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11 *Attorneys for Plaintiff Sierra Snowmobile Foundation, et al.*

12 **IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT**  
13 **FOR THE EASTERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA**

14 SIERRA SNOWMOBILE FOUNDATION,  
a nonprofit corporation; JEFF WITTMAN;  
15 MARY KRUPKA; JOHN WATTS;  
16 BLUERIBBON COALITION, INC, a  
nonprofit corporation; AMERICAN  
17 COUNCIL OF SNOWMOBILE  
ASSOCIATION INC., a nonprofit  
18 corporation,

19 Plaintiffs,

20 v.

21 UNITED STATES FOREST SERVICE,  
22 Pacific Southwest Region; JASON  
KUIKEN, in his capacity as Forest  
23 Supervisor for the Stanislaus National  
24 Forest; UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT  
OF AGRICULTURE, United States Forest  
25 Service,

26 Defendants.

No.

**COMPLAINT FOR  
DECLARATORY AND  
INJUNCTIVE RELIEF**

27  
28

**I. JURISDICTION**

1  
2 1. This Court has jurisdiction pursuant to 28 U.S.C. §1331 (federal question  
3 jurisdiction), 28 U.S.C. §§2201-2202 (declaratory judgment), and 5 U.S.C. §§702, 706  
4 (Administrative Procedure Act or “APA”).

5 2. The federal government has waived sovereign immunity pursuant to 5 U.S.C.  
6 §702.

7 3. Plaintiffs Sierra Snowmobile Foundation (“SSF”), Blueribbon Coalition, Inc.  
8 (“BRC”), American Counsel of Snowmobile Association Inc. (“ACSA”), Jeff Wittman, Mary  
9 Krupka, and Jeff Watts (collectively “Plaintiffs”) have exhausted all administrative remedies.

10 **II. INTRODUCTION**

11 4. Plaintiffs bring this action challenging Defendants’ United States Forest Service  
12 and Forest Supervisor Jason Kuiken’s (“Defendants”) issuance of the Stanislaus National Forest  
13 Over-Snow Vehicle (“OSV”) Use Designation Record of Decision and the underlying analysis  
14 and actions (the “Decision”). The Decision significantly reduces the acreage open to cross-  
15 country motorized OSV use from that previously and historically available to OSV  
16 recreationists on the Stanislaus National Forest.<sup>1</sup>

17 5. This is a civil action for declaratory and injunctive relief, arising under the laws  
18 of the United States, including the Administrative Procedure Act (“APA”), 5 U.S.C. §§701 *et*  
19 *seq.*; U.S. Forest Service Travel Management regulations, 36 C.F.R. Part 212; the National  
20 Environmental Policy Act (“NEPA”), 42 U.S.C. §§4321 *et seq.*; the National Forest  
21 Management Act (“NFMA”), 16 U.S.C. §§1600 *et seq.*; and implementing regulations  
22 established pursuant to these federal statutes.

23 6. Plaintiffs seek a declaration that the Forest Service’s Decision designating  
24 119,104 acres of National Forest System (“NFS”) lands and 83.7 miles of trails for OSV use  
25 within the Stanislaus National Forest is arbitrary and capricious under the APA and fails to  
26 comply with NEPA, NFMA, and the Forest Service’s Travel Management regulations.

27 <sup>1</sup> As used in this Complaint, the term “OSV” generally applies to snowmobile use but also  
28 includes other forms of motorized snow travel. The term “cross-country” means travel by OSVs  
off of established trails such as in an open, snow-covered meadow.



1 snowmobiles in the areas of the Stanislaus National Forest that are the subject of the challenged  
2 Decision, including both the Highway 108 and Highway 4 corridors. The Decision will prevent  
3 them from riding snowmobiles in areas they have historically accessed and visited, and but for  
4 the Decision would visit in the future, in the Stanislaus National Forest.

5 13. Plaintiffs participated to the extent allowed in the proceedings leading to the  
6 Forest Service's Decision challenged here, including submitting comments on the August 23,  
7 2018 draft Environmental Impact Statement ("EIS") and objections to the March 22, 2019 final  
8 EIS and draft Record of Decision ("ROD").

9 14. Defendant the United States Department of Agriculture ("Department of  
10 Agriculture) is a federal agency comprised of 29 agencies and offices. The United States Forest  
11 Service is one of the federal agencies within the Department of Agriculture. The Defendant the  
12 Pacific Southwest Region of the Forest Service ("Forest Service") is the region of the Forest  
13 Service in which the Stanislaus National Forest is located and has responsibility for oversight  
14 and regional guidance for the management of NFS lands within that region, including the  
15 Stanislaus National Forest.

