to Spotted Owls from post-fire logging in such habitat can be ignored
9 on this basis (*e.g.*, Big Hope Response to Comments, pp. 6-9, 40-41). Furthermore, the agency
10 inexplicably responded that it can ignore the new science, ostensibly because the “2004 Framework is
11 not an ongoing, agency action” (Big Hope Response to Comments, p. 10), despite repeatedly
12 acknowledging that the logging projects at issue in this case are being implemented pursuant to the
13 2004 Framework forest plan.

14 2. Through this action, Plaintiffs Earth Island Institute and Center for Biological Diversity
15 challenge the “Big Hope Fire Salvage and Restoration Project” within the 2013 American Fire (“Big
16 Hope Project”) in the Tahoe National Forest, administered by the United States Forest Service, as well
17 as the “Aspen Recovery and Reforestation Project” (“Aspen Project”) within the 2013 Aspen Fire in
18 the Sierra National Forest, also administered by the U.S. Forest Service. According to the
19 Environmental Assessment (EA) and Decision Notice (DN) for the Big Hope Project, the Forest
20 Service proposes to conduct post-fire “salvage” logging, removing approximately 3,443 acres, mostly
21 in rare “complex early seral forest habitat” (mature conifer forest that has experienced moderate to
22 high-intensity wildland fire, and has not been subjected to post-fire logging and shrub removal) on
23 national forest lands in a remote area approximately 10-15 miles south of Interstate 80, plus an
24 additional 3,271 acres of roadside logging (Big Hope EA, pp. 13-14). According to the EA and DN for
25 the Aspen Project, the Forest Service proposes to conduct post-fire “salvage” logging, removing
26 approximately 1,835 acres, mostly in complex early seral forest habitat on national forest lands in a
27 remote area approximately 22-25 miles east of Oakhurst, California, plus an additional 3,239 acres of
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1 post-fire logging in currently lower-intensity areas that the Forest Service predicts will have higher
2 proportions of tree mortality by 2015 and beyond, and 1,125 acres of roadside logging (Aspen EA, p.
3 15). Both Projects would also involve the eradication of much of the native post-fire shrub habitat
4 through mechanical and other means, such as intensive herbicide use.

5 3. “Complex early seral forest”, also known as snag forest habitat, is one of the rarest and
6 least protected of all forest habitat types in the Sierra Nevada. Due to fire suppression policies, it is
7 estimated there is now about one-fourth as much higher-intensity fire—the type of fire that creates
8 complex early seral forest—as there was prior to the early 20th century (Hanson and Odion 2014, Odion
9 et al. 2014). This deficit is further exacerbated by losses due to post-fire logging of snags (standing fire
10 killed trees) and eradication of native fire-following shrubs. This habitat—if not subjected to post-fire
11 logging—supports levels of native biodiversity and wildlife abundance comparable to, and even higher
12 than, that of unburned mature/old forest (Raphael et al. 1987, Burnett et al. 2010, Swanson et al. 2011).
13 In complex early seral forest, native wood-boring beetles lay their eggs on snags, and their larvae, after
14 boring into the snag, become the primary food source for Black-backed Woodpeckers and other
15 woodpecker species (Hanson and North 2008, Siegel et al. 2013). In fact, each adult Black-backed
16 Woodpecker consumes over 13,500 wood-boring beetle larvae each year. The Black-backed
17 Woodpecker is a monogamous species that is the strongest cavity excavator in North America.
18 Anatomically distinct, they have only three toes, instead of four, so that their strike on a recently killed
19 tree has more force (allowing them to prey upon beetle larvae that other woodpeckers have difficulty
20 reaching). Their tongues are extremely long and attached to the back of their skull so that it can
21 forcefully penetrate deep within the wood of the tree to extract the larvae, and they have fluid sacks
22 behind their eyes to protect their brains from damage from their hard strikes (Dixon and Saab 2000).
23 Black-backed Woodpeckers create a new nest cavity every year (even when they stay in the same
24 territory), allowing the cavity from the previous year to be used by the many cavity-nesting species that
25 cannot create their own nest holes, like bluebirds, nuthatches, chickadees, and even flying squirrels
26 (Tarbill 2010). Native flowering shrub patches in complex early seral forest attract native flying
27 insects, which provide food for flycatching birds and rare and sensitive bat species (Swanson et al.

1 2011, Buchalski et al. 2013), and these shrub patches are excellent habitat for small mammals which, in
2 turn, provides food for raptors like the California Spotted Owl, which preferentially selects such areas
3 to find its prey (Bond et al. 2009, Bond et al. 2013). This is a rich and vibrant ecosystem, if left
4 unlogged.

5 4. This action arises under, and alleges violations of, the National Environmental Policy
6 Act (“NEPA”), 42 U.S.C. §§ 4321 *et seq.*; the National Forest Management Act (“NFMA”), 16 U.S.C.
7 §§ 1600 *et seq.*; and the Administrative Procedure Act (“APA”), 5 U.S.C. §§ 701 *et seq.*; and the
8 statutes’ implementing regulations. Specifically, this action challenges the Environmental Assessments,
9 and Decision Notices and Findings of No Significant Impact (“FONSI”), issued by Tom Quinn, Forest
10 Supervisor for the Tahoe National Forest, Dean Gould, Forest Supervisor for the Sierra National
11 Forest, and the United States Forest Service (referred to collectively as “Defendants” or “Forest
12 Service”). Plaintiffs may seek temporary, preliminary, or permanent injunctions against all or portions
13 of the federally approved activities challenged herein to forestall irreparable injury to the environment
14 and to Plaintiffs’ interests, and any other such relief as the Court deems appropriate.

15 JURISDICTION

16 5. Jurisdiction over this action is conferred by 28 U.S.C. §§ 1331 (federal question), 2201
17 (declaratory relief), and 2202 (injunctive relief). This cause of action arises under the laws of the
18 United States, including NEPA, NFMA, the APA, and implementing regulations established pursuant
19 to these federal statutes. An actual, justiciable controversy exists between Plaintiffs and Defendants.
20 The requested relief is proper under 28 U.S.C. §§ 2201 and 2202, and 5 U.S.C. §§ 705 and 706.

21 VENUE

22 6. Venue in this Court is proper under 28 U.S.C §§ 1391 and 1392. Defendants are federal
23 agency employees and a federal agency, and Plaintiff Earth Island Institute’s primary place of business
24 is in the Northern District of California. Plaintiff Center for Biological Diversity (CBD) has an office in
25 San Francisco, within the Northern District, and CBD’s counsel on this case is based in the Northern
26 District. The U.S. Forest Service’s attorneys at the Office of General Counsel for Region 5 (California)
27 are also in San Francisco, within the Northern District. Venue therefore properly vests in this district.

