



For Immediate Release

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California Attorney General, Conservation Groups Challenge Revised Sierra Plan
Claims Against Forest Service Charge New Logging Mandate Ignores Science

Sacramento --- The State of California and a coalition of conservation organizations filed back-to-back legal actions yesterday and today against the Forest Service, saying the agency failed to include essential scientific information when revising the Sierra Nevada Framework, a management plan for eleven national forests in California. The revised plan triples the amount of logging across the Sierra range and shifts fire prevention resources away from communities.

"With no basis in science and no new facts, the Bush Administration has jettisoned the product of more than 10 years of study, public participation and consensus building", said Attorney General Bill Lockyer. What the Forest Service disingenuously calls a fine-tuning is really a complete overhaul that will make our communities less safe from fires at the same time it damages our treasured forests.

The challenges, filed in the U. S. District Court, Eastern District of California, assert that the 2004 revisions failed to disclose key scientific data regarding impacts on old growth forests, water and wildlife. In addition, critics say that the new plan decreases the level of fire safety and protection to homes and communities, focusing instead on increased logging of large, fire-resistant trees in the backcountry.

"Logging large trees in remote areas does not effectively address the real fire risk presented by more combustible small trees and brush," said Dr. Norm Christensen, Professor of Ecology and Founding Dean of the Nicholas School of the Environment and Earth Sciences at Duke University. The revised Framework ignores scientific consensus on reducing those fuels most important to ignition and spread of wildfire."

The Forest Service approved the original Sierra Nevada Forest Plan Amendment in January 2001, to direct the management of 11.5 million acres of California's national forest lands. The original plan was never implemented, and in January 2004, the Forest Service announced revisions to triple the amount of logging and limit protections for forests, water and wildlife throughout the Sierra. In November of last year, the agency rejected appeals to their 2004 decision.

According to Jim Lyons, former USDA Undersecretary for Natural Resources and Environment and key architect of the original Framework, "The 2001 Framework was a balanced plan that was widely praised by a number of diverse interests. Unfortunately, it was never given a chance to work on the ground."

Craig Thomas, director of the Sierra Nevada Forest Protection Campaign, said, "We support the original 2001 Framework. Thinning projects should have started in 2001 when the Forest Service approved it." Thomas, a Sierra resident, added, "We need to protect people from fire where they live, but logging trees in the backcountry does not protect us from fire."

Conservation groups also cite the current Plans failure to provide a safety net for key resources through a required monitoring program. There is no system in place to ensure that intensive logging won't damage waterways or even create new fire dangers," stated Pat Gallagher, Sierra Club Legal Director. "Forest managers, like doctors, should follow the creed to first do no harm."

According to Mike Sherwood, a lawyer with Earthjustice, "This mandate to triple logging ignores decades of scientific research and public input. We should return to the balanced plan in 2001 that protected communities, clean drinking water, and what remains of the Sierra's ancient forests. These forests belong to all of us, and it is our responsibility to protect them for the future."

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Conservation groups listed on the challenge include: Sierra Nevada Forest Protection Campaign, Sierra Club, Natural Resources Defense Council, Center for Biological Diversity, The Wilderness Society. Groups are represented by Earthjustice, a non-profit public interest environmental law firm based in Oakland, and the Sierra Club Environmental Law Program (ELP).