16 15. At all times relevant hereto, Defendant Jason Kuiken was the Forest Supervisor  
17 of the Stanislaus National Forest. Forest Supervisor Kuiken is the ultimate authority for the  
18 procedures, actions, and decisions of the Stanislaus National Forest and is charged with  
19 ensuring that the Forest Service complies with applicable law. Forest Supervisor Kuiken is sued  
20 solely in his official capacity.

#### 21 **IV. VENUE**

22 16. Venue is proper in this district pursuant to 28 U.S.C. §1391 because all or a  
23 substantial part of the events or omissions giving rise to the claims herein occurred within this  
24 judicial district, and because Defendants' regional and Forest Supervisor's offices are located in  
25 this district.

V. LEGAL BACKGROUND

A. The National Environmental Policy Act

17. NEPA directs all federal agencies to assess the environmental impacts of, and alternatives to, their proposed actions that significantly affect the quality of the human environment. 42 U.S.C. §4332(2)(C).

18. The Council on Environmental Quality (“CEQ”) has promulgated uniform regulations to implement NEPA that are binding on all federal agencies. 42 U.S.C. §4342; 40 C.F.R. §§1500 *et seq.*<sup>2</sup>

19. NEPA’s twin aims are (1) to foster informed decision making by requiring agencies to consider the environmental impacts of their proposed actions and (2) to ensure that agencies inform the public that they considered environmental concerns. 42 U.S.C. §4331; 40 C.F.R. §1500.1. To accomplish these goals, federal agencies must prepare an EIS to consider the effects of each “major Federal action[] significantly affecting the quality of the human environment.” 42 U.S.C. §4332(C).

20. An EIS must take a hard look at the environmental impacts of a proposed action before reaching a decision and “provide full and fair discussion of significant environmental impacts.” 40 C.F.R. §1502.1; 42 U.S.C. §4332(C). An EIS must also “[r]igorously explore and objectively evaluate all reasonable alternatives” and explain why other alternatives were eliminated from detailed study. 40 C.F.R. §1502.14(a); 42 U.S.C. §4332(C)(iii), (E).

21. Agencies like the Forest Service must consider a “No-Action” alternative in every case because it provides a benchmark against which the action alternatives are evaluated. In the context of a land use plan amendment, the “No-Action” alternative assumes that the proposed plan amendment is not adopted.

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<sup>2</sup> On July 16, 2020, CEQ issued a Final Rule amending its NEPA regulations, found at 40 C.F.R. Parts 1500-1508. *See* Update to the Regulations Implementing the Procedural Provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act, 85 Fed. Reg. 43304 (July 16, 2020) (“CEQ Final Rule”). The CEQ Final Rule became effective September 15, 2020, and applies to any NEPA process begun after September 14, 2020. Here, the Forest Service applied the CEQ NEPA regulations in place at the time the NEPA process was initiated through publication of the Notice of Intent on June 26, 2015.

1           22. To fulfill NEPA’s public participation goals, federal agencies must assess and  
2 consider comments both individually and collectively and properly respond to comments in a  
3 final EIS. 40 C.F.R. §§1502.9(c), 1503.4(a). If an agency “makes substantial changes in the  
4 proposed action that are relevant to environmental concerns” or “[t]here are significant new  
5 circumstances or information relevant to environmental concerns and bearing on the proposed  
6 action or its impacts[,]” the agency must issue a supplemental draft and final EIS. *Id.*  
7 §1502.9(d).

8           23. At the time of its decision, an agency must release a “record of decision” that  
9 identifies and discusses all factors that the agency balanced when making its decision and state  
10 how those considerations entered into its decision. *Id.* §1505.2.

#### 11 **B. The Travel Management Rule**

12           24. In 2005, the Forest Service overhauled the travel planning process for the  
13 national forests and finalized its “Travel Management Rule” to provide more effective  
14 management of public motor vehicle use. 70 Fed. Reg. 68,264 (Nov. 9, 2005) (codified at 36  
15 C.F.R. Part 212). The 2005 Travel Management Rule includes Subpart B, which requires  
16 designation of those roads, trails, and areas on NFS lands where public motor vehicle use is  
17 allowed (36 C.F.R. § 212.51(a)), and Subpart C, which allows, but does not require, the  
18 regulation of OSV use. 70 Fed. Reg. at 68,290. The Forest Service recognized the difference  
19 between management of OSV use and management of other types of motor vehicle use on NFS  
20 lands, explaining that “[u]nlike other types of motor vehicles traveling cross-country, OSVs  
21 generally do not create a permanent trail or have a direct impact on soil and ground vegetation.”  
22 70 Fed. Reg. at 68284.