PARTIES

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2 7. Plaintiff Earth Island Institute (“EII”) is a nonprofit corporation organized under the
3 laws of the state of California. EII is headquartered in Berkeley, California. EII’s mission is to develop
4 and support projects that counteract threats to the biological and cultural diversity that sustains the
5 environment. Through education and activism, these projects promote the conservation, preservation
6 and restoration of the Earth. One of these projects is the John Muir Project—whose mission is to
7 protect all federal public forestlands from commercial exploitation that undermines and compromises
8 science-based ecological management. John Muir Project offices are in San Bernardino County,
9 California. EII is a membership organization with over 15,000 members in the U.S., over 3,000 of
10 whom use and enjoy the National Forests of California for recreational, educational, aesthetic, spiritual,
11 and other purposes. EII, through its John Muir Project, has recently appealed numerous timber sales on
12 National forests in the Sierra Nevada, including the Projects at issue in this case which, if implemented,
13 would adversely affect the interests of their members. EII through its John Muir Project has a
14 longstanding interest in protection of national forests. EII’s John Muir Project and EII members
15 actively participate in governmental decision-making processes with respect to national forest lands in
16 California and rely on information provided through the NEPA processes to increase the effectiveness
17 of their participation.

18 8. Earth Island Institute’s members include individuals who regularly use public lands
19 within the Tahoe National Forest and the Sierra National Forest, and the American and Aspen fire areas
20 in particular, for scientific study, recreational enjoyment, aesthetic beauty, and nature photography.
21 These members’ interests will be irreparably harmed by the planned logging in the American and
22 Aspen fire areas, as they will no longer be able to scientifically study these areas in their natural (pre-
23 logging) state, take nature photographs of the area in its natural (pre-logging) state, or enjoy the
24 aesthetic beauty of the unlogged snag forest habitat and its inhabitants in their natural state.

25 9. Plaintiff Center for Biological Diversity (“the Center”) is a non-profit corporation with
26 offices in San Francisco, Los Angeles, and Joshua Tree, California; Nevada; Oregon; Washington;
27 Arizona; New Mexico; Alaska; and Washington, D.C. The Center is actively involved in species and
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1 habitat protection issues throughout North America and has more than 42,000 members, including
2 many members who reside and recreate in California. One of the Center's primary missions is to
3 protect and restore habitat and populations of imperiled species, including from the impacts of logging
4 and climate change.

5 10. The Center's members and staff include individuals who regularly use and intend to
6 continue to use the Tahoe National Forest and the Sierra National Forest, including the lands and
7 waters that were affected by the American and Aspen fires and are now planned for logging as part of
8 these Projects. These members and staff use the area for observation, research, aesthetic enjoyment,
9 and other recreational, scientific, spiritual, and educational activities. Many of the Center's staff and
10 members use the area to observe and study imperiled species like the Black-backed Woodpecker,
11 California Spotted Owl, and Pacific Fisher that, since the American and Aspen fires burned, can be
12 found in project areas. These members' interests will be irreparably harmed by the planned logging in
13 the fire areas, as they will no longer be able to visit and enjoy this area in its unlogged state, nor will
14 they be able to observe or attempt to observe the Black-backed Woodpecker, California Spotted Owl,
15 Pacific Fisher, or other species which use and are dependent on these areas in their unlogged state.

16 11. This suit is brought by EII and the Center on behalf of themselves and their adversely
17 affected members and staff. Plaintiffs and their members' present and future interests in and use of the
18 Project areas are and will be directly and adversely affected by the challenged decisions. Those adverse
19 effects include, but are not limited to: (1) impacts to native plants and wildlife and their habitats within
20 and around the Project areas from logging, biomass removal, soil compaction, noise, and human
21 presence; (2) impacts to riparian areas and water quality; (3) reduction and impairment of recreation
22 opportunities; (4) impaired aesthetic value of forest lands, trails, and landscapes caused by Defendants'
23 logging; and (5) loss of scientific study opportunities with regard to Black-backed Woodpecker,
24 California Spotted Owl, and Pacific Fisher use of unlogged post-fire habitat, and loss of scientific study
25 opportunity with regard to natural post-fire conifer regeneration in areas proposed for logging. In
26 addition, Plaintiffs and their members and staff have an interest in ensuring that Defendants comply
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1 with all applicable laws, regulations, and procedures pertaining to the management of national forest
2 lands.

3 12. Because Defendants' actions approving the Projects violate several procedural and
4 substantive laws, a favorable decision by this Court will redress the actual and imminent injury to
5 Plaintiffs.

6 13. Both Plaintiffs participated in the administrative process culminating in the issuance of
7 Project Decision Notices and FONSI's by submitting comments on the Preliminary Environmental
8 Assessments ("EAs") for the Projects. Defendants have requested and received (from the Washington,
9 D.C. office of the Forest Service) an economic "emergency situation determination" (ESD) for both
10 Projects, which allows the agency to begin logging after the decision is signed, without any further
11 public input or process, such as administrative appeals or objections. As such, Plaintiffs have exhausted
12 all available administrative remedies.

13 14. Defendant Tom Quinn is the Forest Supervisor for the Tahoe National Forest and is
14 being sued in his official capacity. Mr. Quinn is directly responsible for forest management in the
15 Tahoe National Forest and for ensuring that all resource management decisions comply with applicable
16 laws and regulations. Mr. Quinn signed the Decision Notice for the Big Hope Project challenged here.
17 Mr. Quinn officially resides in the Nevada City area of California. Defendant Dean Gould is the Forest
18 Supervisor for the Sierra National Forest and is being sued in his official capacity. Mr. Gould is
19 directly responsible for forest management on the Sierra National Forest and for ensuring that all
20 resource management decisions comply with applicable laws and regulations. Mr. Gould signed the
21 Decision Notice for the Aspen Project challenged here. Mr. Gould officially resides in Clovis area of
22 California.

23 15. Defendant United States Forest Service is an agency of the United States Department of
24 Agriculture. The Forest Service is responsible for the administration and management of the federal
25 lands subject to this action, including the implementation of NEPA, NFMA, the APA, and the statutes'
26 implementing regulations.

LEGAL BACKGROUND

A. The National Environmental Policy Act

16. The National Environmental Policy Act (“NEPA”) is “our basic national charter for protection of the environment.” 40 C.F.R. § 1500.1(a). NEPA’s twin aims are to ensure that federal agencies consider the environmental impacts of their proposed actions and to ensure that agencies inform the public that environmental concerns have been considered.

17. NEPA requires “responsible [federal] officials” to prepare an environmental impact statement (“EIS”) to consider the effects of each “major Federal action[] significantly affecting the quality of the human environment.” 42 U.S.C. § 4332(2)(C)(i). Preparation of an EIS is mandated if “substantial questions are raised as to whether a project . . . *may* cause significant degradation of some human environmental factor.” *Center for Biological Diversity v. National Highway Traffic Safety Administration*, 538 F.3d 1172, 1219-20 (9th Cir. 2008) (emphasis added). To determine whether the impacts of a proposed action are significant enough to warrant preparation of an EIS, the agency may first prepare an environmental assessment (“EA”). An agency must prepare an EIS for any action that has “individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts.” 40 C.F.R. § 1508.27(b)(7). A cumulative impact is defined as “the impact on the environment which results from the incremental impact of the action when added to other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions regardless of what agency . . . or person undertakes such other actions. Cumulative impacts can result from individually minor but collectively significant actions taking place over a period of time.” *Id.* § 1508.7.

