



BOARD OF SUPERVISORS COUNTY OF INYO

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December 11, 2012

Mr. Tom Tidwell, Chief
United States Forest Service
1400 Independence Ave. SW
Washington DC 20250-0003

Re: Inyo National Forest Plan Update/Revision – Science Synthesis

Dear Chief Tidwell:

On behalf of the Inyo County Board of Supervisors, I am writing to express its dismay that Inyo County has been excluded from an early and important stage of the update effort underway for the Inyo National Forest Plan. It is the County's goal to be meaningfully and constructively involved in this effort at every opportunity, and most importantly when foundational issues are addressed. It is clear that the foundation of the new Forest Plan is to be science, which will affect most decisions made in the development of the plan and subsequent management of the Forest. To further the scientific analysis Region Five has commenced collecting applicable existing research in a science synthesis. This synthesis is to be extensively reviewed prior to release to the public for comment. The Region has indicated that it may exclude Inyo County from this review.

Inyo County participated extensively in the development of the recently adopted Forest Planning Rule, with the motive of commencing a cooperative relationship with the Inyo National Forest. Our participation included traveling to Washington DC to participate in various roundtables and interacting with the national forest planning team. County staff was encouraged by the openness and inclusiveness of this process and by the final product, which recognizes the importance of involving the local affected population, through its elected government, in the development of forest plans.

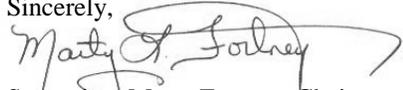
During our involvement, County staff was encouraged by the Forest planning staff to participate early and often in the development of the upcoming Inyo National Forest Plan Update, and specifically in the Science Synthesis being prepared for the Sierra Nevada. The County sees this as an excellent opportunity for the County and the Forest to coordinate our efforts at a foundational juncture in the planning process. This is the type of involvement for which the County advocated during the development of the national planning rule, and the type of involvement it was promised. Additionally, and contemporaneously with the drafting of the Forest Planning Rule, the California State Association of Counties and the Regional Council of Rural Counties negotiated and executed a memorandum of agreement (MOA) with Region Five to further cooperation and coordination between California counties and the USFS. This MOA also encourages early and extensive involvement in Forest plans by California counties.

Inyo County strongly believes that its input into the important and foundational work being undertaken for the Science Synthesis will add value to the document. Further, this coordination must occur before initial decisions and evaluations are made, when the County can effectively bring its expertise to bear on the issues. Our staff is told that only scientists with published articles may perform a peer review of the science synthesis. This ignores the scientific, engineering and practical expertise Inyo County has on staff and at its command, and frankly seems like little more than an excuse to exclude the County from participating in the discussion. The regional decision flies in the face of the Forest Planning Rule and the regional MOA, which are intended to increase coordination between counties and the forest, to the benefit of the local communities that are so dramatically affected by forest plans.

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We hope you agree that the default position of the Forest should be inclusion. We believe such a policy would benefit the Forest as much as the local community and strengthen both Forest and County planning efforts. We request you direct Region Five management to encourage County involvement during the development of the Science Synthesis, and at all possible opportunities thereafter. It is time, we believe, to implement the promises of the Forest Plan to the benefit of your agency and our constituents. Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,



Supervisor Marty Fortney, Chairperson
Inyo County Board of Supervisors

cc: Board of Supervisors
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Regional Council of Rural Counties
California State Association of Counties
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