23           25. In 2015, the Forest Service revised Subpart C of the Travel Management Rule to  
24 require the designation of areas and trails for OSV use to “provide[] for a system of National  
25 Forest System roads, National Forest System trails, and areas on National Forest System lands  
26 that are designated for [OSV] use.” 36 C.F.R. §212.80(a); 80 Fed. Reg. 4501 (Jan. 28, 2015).  
27 This Subpart requires the Stanislaus National Forest to designate OSV use of the NFS lands  
28 “where snowfall is adequate for that use to occur, and, if appropriate, shall be designated by

1 class of vehicle and time of year.” 36 C.F.R. §212.81(a). The Forest Service continued to  
2 recognize the difference between management of OSV use and management of other types of  
3 motor vehicle use on NFS lands resulting from the more limited environmental impacts of  
4 OSVs, which “generally do not create a permanent trail or have a direct impact on soil and  
5 ground vegetation.” 80 Fed. Reg. at 45011. The Forest Service also recognized that “adequate  
6 snowfall” may vary given the circumstances and it declined to impose a one-size-fits-minimum  
7 snow depth requirement.

8 26. The Travel Management Rule contains general and specific criteria the Forest  
9 Service must consider and apply when designating roads, trails, and areas for motor vehicle use  
10 on National Forests. 36 C.F.R. §212.55(a).

11 27. In designating trails and areas, the Forest Service must consider and apply  
12 specific criteria with the objective of minimizing damage to forest resources, harassment of  
13 wildlife, disruption of wildlife habitat, and conflicts between motor vehicle use and existing or  
14 proposed recreational uses of the national forest. 36 C.F.R. §212.55(b). These specific criteria  
15 are often referred to as the “minimization criteria.” The Forest Service must not only consider  
16 these minimization criteria but affirmatively demonstrate how it evaluated and applied the  
17 minimization criteria in any decision designating trails and areas for motor vehicle use with the  
18 objective of minimizing impacts and conflicts.

19 28. General criteria for the Forest Service’s consideration include effects on natural  
20 and cultural resources, public safety, provision of recreational opportunities, access needs,  
21 conflicts among uses of the Forest, and the availability of resources for necessary administration  
22 and maintenance. 36 C.F.R. §212.55(a).

### 23 **C. National Forest Management Act**

24 29. NFMA requires the Forest Service to develop and implement a land and resource  
25 management plan (“Forest Plan”) for each unit of the National Forest System. 16 U.S.C. §1604.  
26 Forest Plans guide natural resource management activities forest-wide, setting standards,  
27 management area goals and objectives, and monitoring and evaluation requirements. A Forest  
28

1 Plan must provide for multiple uses for the forest, including density, recreation, range, wildlife,  
2 fish, timber, and wilderness.

3 30. Under NFMA all permits, contracts, and other instruments for the use of  
4 National Forest System lands “shall be consistent with the land management plans.” *Id.*  
5 §1604(i). Therefore, after a Forest Plan is developed, all subsequent agency action, including  
6 site-specific actions, must comply with NFMA and the governing Forest Plan.

7 31. The Forest Plan governing the Stanislaus National Forest was adopted in 1991  
8 (“Stanislaus Forest Plan”) and has been amended multiple times of the years. The 2017  
9 Stanislaus National Forest Plan Direction represents the current Stanislaus Forest Plan  
10 management direction, based on the original Stanislaus Forest Plan as modified through the  
11 Forest Plan amendment process. Stanislaus National Forest, Forest Plan Direction 115 (March  
12 2017) (“Stanislaus Forest Plan Direction”).

13 32. The Stanislaus Forest Plan’s goal for recreation includes providing “a wide range  
14 of recreation opportunities directed at various experience levels to meet current and projected  
15 demand, including campgrounds, hiking trails, picnic areas, OHV trails, etc.” and, more  
16 specifically, to “provide a variety of off-highway vehicle (OHV) recreational opportunities in a  
17 manner consistent with protection of wildlife and other resources, and with non-motorized  
18 recreation.” Stanislaus Forest Plan Direction at 4.