18. The EA must take a “hard look” at the impacts, and must not minimize adverse side effects of the proposed action; if the agency decides the impacts are not significant, it must supply a convincing statement of reasons why. *Blue Mountains Biodiversity Project v. Blackwood*, 161 F.3d 1208 (9th Cir. 1998); *Ocean Advocates v. United States Army Corps of Engineers*, 361 F.3d 846, 865 (9th Cir. 2003); *Earth Island Institute v. U.S. Forest Service*, 442 F.3d 1147 (9th Cir. 2006). Further, if significant new information or changed circumstances arise, the Forest Service must prepare a supplemental EA or EIS. 40 C.F.R. § 1502.9(c); *Price Road Neighborhood Ass’n, Inc. v. U.S. Dept. of*

1 *Transp.*, 113 F.3d 1505, 1508-1509 (9th Cir. 1997). In the analysis of impacts, there must be a rational
2 connection between the facts found and the decision made. *Ocean Advocates v. United States Army*
3 *Corps of Engineers*, 361 F.3d 846, 865 (9th Cir. 2003); *Earth Island Institute v. U.S. Forest Service*,
4 442 F.3d 1147 (9th Cir. 2006).

5 19. Further, NEPA's implementing regulations require that the agency "shall identify any
6 methodologies used and shall make explicit reference by footnote to the scientific and other sources
7 relied upon for conclusions," and shall ensure the scientific accuracy and integrity of environmental
8 analysis. *Id.* § 1502.24. The agency must disclose if information is incomplete or unavailable and
9 explain "the relevance of the incomplete or unavailable information to evaluating reasonably
10 foreseeable significant adverse impacts." *Id.* § 1502.22(b)(1). The agency must also directly and
11 explicitly respond to dissenting scientific opinion. *Id.* § 1502.9(b). Agencies must fully analyze a
12 reasonable range of alternatives and the purpose and need for projects cannot be arbitrarily narrow. *Id.*
13 § 1502.13, 1502.14.

14 **B. The National Forest Management Act**

15 20. The National Forest Management Act ("NFMA") establishes the statutory framework
16 for management of the National Forest System. NFMA requires the Forest Service to develop a Land
17 and Resource Management Plan ("Forest Plan") for each national forest.

18 21. Pursuant to NFMA, all site-specific actions taken within a national forest must be
19 consistent with the applicable forest plan. *Id.* § 1604(i).

20 22. In 1982, the Forest Service promulgated regulations implementing NFMA.

21 23. In 2000, the NFMA regulations were replaced with interim regulations, which state that
22 previous requirements of the 1982 regulations, including the wildlife viability requirement, remain as
23 enforceable requirements so long as they are incorporated into the forest plan at issue.

24 24. In 2012, new NFMA regulations were issued. However, the transition provision which
25 requires the Forest Service to "consider" the "best available science" in environmental analysis
26 documents for site-specific projects remains in effect until the Forest Plans at issue have been revised.
27 36 C.F.R. § 219.35(a); *Ecology Ctr. v. Castaneda*, 574 F.3d 652, 658-660 (9th Cir. 2009) (Forest
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1 Service violates the best available science requirement in site-specific project documents when the
2 science submitted by Plaintiffs demonstrates that the agency’s positions/studies are outdated or flawed,
3 or where the studies submitted by Plaintiffs directly undermine the Forest Service’s conclusions, and
4 the agency has not “carefully considered” the evidence from Plaintiffs).

5 **FACTUAL BACKGROUND**

6 25. The American fire occurred in August of 2013, covering about 27,440 acres on the
7 Tahoe National Forest in a remote area about 10-15 miles south of Interstate 80. The fire had a mosaic
8 of effects, with 64% of it comprised by “low or moderately low” fire effects (less than 50% mortality),
9 with the remaining 36% experiencing over 50% mortality (Big Hope EA, p. 6).

10 26. The Tahoe National Forest operates under the 1992 Land and Resources Management
11 Plan as amended by the 2004 Framework Amendment and the 2007 Management Indicator Species
12 (MIS) Amendment. This Plan has not yet been revised under the 2012 NFMA Planning Rule.

13 27. In November of 2013, the Tahoe National Forest issued a scoping notice inviting public
14 comments on their proposal to conduct a post-fire logging project in the American fire through the Big
15 Hope Project. Plaintiffs submitted scoping comments in December of 2013.

16 28. In April of 2014, the Tahoe National Forest issued a Preliminary Environmental
17 Assessment for the Big Hope Project, which included only one action alternative that was fully
18 considered: the Proposed Action. Plaintiffs submitted detailed expert comments, and scientific sources,
19 during the comment period on the EA.

20 29. The number one stated purpose and need in the EA for the Big Hope Project is the
21 generation of revenue for the Forest Service’s budget from the sale of timber from the Project area to
22 private logging companies, since the agency keeps the receipts from the sale of post-fire timber (Big
23 Hope EA, p. 8). The Forest Service even granted itself an economic “Emergency Situation
24 Determination” (ESD) to facilitate more rapid logging, in order to maximize the revenue to the Forest
25 Service—the effect of which is that logging can begin once the decision is signed, and no other public
26 participation is allowed (Big Hope Decision Notice, p. 11). The Ninth Circuit has already found that
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1 the Forest Service has a financial conflict of interest, particularly with regard to post-fire logging
2 projects. *Earth Island Institute v. U.S. Forest Service*, 442 F.3d 1147, 1178 (9th Cir. 2006).

3 30. The Aspen fire occurred in July of 2013, covering about 22,350 acres on the Sierra
4 National Forest in a remote area about 8 miles west of Huntington Lake. The fire had a mosaic of
5 effects, with 80% of it comprised of low and moderate-intensity fire effects (Aspen EA, pp. 6-8).

6 31. The Sierra National Forest operates under the 1992 Land and Resources Management
7 Plan as amended by the 2004 Framework Amendment and the 2007 MIS Amendment. This Plan has
8 not yet been revised under the 2012 NFMA Planning Rule.

9 32. In November of 2013, the Sierra National Forest issued a scoping notice inviting public
10 comments on their proposal to conduct a post-fire logging project in the Aspen fire (Aspen Project),
11 and Plaintiffs submitted scoping comments in December of 2013.

12 33. In April of 2014, the Sierra National Forest issued a Preliminary Environmental
13 Assessment for the Aspen Project. Plaintiffs submitted detailed expert comments, and scientific
14 sources, during the comment period on the EA.

15 34. The EA for the Aspen Project states that the generation of revenue for the Forest
16 Service's budget from the sale of timber from the Project area to private logging companies (since the
17 agency keeps the receipts from the sale of post-fire timber) is a primary purpose and need of the Project
18 (Aspen EA, p. 10). As with the Big Hope project, the Forest Service granted itself an economic
19 "Emergency Situation Determination" (ESD) to facilitate more rapid logging.

20 35. Post-fire forest provides essential habitat for many fire-dependent species, including the
21 rare Black-backed Woodpecker. This species depends upon recent moderately to severely burned forest
22 habitat, which creates a very high density of large "snags" or dead trees, for nesting and foraging
23 (generally at least 80 to 100 medium and large snags per acre across at least 100 to 300 acres per pair,
24 within post-fire habitat that is typically less than 8 to 10 years old).

25 36. In 2012 the Forest Service commissioned the preparation of a Conservation Strategy for
26 the Black-backed Woodpecker that would advise the Forest Service on what management activities in
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1 burned forest would be compatible with the continued existence of this species. The Conservation
2 Strategy recommends, in part, as follows:

- 3 • “patches retained to support Black-backed Woodpeckers should incorporate areas with
4 the highest densities of the largest snags to provide foraging opportunities (see Siegel et
5 al. 2012b) as well as high density patches of medium- and small-diameter snags (see
6 Seavy et al. in press) in the interior of the fire area to support higher nesting success in
7 the early postfire years (see Saab et al. 2011)”;
- 8 • “focus on retaining large patches of predominately prey-rich trees as evidenced by
9 wood-boring beetle holes on trunks, or by using another appropriate index”;
- 10 • “post-fire clear-cut patches (where all the snags in an area are removed) should not
11 exceed 2.5 ha [6.18 acres](see Schwab et al. 2006)”;
- 12 • “Avoid harvesting fire-killed forest stands during the nesting season (generally May 1
13 through July 31). This management recommendation will protect dozens of other nesting
14 bird species associated with burned forests in addition to the Black-backed
15 Woodpecker.”

16 37. Blacked-backed Woodpeckers are currently residing in both the Big Hope and Aspen
17 project areas.

18 38. The Big Hope Project would contribute to the loss of habitat for 20 out of the 38 Black-
19 backed Woodpecker pairs projected to exist in the American Fire area (Big Hope EA, p. 143). An
20 estimated 13 pairs would be eliminated by the proposed logging on National Forest land, and 7 pairs
21 would be eliminated by logging on private lands (which is already ongoing). The Project would remove
22 about 57% of the suitable Black-backed Woodpecker habitat that is located on National Forest land
23 (Big Hope EA, p. 141, Table 44 [1,802 acres removed out of 3,140]). The Aspen Project would
24 eliminate about 38% of the estimated Black-backed Woodpecker pairs (6.5 out of 17.1 projected pairs
25 would be lost), and would remove about 41% of the suitable Black-backed Woodpecker habitat (Aspen
26 EA, p. 202).

1 39. The proportions of suitable Black-backed Woodpecker habitat that would be removed
2 by the Aspen and Big Hope Projects are about two to three times higher than the proportion (17%)
3 removed on Forest Service lands over the past several years. Big Hope Project Response to Comments,
4 pp. 61-62.

5 40. In addition to eliminating thousands of acres of suitable and occupied Black-backed
6 Woodpecker habitat in both Project areas, logging of suitable Black-backed Woodpecker habitat would
7 overlap the end of nesting season in 2014, as well as the nesting season in 2015. Such action can
8 potentially kill black-backed woodpecker chicks in the nest before they can fly away, increases the
9 chance of nest abandonment, inhibits population growth of this species, and is contrary to the
10 recommendations of the Forest Service's own Conservation Strategy for the Black-backed Woodpecker
11 (Bond et al. 2012).

12 41. Monica Bond, the lead author of the Forest Service's Conservation Strategy for the
13 Black-backed Woodpecker, criticized the Forest Service for permitting the logging of post-fire habitat
14 during Black-backed Woodpecker nesting season.

15 42. In responding to Monica Bond's comments, neither the Big Hope nor the Aspen EAs
16 actually analyzed the impacts to the Black-backed Woodpecker from logging during nesting season.

17 43. Instead, the Big Hope Project EA Response to Comments (p.58-59) noted that the Forest
18 Service would rely on loggers to identify any occupied nest tree, and that, if identified, that particular
19 tree would not be cut down. The Response to Comments, however, failed to explain how loggers could
20 effectively complete this task, nor did it address how a family of Black-backed Woodpeckers would
21 survive with only one tree, surrounded by a sea of stumps, when one family of this species needs about
22 100-300 acres of forest, with each acre comprised of approximately 80 to 100 dead standing trees, on
23 average, in order to survive.

24 44. The Aspen Project Response to Comments (p. 139) took another approach,
25 acknowledging that the Forest Service's Black-backed Woodpecker Conservation Strategy
26 recommended, based upon the best available science, avoiding all logging in suitable Black-backed
27 habitat during nesting season, and acknowledged that nesting season extends through July 31st, and that
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1 43% of suitable Black-backed habitat would be logged, but then inexplicably concluded: “Based upon
2 the lack of effects to black-backed woodpecker habitat and nesting birds an additional alternative that
3 limited harvests for black-backed woodpecker habitat [to avoid nesting season] was considered
4 unnecessary”.

5 45. The Black-backed Woodpecker subspecies occurring in the Sierra Nevada forests has
6 been petitioned for listing under the Endangered Species Act (ESA), and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife
7 Service (USFWS), on April 9, 2013, issued a determination that substantial scientific evidence had
8 been presented in the Petition sufficient to conclude that listing this species under the ESA “may be
9 warranted”, due to threats such as a deficit of habitat due to fire suppression and post-fire logging
10 (USFWS 2013).

11 46. On national forest lands, the Black-backed Woodpecker is the sole management
12 indicator species (MIS), or bellwether, for all wildlife species positively associated with high levels of
13 snags (standing fire-killed trees) in post-fire habitat.

14 47. Neither the Big Hope EA nor the Aspen EA discussed the fact that the USFWS has
15 determined that the Sierra Nevada and eastern Oregon Cascades population of the Black-backed
16 Woodpecker may need to be listed under the ESA due in large part to post-fire logging, exacerbated by
17 an overall scarcity of suitable habitat, relative to historical (before the early 1900s) conditions, due to
18 fire suppression policies.

19 48. Current science also concludes that post-fire logging of one-third of suitable Black-
20 backed Woodpecker habitat will lead to a precipitous decline in populations and a trend toward
21 extinction over the next three decades (Odion and Hanson 2013).

22 49. Neither the Big Hope EA nor the Aspen EA provide any explanation as to how the
23 removal of well over one-third of the suitable Black-backed Woodpecker habitat created by the
24 American and Aspen fires will not seriously threaten Black-backed Woodpecker populations.

25 50. In addition, the cumulative effects from the high proportion of removal of suitable
26 Black-backed Woodpecker habitat that would be destroyed by the Big Hope and Aspen Projects (about
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1 half), particularly in combination with other reasonably foreseeable losses of habitat, such as in the
2 Rim fire area, were also not analyzed, or adequately analyzed, in these EAs.

3 51. The Big Hope and Aspen EAs thus failed to adequately address the direct impacts or
4 cumulative effects of their actions on the Black-backed Woodpecker, did not consider or adequately
5 consider all relevant factors or issue a convincing statement of reasons for the decision not to prepare
6 an EIS, and failed to adequately assess intensity factors in determining whether potentially significant
7 adverse impacts would occur from the Projects.

8 52. The California Spotted Owl is a rare raptor that the Forest Service has designated as a
9 Sensitive Species, meaning that the agency recognizes that there is reason for concern about the
10 population viability of this species. The Forest Service is required to maintain viable populations of
11 Sensitive Species, including the California Spotted Owl.