19 **D. Administrative Procedure Act**

20 33. The APA governs judicial review of agency actions and provides a right to  
21 judicial review for any “person suffering legal wrong because of agency action, or adversely  
22 affected or aggrieved by agency action.” 5 U.S.C. §702. The APA directs courts to “hold  
23 unlawful and set aside agency action . . . found to be . . . arbitrary, capricious, an abuse of  
24 discretion, or otherwise not in accordance with law.” *Id.* §706(2)(A). Agency actions must also  
25 be set aside if made “without observance of procedure required by law.” *Id.* §706(2)(D).

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1 **VI. FACTUAL BACKGROUND**

2 **A. Stanislaus National Forest and OSV Use**

3 34. The Stanislaus National Forest encompasses 898,099 acres on the western slope  
4 of the Sierra Nevada mountain range ranging in elevation from 1,500 to over 11,000 feet above  
5 sea level. Almost 215,000 acres within the Stanislaus National Forest are designated  
6 Wilderness Areas under the Wilderness Act of 1964, 16 U.S.C. §1131, *et seq.*, and are closed to  
7 all motorized travel. *See* Stanislaus National Forest OSV Use Designation Final Environmental  
8 Impact Statement at 27, 30 (March 2019) (“FEIS”). The Stanislaus National Forest also includes  
9 100,299 acres of Near Natural management areas and 23,107 acres of Proposed Wilderness  
10 management areas, both of which the Forest Plan directs the Forest Service to manage as non-  
11 motorized. FEIS at 30; Forest Plan Direction at 65, 115. Although the Stanislaus Forest Plan  
12 provides for Near Natural and Proposed Wilderness areas to be managed as semi-primitive non-  
13 motorized, they were never formally closed to OSV use and have been historically used by OSV  
14 riders.

15 35. The forest has four ranger districts divided along three highway corridors that  
16 provide access to most recreational opportunities: Highway 120 to the south (Groveland  
17 District), Highway 108 along the Middle Fork of the Stanislaus River (Mi-Wok and Summit  
18 Ranger Districts), and Highway 4 to the north (Calaveras Ranger District). Of the three  
19 corridors, Highway 108 serves the most recreational use in the Forest. FEIS at 90.

20 36. The Stanislaus National Forest is a destination for a variety of winter recreation  
21 activities, including backcountry snowmobiling. Prior to the Decision, the Forest Service  
22 permitted cross-country OSV use in the Stanislaus National Forest wherever there was adequate  
23 snowfall in areas that allowed for motorized use and in some Near Natural and Proposed  
24 Wilderness areas. *See* FEIS at 91. This included areas below 5,000 feet in elevation.

25 37. For over 30 years, the Forest Service, Pacific Southwest Region, in cooperation  
26 with the California Department of Parks and Recreation (California State Parks) Off-Highway  
27 Motor Vehicle Recreation Division encouraged snowmobiling by maintaining and grooming  
28 certain NFS trails.

1           38.     The Stanislaus Forest Plan Direction requires a minimum of 12 inches of snow  
2 depth for cross-country OSV use but does not specify a minimum snow depth for OSV travel on  
3 existing trails. Stanislaus Forest Plan Direction at 53. Conditions on existing OSV trails vary  
4 considerably throughout the Stanislaus National Forest in both the level of snow compaction  
5 and the underlying ground conditions, which makes the blanket 12-inch minimum snow depth  
6 requirement inappropriate.

7     **B. Project Scoping and Draft EIS**

8           39.     Recognizing the “need to provide a manageable, designated OSV system of trails  
9 and areas within the Stanislaus National Forest that is consistent with and achieves the purposes  
10 of the Forest Service Travel Management Rule,” the Forest Service issued a Notice of Intent to  
11 Prepare an EIS for a proposal to designate OSV use on roads, trails, and areas and identify trails  
12 for grooming within the Stanislaus National Forest. 80 Fed. Reg. 36760 (June 26, 2015). The  
13 Forest Service then began the formal 45-day scoping period under NEPA. Scoping is one of the  
14 earliest steps under NEPA to gather internal and external input for determining the scope of  
15 issues to be addressed in an EIS and for identifying any significant issues related to a proposed  
16 action. *See* 40 C.F.R. §1501.7. During the 45-day scoping period, the Forest Service received  
17 over 100 responses regarding its proposal to designate areas and trails in the Stanislaus National  
18 Forest for OSV use. Stanislaus National Forest OSV Use Designation Draft EIS (August 2018)  
19 (“DEIS”) at 10.