12 53. Long known for their association with dense, mature/old forest, spotted owls have, over
13 the past six years, been extensively studied in regard to burned forests. This recent research has found
14 that past assumptions about the relationship between owls and fire are not true. Not only are owls using
15 intensely burned forest, the most recent scientific evidence establishes that California Spotted Owls
16 *preferentially* select unlogged high-intensity fire areas in mature conifer forest for foraging (Bond et al.
17 2009, Bond et al. 2013).

18 54. The scientific research has also found that recent fires in the Sierras have not reduced
19 California spotted owl occupancy, and, in fact, spotted owl reproduction is higher in fire areas.

20 55. However, when post-fire logging of moderate/high-intensity fire areas occurs near or
21 adjacent to territory cores (such as PACs), indications are that occupancy is reduced (Bond et al. 2009,
22 Bond 2011, Lee et al. 2012).

23 56. Despite this, and more, new science as to the relationship between owls and fire, the
24 Forest Service, in both the Big Hope and Aspen EAs, refers back to the 2004 Sierra Nevada Framework
25 to assert that burned forest can be ignored as owl habitat and impacts of post-fire logging on the owls
26 can likewise be ignored.

1 57. In fact, by mid-April of 2014—before post-fire California Spotted Owl surveys had been
2 conducted (and before the results of any post-fire occupancy surveys)—the Forest Service used the
3 2004 Sierra Nevada Forest Plan Amendment to declare all areas in the American fire (Big Hope
4 Project) with over 50% basal area mortality as “unsuitable” to Spotted Owls, resulting in the deletion of
5 two Spotted Owl Protected Activity Centers (PACs) and Home Range Core Areas (HRCAs) from the
6 spotted owl territory network, and the “re-mapping” of an additional 7 PACs and 8 HRCAs, which
7 opened to post-fire logging thousands of acres of forest that would otherwise be protected in these areas
8 (Big Hope EA, pp. 90-91).

9 58. The Big Hope EA then claimed that “suitable” spotted owl habitat would be minimally
10 impacted by planned logging (*i.e.*, by defining areas of >50% basal area mortality as unsuitable, and
11 PACs with >50% high-intensity fire as lost to fire) (Big Hope EA, pp. 95, 97, 186-187), after admitting
12 on the same page that current science concludes that such areas of moderate- and high-intensity fire *are*
13 suitable foraging habitat (“preferred” foraging habitat, in fact) for the owls (Big Hope EA, p. 95). But
14 the Big Hope Project EA did not stop there: it goes on to categorize an additional 1,487 acres with less
15 than 50% basal area mortality as “unsuitable” for spotted owls, opening up even more acres of suitable
16 owl habitat to intensive post-fire logging (Big Hope EA, p. 90).

17 59. In the Aspen Project, the Forest Service re-mapped four Spotted Owl PACs and HRCAs
18 on the same basis, excluding areas of moderate/high-intensity fire and thus opening these areas to post-
19 fire logging while claiming no impacts to California Spotted Owls (Aspen EA, pp. 179-180).

20 60. Like the Big Hope EA, the Aspen EA included a cursory admission that moderate/high-
21 intensity fire areas create suitable Spotted Owl foraging habitat (EA, p. 181), then failed to incorporate,
22 in the impacts analysis, the loss of suitable foraging habitat from post-fire logging in moderate/high-
23 intensity fire areas (Aspen EA, pp. 179-180).

24 61. In the assessment of adverse impacts to Spotted Owls, the Aspen Project flatly refused
25 to consider the new science that directly undermines the Forest Service’s assumptions, and which
26 directly contradicts the agency’s outdated studies (none of which actually investigated the relationship
27 between Spotted Owls and fire), regarding California Spotted Owls, stating: “Implementation of action
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1 alternatives would not result in *any* additional reduction of habitat beyond what was caused by the
2 Aspen Fires”, citing the 2004 Framework (Aspen Project Response to Comments, pp. 47, 142
3 [emphasis added]).

4 62. When Plaintiffs submitted new scientific information showing that the 2004
5 Framework’s assumptions about suitable habitat are incorrect and outdated, the Forest Service simply
6 referred back to the 2004 Framework’s definition of habitat suitability (Aspen Project Response to
7 Comments, pp. 171, 194). The Aspen Project Response to Comments (pp. 47-49, 60) quoted comments
8 regarding studies finding California Spotted Owls succeeding in unlogged mixed-severity fire areas
9 (Bond et al. 2013), and serious adverse effects to Spotted Owls from post-fire logging (Lee et al. 2012,
10 Clark et al. 2013), but offered no response to these studies. Likewise, the EAs offer no response to
11 Bond et al. 2009’s recommendation that “burned forests within 1.5 km of nests or roosts of California
12 spotted owls *not be salvage-logged* until long-term effects of fire on spotted owls and their prey are
13 understood more fully” (emphasis added). Thus, the EAs fail to address adverse impacts to the suitable
14 habitat that Spotted Owls depend upon for the food they need to survive.

15 63. Not only does the most recent science demonstrate the importance of burned forest
16 habitat to spotted owls, surveys conducted by the Forest Service in 2014 confirm California spotted owl
17 presence in the American and Aspen fire areas in or near owl PACs and HRCAs that were dropped or
18 re-mapped (*i.e.*, areas that the Forest Service claimed are unsuitable). Yet, logging is nonetheless
19 proposed to occur within 1.5 km of these owl survey locations, contrary to Bond et al. 2009.

20 64. The EAs for the Projects fail to adequately discuss or consider the best available data
21 indicating loss of Spotted Owl occupancy from post-fire logging. The Big Hope Response to
22 Comments (pp. 41-42) dismisses multiple lines of evidence submitted by Plaintiffs about the loss of
23 Spotted Owl occupancy due to post-fire logging, claiming that these impacts do not have to be
24 considered, ostensibly because this finding was not a primary part of the design in one study and
25 because the other study is “not a research paper”. The Ninth Circuit has held that data on impacts of
26 post-fire logging to California Spotted Owls cannot be dismissed on the basis that the data are
27 preliminary or unpublished. *Earth Island Institute v. U.S. Forest Service*, 442 F.3d 1147, 1172 (9th Cir.
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1 2006). Other data sources showing loss of Spotted Owl occupancy after post-fire logging, which were
2 submitted with Plaintiffs' comments, such as the Bond (2011) report, are simply not addressed at all in
3 the Projects' EAs, Wildlife BEs, or Response to Comments documents.

4 65. One example of the scientific disconnect in the EAs is Spotted Owl Protected Activity
5 Center PLA0004, which was "retired" by the Forest Service following the American fire on the basis
6 that 52% of the area experienced high-severity fire. This resulted in the elimination of any protections
7 that would otherwise be provided, and the Proposed Action would log this PAC (Big Hope EA, p. 91).
8 However, the Forest Service admits in the Big Hope Response to Comments (p. 46) that approximately
9 50% high-severity fire effects in a PAC are not too high for the PAC to be viable for Spotted Owls,
10 creating an inherent contradiction between the facts found and the decision made.

11 66. Further, because the Forest Service dropped this PAC, the agency did not conduct post-
12 fire surveys to determine whether it is currently occupied by Spotted Owls. Lee et al. (2012) found that
13 most of the Spotted Owl territories with over 50% high-severity fire remained occupied after fire,
14 unless they were subjected to post-fire logging.

15 67. Another PAC in the American Fire area, PLA0071, which is occupied by a pair of
16 Spotted Owls post-fire according to Forest Service 2014 survey data, has post-fire logging units
17 planned in, around, and immediately adjacent to the PAC. These moderate- and high-intensity fire
18 patches that occurred in portions of the pre-fire PAC were re-drawn out of the PAC by the Forest
19 Service after the fire, allowing them to be logged.

20 68. Also ignored in the Big Hope and Aspen EAs is the fact that the most current, and best
21 available, science concludes that California spotted owl populations are declining (Conner et al. 2013,
22 Tempel and Gutierrez 2013, Tempel 2014). The Wildlife Biological Evaluation (BE) for the Big Hope
23 Project (at p. 32) cites research from 2006 for the proposition that California Spotted Owl populations
24 are not declining, but fails to mention or discuss the 2013 and 2014 studies that—based upon more
25 data—refute this earlier conclusion. The Aspen Project EA (e.g., p. 166) refused to even acknowledge
26 the current science showing Spotted Owls are in decline on Forest Service lands.

1 69. When Plaintiffs submitted the 2013 and 2014 studies to the Forest Service during com-
2 ments, stating that this new scientific information undermines outdated conclusions in the 2004
3 Framework, and outdated citations in the EAs, the Forest Service responded with text apparently cut
4 and pasted from some 2012 document, which argued that the new data on population declines of
5 California Spotted Owls (the 2013 and 2014 studies cited above, which were submitted with Plaintiffs'
6 comments) was not yet published (Aspen Project Response to Comments, p. 172). The Project EAs
7 failed to adequately analyze this science, or adequately disclose the impacts or cumulative effects of
8 logging post-fire habitat on spotted owls, including logging in moderate- and high-intensity fire areas
9 within the pre-fire and post-fire boundaries of PACs and HRCAs.

10 70. The conclusion of the Aspen EA (p. 196) that “the Project may affect individuals, but is
11 not likely to result in a trend toward Federal listing or loss of viability” of the California Spotted Owl is
12 not based upon an analysis of the adverse impacts of planned post-fire logging on suitable foraging
13 habitat created by moderate/high-intensity fire.

14 71. Similarly, the EA for the Big Hope Project, through the Wildlife BE (p. 61), made the
15 following conclusion: “It is my determination that implementation of the proposed action may affect
16 individuals, but is not likely to result in a trend toward Federal listing or loss of viability for the
17 California spotted owl within the planning area of the Tahoe National Forest. In the absence of a range
18 wide viability assessment, this viability determination is based on local knowledge of the California
19 spotted owl as discussed previously in this evaluation, and professional judgment.” This conclusion is
20 not based upon an adequate analysis of the adverse impacts of planned post-fire logging because the
21 analysis ignored the most recent science showing that spotted owls are a) in decline and b)
22 preferentially selecting intensely burned forest for foraging. In other words, it was not possible for the
23 Forest Service to make a valid determination given that the Forest Service chose to ignore the best
24 available science regarding spotted owl trends and spotted owl habitat.

25 72. The U.S. Forest Service’s Forest Service Manual (FSM), Amendment 2600-2005-1
26 (effective date: September 23, 2005), Section 2670.12, states: “Departmental Regulation 9500-4. This
27 regulation directs the Forest Service to: 1. Manage ‘habitats for all existing native and desired
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1 nonnative plants, fish, and wildlife species in order to maintain at least viable populations of such spe-
2 cies.” This requirement pertains with special force to Forest Service Sensitive Species, and Section
3 2670.22 states that following requirement for Sensitive Species: “Maintain viable populations of all
4 native and desired nonnative wildlife, fish, and plant species in habitats distributed throughout their
5 geographic range on National Forest System lands.” The Forest Service also must not take actions that
6 would contribute to a trend towards federal listing under the Endangered Species Act. FSM Section
7 2670.32.

8 73. The Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals has held that, with regard to the Forest Service’s
9 obligations under NEPA for Sensitive Species, the Forest Service must determine the quantity and
10 quality of habitat needed to maintain at least viable populations of the Sensitive Species, and must
11 determine whether the individual project being considered would push such habitat below the critical
12 threshold needed to maintain at least viable populations. *Ecology Center v. Austin*, 430 F.3d 1057,
13 1067-1068 (9th Cir. 2006), overruled on other grounds, *The Lands Council v. McNair*, 537 F.3d 981,
14 988, 990-994, 1001 (9th Cir. 2008) (*en banc*).

15 74. The Aspen and Big Hope EAs failed to divulge the quantity and quality of habitat
16 needed to maintain viable populations of California Spotted Owls on the Sierra and Tahoe National
17 Forests and range-wide, and failed to divulge whether the Projects would reduce such habitat below the
18 critical threshold to maintain viable populations.

19 75. The Aspen project is also within the range of the Pacific Fisher, an extremely rare,
20 mink-like mammal that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has determined to be “warranted” for listing
21 under the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA), based upon the biological science and threats,
22 including logging. At that time (2004), listing was determined to be “precluded”, however, due to other
23 administrative priorities, but a new listing decision is expected in the fall of this year. *See* 78 Fed. Reg.
24 70104, 70117 (November 22, 2013) (“[The Fish and Wildlife Service] continue[s] to find that listing
25 this species is warranted but precluded as of the date of publication of this notice of review. However,
26 we are working on a proposed listing rule that we expect to publish prior to making the next annual
27 resubmitted petition 12-month finding.”).

1 76. The current science concludes that Pacific Fishers select dense, mature/old conifer forest
2 for suitable denning and resting habitat (Zielinski et al. 2006, Purcell et al. 2009), but areas of mature/
3 old conifer forest that experience moderate/high-intensity fire are suitable foraging habitat, with Fishers
4 using such areas at levels comparable to their use of unburned mature/old conifer forest (Hanson 2013).
5 Hanson (2013) concluded that moderate/higher-severity fire occurring in dense, mature/old conifer
6 forest creates suitable Fisher foraging habitat, and that post-fire logging would reduce or remove the
7 structural components and complexity that makes post-fire habitat suitable for Fishers.

8 77. The Aspen EA (pp. 183-184) cursorily mentioned Hanson (2013), but failed to
9 acknowledge that this study found Fisher use of moderate/high-intensity fire areas to equal that of
10 unburned old forest and that this post-fire habitat is suitable Fisher habitat, and failed to acknowledge
11 the conclusion of Hanson (2013) that post-fire logging would eliminate habitat suitability. On this
12 faulty basis, the Forest Service categorized moderate/high-intensity fire areas as unsuitable for Fishers
13 and based the impacts analysis on this assumption (Aspen EA, pp. 183-184)—even as the Aspen
14 Project Response to Comments (p. 62) acknowledges that Hanson (2013) found fishers preferentially
15 selecting mixed-severity fire areas over unburned forests and using moderate/higher-severity fire areas
16 at levels comparable to use of unburned old forest.