20           40.     In August 2018, the Forest Service released the DEIS for the Stanislaus National  
21 Forest OSV Use Designation project. The DEIS analyzed five alternatives to meet the project  
22 purpose of providing “for a system of NFS roads, NFS trails, and areas on NFS lands that are  
23 designated for over-snow vehicle use where snowfall is adequate for that use to occur.” DEIS at  
24 8. All of the alternatives imposed a minimum snow-depth requirement of at least 12 inches for  
25 both cross-country and trail OSV use. With a single exception, the other proposed alternatives  
26 significantly reduced OSV access as summarized below:

OSV Access	Alternative 1	Alternative 2	Alternative 3	Alternative 4	Alternative 5
Total acreage available for cross-country OSV use	140,895	684,585	116,868	191,099	97,763
Total miles of NFS Trails available for OSV Use	101.89	108.86	108.5	105.29	56.69

Source: DEIS xii (Table S-2), xv (Table S-9), and 29.

41. All of the alternatives include a minimum snow-depth requirement of at least 12 inches for both cross-country and trail OSV use. *See* DEIS xvi (Table S-11).

42. Alternative 1 was the Forest Service’s initial proposed action. In addition to the above OSV use area and trail designations and requirements, this Alternative imposed a minimum snow depth requirement of 24 inches within Stanislaus Meadow. DEIS 27.

43. Alternative 2 was considered the “no-action” alternative because it would have maintained the status quo of OSV access on the Stanislaus National Forest. Under this alternative, the Forest Service would not designate acreage and trails for OSV use, but existing OSV use would be allowed to continue. The DEIS estimated that 684,505 acres of NFS lands were available for public cross-country OSV travel under the then-existing management conditions. DEIS 29-30.

44. Alternative 3 was favored by OSV opponents and focused on “maintain[ing] or preserv[ing] nonmotorized recreation opportunities” to the necessary exclusion of OSV recreation. It was developed during the project development or “scoping” process. It designated no OSV-use areas or trails in Near Natural or Proposed Wilderness Areas, which means that historic OSV use in these high-quality snow areas would be eliminated. DEIS at xi. This Alternative also increases the minimum snow-depth requirement to 24 inches in both the Stanislaus Meadow area and the Highland Lakes area.

45. Alternative 4 was the least restrictive alternative and was developed during scoping to provide quality OSV recreation opportunities based in part on historical use. It was the only alternative to designate additional acres for public, cross-country OSV use.

46. Alternative 5 was the Forest Service’s preferred alternative. It designates less acreage for cross-country OSV use than any of the other alternatives because it restricted OSV use in areas or on trails that the Forest Service believed had access issues and were unlikely to meet the minimum snow-depth requirements often enough to warrant their designation. Like Alternative 3, Alternative 5 includes a 24-inch minimum snow depth in the Stanislaus Meadow and the Highland Lakes areas. Additionally, Alternative 5 imposes new seasonal restrictions to the 411 acres near the Sonora Pass, necessarily closing this area to OSV use on April 15 (regardless of snow coverage) unless the Forest Supervisor issues a Forest Order for an earlier or later closure date (but no later than the last Sunday in April).

### C. FEIS and Draft ROD

47. After receiving public comments on the DEIS, the Forest Service issued the FEIS and draft Record of Decision (“Draft ROD”) in March 2019. The changes made to the total acreage available for cross-country OSV use in the FEIS from the DEIS are shown below.

OSV Access	Alternative 1	Alternative 2	Alternative 3	Alternative 4	Alternative 5
DEIS - Total acreage available for cross-country OSV use	140,895	684,585	116,868	191,099	97,763
FEIS - Total acreage available for cross-country OSV use	140,895	351,108	116,868	191,099	129,780

Source: DEIS xii (Table S-2), and 29; FEIS xii (Table S-2).

48. The FEIS revised Alternative 2, the no-action alternative, by decreasing the acreage available for OSV use under existing conditions from 684,585 to 351,108 acres. FEIS xi. As explained in the DEIS, the 684,585-acre estimate for existing OSV use included more than 250,000 acres that occur below 5,000 feet in elevation and, in the Forest Service’s estimation, may not consistently receive snow in quantities adequate to support OSV use. DEIS 30. In the FEIS, the Forest Service went a step further and summarily excluded all of area below 5,000 feet in elevation—over 300,000 acres-- which the FEIS incorrectly claimed “never receive even a few inches of snow and have not and would not ever possibly be ‘available’ for

1 OSV use due to lack of snow.” FEIS 27-28. The FEIS did not explain the 50,000-acre difference  
2 in the calculation of acreage below 5,000 feet in elevation between the DEIS and the FEIS. In  
3 total, the changes to Alternative 2, including the exclusion of all acreage below 5,000 feet in  
4 elevation, reduced the reported OSV-use areas “available for OSV use” by 333,397 acres  
5 between the DEIS and the FEIS. FEIS at 29.