17 78. Both the Aspen EA and the Response to Comments fail to divulge that Hanson (2013)
18 also found a statistically significant positive selection for larger proportions of higher-severity fire area
19 by Pacific fishers, where higher-severity was defined as over 50% basal area mortality. The Aspen
20 Project Response to Comments erroneously claimed (p. 62) not to understand the higher-severity fire
21 definition used in Hanson (2013) (over 50% basal area mortality), despite the fact that this is the same
22 definition used by the Forest Service to evaluate the Aspen project (Aspen EA, pp. 96, 178). The Aspen
23 EA never addressed the actual findings of the study or considered these findings in assessing the true
24 impacts of this project on Fisher habitat and survival.

25 79. The conclusion of the Aspen EA (p. 196) that “the Project may affect individuals, but is
26 not likely to result in a trend toward Federal listing or loss of viability” of the Pacific Fisher is not
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1 based upon an analysis of the adverse impacts of planned post-fire logging on suitable foraging habitat
2 created by moderate/high-intensity fire.

3 80. During scoping comments, and comments on the EAs, Plaintiffs submitted detailed
4 expert comments, and scientific sources, demonstrating that after a fire the forest naturally regenerates,
5 *i.e.*, seeds from live trees within and around burned areas, and seeds buried under forest duff which did
6 not get burned sprout and grow, beginning the next phase in the cycle of life for a fire adapted
7 ecosystem. These scientific sources establish that substantial natural post-fire conifer regeneration
8 occurs in high-intensity fire patches, including in the interior of such patches (more than two mature
9 tree lengths into the patches), and that native shrubs do not preclude such conifer regeneration.

10 81. Plaintiffs also submitted data demonstrating that the one study which found relatively
11 little natural post-fire conifer regeneration in high-intensity fire patches (Collins and Roller 2013) was
12 conducted largely in areas that had been clearcut before or after the fires, and that the authors did not
13 divulge that conifer seed source had been removed prior to the fires in the studied areas. Neither of the
14 EAs nor the Response to Comments documents acknowledged this information.

15 82. During scoping comments, and comments on the EAs, Plaintiffs submitted detailed
16 expert comments, and scientific sources, demonstrating that, contrary to the Forest Service's
17 hypothetical modeling assumptions/scenarios, post-fire logging, artificial conifer planting, and shrub
18 removal does not, in fact, effectively prevent future high-intensity fire, and often *increases* fire
19 intensity potential instead (Donato et al. 2006, Thompson et al. 2007, McGinnis et al. 2010, Donato et
20 al. 2013).

21 83. In 2004, the Forest Service amended all forest plans in the Sierra Nevada management
22 region, including those of the Sierra and Tahoe National Forests, with the 2004 Sierra Nevada Forest
23 Plan Amendment (the "2004 Framework"). The 2004 Framework allows, among other things, up to
24 100% removal of snag forest habitat (complex early seral forest), elimination of all or a portion of
25 California Spotted Owl PACs and HRCAs if the majority of the area experiences high-intensity fire,
26 and post-fire logging of these portions of pre-fire PACs or HRCAs, based upon the assumption that
27 moderate and high-intensity fire areas do not comprise suitable California Spotted Owl habitat, and that
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1 such fire effects eliminate habitat suitability for the owls, such that the logging of such areas will not
2 adversely affect the owls (USFS 2004). The 2004 Framework assumed that high-intensity fire is
3 unnaturally high currently in the Sierra Nevada and that it is causing substantial loss of occupancy.
4 Further, the 2004 Framework assumed that, due to fire suppression, Sierra Nevada forests are now
5 burning “almost exclusively” at high-intensity effects in areas that have missed natural fire return
6 intervals, and that high-intensity fire results in a loss of ecological integrity and threatens ecological
7 collapse.

8 84. Since 2004, significant new scientific information has arisen which has rendered invalid
9 the assumptions upon which the 2004 Framework EIS and Record of Decision were based, and
10 Plaintiffs submitted this new information to the Forest Service during comments on the Aspen and Big
11 Hope Projects. This information includes but is not limited to the following: a) California spotted owls
12 preferentially select unlogged high-severity fire areas as suitable foraging habitat (Bond et al. 2009),
13 and within burned forest they select the areas with highest overall density/complexity in terms of total
14 basal area of trees (snags and live trees combined), indicating that high levels of standing snags in
15 higher-severity areas is important to California spotted owls (Roberts 2008); b) California spotted owl
16 reproduction is higher in unlogged mixed-severity fire areas than in unburned mature forest (Bond et al.
17 2002, Roberts 2008); c) California spotted owl occupancy is slightly higher in mixed-severity fire areas
18 (average of 32% high-severity fire effects) than in unburned mature forests in the Sierra Nevada, while
19 occupancy has been consistently lost in areas where “salvage” logging has removed post-fire habitat
20 (Bond 2011, Lee et al. 2012); d) in unlogged mixed-severity fire areas, California spotted owls have
21 home range sizes that are comparable to or smaller than those in unburned mature forest (indicating
22 comparable territory fitness and habitat suitability in burned forest) (Bond et al. 2013); e) the only area
23 in the Sierra Nevada in which California spotted owl populations are known to be stable or slightly
24 increasing is an area with an active mixed-severity fire regime and no mechanical thinning or post-fire
25 logging (Sequoia/Kings-Canyon National Park), while all study areas on national forests and private
26 lands (characterized by aggressive reduction of fire due to fire suppression, landscape-level mechanical
27 thinning, and common post-fire logging) have declining populations (Conner et al. 2013, Tempel and
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1 Gutiérrez 2013, Tempel 2014); f) due to fire suppression policies, there is now a deficit of high-
2 intensity fire in the forests of the Sierra Nevada, and there is now only about one-fourth to one-half as
3 much high-intensity fire as there was prior to the early 20th century, depending upon the estimates
4 (Mallek et al. 2013, Baker 2014, Hanson and Odion 2014, Odion et al. 2014); g) high-intensity fire
5 creates complex early seral forest (a.k.a., “snag forest habitat”), which is one of the rarest, most
6 biodiverse and ecologically important, and most threatened of all forest habitat types (Burnett et al.
7 2010, Swanson et al. 2011, Odion et al. 2014); h) forests of the Sierra Nevada are burning mostly at
8 low/moderate-intensity currently, and this is also true of the most fire-suppressed forests (those that
9 have missed the most natural fire return intervals) (Odion and Hanson 2006, Odion and Hanson 2008,
10 van Wagendonk et al. 2012); i) due to fire suppression, we now have two to four times less high-
11 intensity fire than we did historically (Mallek et al. 2013, Hanson and Odion 2014, Odion et al. 2014),
12 and the most comprehensive analysis found that fire intensity is not increasing in the Sierra Nevada,
13 and that Forest Service analyses to the contrary were based upon demonstrable methodological errors
14 (Hanson and Odion 2014); j) due to the deficit of high-intensity fire from fire suppression, exacerbated
15 by post-fire logging, Black-backed Woodpeckers are now very rare in the Sierra Nevada, and there is
16 now a conservation concern about their populations, leading the Forest Service to produce a
17 Conservation Strategy for this species (Bond et al. 2012); k) Black-backed Woodpeckers strongly
18 select large patches (generally at least 100-200 acres per pair) of recent moderate to high-intensity fire
19 occurring in areas of pre-fire dense, mature/old conifer forest, indicating that maintaining such fire
20 effects and habitat conditions are important for the conservation of this species (Hanson and North
21 2008, Siegel et al. 2013); l) a recent study concluded that current forest management, including
22 removal of one-third or more of Black-backed Woodpecker habitat through post-fire logging, would
23 cause a precipitous decline in Black-backed Woodpecker populations over the next three decades in the
24 Sierra Nevada and eastern Oregon Cascades, creating a substantial risk of extinction (Odion and Han-
25 son 2013); and m) Pacific Fishers actively use areas of unlogged moderate/high-intensity fire occurring
26 in pre-fire dense, mature/old conifer forest—at levels comparable to their use of unburned old forest—
27 and preferentially select mixed-intensity fire areas over unburned forest when they are near fire edges.

1 85. The Forest Service continues to manage national forests of the Sierra Nevada under the
2 assumptions of the 2004 Framework, despite the significant new information that has arisen over the
3 past decade. Brushing aside the large amount of new science submitted by Plaintiffs—science which
4 shows that the 2004 Framework’s conclusions and assumptions are inaccurate and outdated—the
5 Forest Service, replied: “The 2004 SNFPA decision has not been vacated by the courts and the deci-
6 sion, with its standards and guidelines, remains in effect. The Aspen project is in compliance with the
7 2004 Framework decision and its standards and guidelines.” Aspen Project Response to Comments, p.
8 176.

9
10 **CLAIMS FOR RELIEF**

11 **FIRST CLAIM FOR RELIEF**

12 **Violation of NEPA and the APA**

13 **Failure to Prepare an Environmental Impact Statement**

14 86. Plaintiffs incorporate by reference all preceding paragraphs.

15 87. Based on the evidence in the record, the Big Hope and Aspen Projects will likely have
16 significant adverse impacts and cumulative effects to California Spotted Owls (a designated Sensitive
17 Species), and Black-backed Woodpeckers and the habitat type and suite of species which they
18 represent. The record also indicates that the Aspen Project would have significant or potentially
19 significant adverse impacts on Pacific Fishers—a Candidate Species under the ESA. Further, the Forest
20 Service has failed to provide a convincing statement of reasons to support their decision not to prepare
21 an EIS.

22 88. Defendants’ decision to implement the Big Hope and Aspen Projects without preparing
23 an Environmental Impact Statement, and without articulating a convincing statement of reasons for the
24 decision not to prepare an EIS, violates NEPA and its regulations (40 C.F.R. § 1508.27) and was
25 arbitrary, capricious, an abuse of discretion, or otherwise not in accordance with law under the APA. 5
26 U.S.C. § 706(2).

SECOND CLAIM FOR RELIEF

Violation of NEPA and the APA

Significant New Information and Failure to Supplement the 2004 Framework

89. Plaintiffs incorporate by reference all preceding paragraphs.

90. Defendants’ Big Hope and Aspen EAs rely on aspects of the 2004 Framework which have been rendered outdated and invalid due to significant new scientific information and changed circumstances. For example, new science demonstrates that many of the assumptions in the 2004 Framework are not scientifically valid, and yet the Forest Service relies on those assumptions instead of making the required changes to their outdated Forest Plan, or adapting their management on site specific projects to reflect this new information.

91. Defendants’ failure to prepare a supplemental EIS to the 2004 Framework, as required by the NEPA, and NEPA’s implementing regulations, 40 C.F.R. § 1508.9(c), represent agency action which is unlawfully withheld or unreasonably delayed, arbitrary, capricious, an abuse of discretion, in excess of statutory authority and limitations, and not in accordance with the law and procedures required by law. 5 U.S.C. § 706 (1) & (2).

THIRD CLAIM FOR RELIEF

Violations of NEPA and the APA

Failure to Take a Hard Look, To Adequately Explain Impacts, To Provide Necessary Information, To Ensure Scientific Integrity, To Respond to Dissenting Scientific Opinion, and To

Articulate a Reasonable Purpose and Need

92. Plaintiffs incorporate by reference all preceding paragraphs.

93. Pursuant to NEPA, Defendants must take a “hard look” at the consequences, environmental impacts, and adverse effects, including cumulative effects, of proposed actions. 42 U.S.C. § 4332(2)(C); 40 C.F.R. § 1508.9. Further, the Forest Service must adequately explain its impacts assessment, provide any necessary information for understanding and evaluating its decisions, ensure scientific accuracy and integrity in NEPA documents, and must also clearly divulge its

1 methodologies for key findings, articulate a purpose and need which is not unreasonably narrow, and
2 respond directly to dissenting scientific opinion. *Id.* § 1502.1, 1502.9, 1502.24.

3 94. The Forest Service failed to analyze, or adequately analyze, impacts and cumulative
4 effects of the Big Hope and Aspen Projects with regard to California Spotted Owls, Black-backed
5 Woodpeckers, and Pacific Fishers.

6 95. Defendants' decision to implement the Projects without taking the requisite "hard look"
7 at environmental impacts and cumulative effects, without ensuring scientific accuracy and integrity,
8 without adequately explaining the impacts assessment, without providing necessary information,
9 without articulating a reasonable purpose and need, and without adequately disclosing methodologies
10 or directly responding to dissenting science with regard to California Spotted Owls, Black-backed
11 Woodpeckers, and Pacific Fishers, violates NEPA and its regulations, and was arbitrary, capricious, an
12 abuse of discretion, or otherwise not in accordance with law under the APA. 5 U.S.C. § 706(2).

13
14 **FOURTH CLAIM FOR RELIEF**

15 **Violation of NFMA and the APA**

16 **Failure to Consider the Best Available Science**

17 96. Plaintiffs incorporate by reference all preceding paragraphs.

18 97. Defendants' Big Hope and Aspen EAs failed to carefully consider the best available
19 science with regard to California Spotted Owls, Black-backed Woodpeckers, and Pacific Fishers, and
20 the science on these subjects submitted by Plaintiffs to the Forest Service directly undermines the
21 Forest Service's conclusions/assumptions, and/or shows the Forest Service's studies or positions to be
22 outdated or flawed.

23 98. Defendants' failure to consider the best available science with regard to California
24 Spotted Owls, Black-backed Woodpeckers, and Pacific Fishers, as required by the NFMA, and
25 NFMA's implementing regulations, 36 C.F.R. § 219.35(a), is arbitrary, capricious, an abuse of
26 discretion, in excess of statutory authority and limitations, and not in accordance with the law and
27 procedures required by law. 5 U.S.C. § 706(2).

PRAYER FOR RELIEF

Plaintiffs respectfully request that this Court:

1. Declare that Defendants violated NEPA, NFMA, the APA, and implementing regulations, in preparing and approving the Big Hope and Aspen Project EAs, Decision Notices, and FONSI;
 2. Enjoin Defendants from awarding or implementing the Projects, except for felling of hazard trees that could otherwise fall on and hit roads maintained for public use, trails or administrative structures, until Defendants have complied with NEPA, NFMA, the APA, and implementing regulations;
 3. Award Plaintiffs their costs and attorneys fees under the Equal Access to Justice Act;
- and
4. Grant Plaintiffs such other and further relief as the Court deems just and equitable.

Respectfully submitted,

Dated: July 8, 2014

/s/ Justin Augustine

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