6 49. All of the alternatives in the FEIS begin with the assumption that no land below  
7 5,000-foot elevation is available for OSV use, yet the FEIS cites to no underlying analysis or  
8 study supporting this assumption. The FEIS does not consider that in many years—2017 and  
9 2019, for example—areas below 5,000 feet easily satisfied the minimum snow-depth  
10 requirements for significant periods of time. Substituting elevation as a surrogate for actual  
11 snow depth is not only demonstrably unreliable, it fails to satisfy the purpose and need for the  
12 project to accurately define where adequate snow cover occurs.

13 50. All of the alternatives in the FEIS include the 12-inch minimum snow depth  
14 requirement for OSV use on trails in addition to cross-country OSV use. The FEIS fails to  
15 recognize that the application of the 12-inch minimum snow depth requirement to trails is a new  
16 management restriction, incorrectly stating that “there would be no change in the availability of  
17 motorized OSV recreation opportunities as a result of the minimum snow depth requirement.”  
18 FEIS at 121.

19 51. Additionally, Alternatives 3 and 5 impose a 24-inch minimum snow depth  
20 ostensibly to protect the Yosemite toad and Sierra Nevada yellowlegged frog. FEIS at xii.  
21 However, when analyzing the effects of OSV use on aquatic resources, FEIS stated that “no  
22 measurable effects on aquatic resources, riparian systems, or meadows have been observed”  
23 through monitoring on the Stanislaus National Forest. FEIS at 170. The FEIS also  
24 acknowledged that “monitoring within the American River Ranger District of neighboring  
25 Tahoe National Forest documented similar findings (see table 33), which is particularly  
26 noteworthy given the fact that the Tahoe National Forest has no minimum snow depth  
27 requirements for OSV use.” *Id.*

28

1           52.     The FEIS also revised Alternative 5 based on feedback received on the DEIS.  
2     Some of the modifications to Alternative 5 in FEIS include the following:

- 3           a)     Designating a larger quantity of high-quality, cross-country OSV-use  
4           areas (including additional acres in Near Natural areas);
- 5           b)     Restricting OSV use in specific areas to preserve more contiguous,  
6           accessible, lands for quiet, non-motorized winter recreation (e.g., the west and  
7           east shores of Lake Alpine, the corridor from Lake Alpine Sno-Park, the 2,882  
8           acres adjacent to the Bear Valley cross-country ski special use permit area, and  
9           the area south of Lealand Meadow to Herring Creek Road);
- 10          c)     Designating more miles of OSV-use trails where use is known to  
11          concentrate along that route corridor;
- 12          d)     Refining OSV-use area boundaries to better utilize topography and other  
13          natural features to enhance compliance and enforcement; and
- 14          e)     Adjusting OSV-use designations to comply with land ownership and  
15          legal access (e.g., private property, jurisdiction, easements, rights-of-way).

16          53.     The Draft ROD selected Alternative 5, as presented in the FEIS, which includes  
17     the designation of 129,780 acres for cross-country OSV use, seasonal closure dates for 411  
18     acres near the Sonora Pass, a 24-inch minimum snow depth in the Stanislaus Meadow and the  
19     Highland Lakes areas, and a 12-inch minimum snow depth for all other areas and trails.

20          54.     The Draft ROD imposes a 63% decrease in OSV-permissible acreage from the  
21     status quo of Alternative 2 (a 351,100-acre reduction). Alternative 5 effectively prohibits  
22     recreationists from using OSVs on approximately 221,320 more acres than have been  
23     historically permitted. In this regard, Alternative 5 is only slightly less restrictive than  
24     Alternative 3, the most OSV-use-restrictive alternative. Under Alternative 3's restrictions, the  
25     area available for OSV use would be reduced to 116,868 acres—a 67% decrease from the  
26     acreage historically available for OSV use.

27          55.     Plaintiffs each timely submitted objections to the Draft ROD.  
28

**D. The Final ROD**

56. Forest Supervisor Kuiken signed the final Record of Decision (“Final ROD”) on July 13, 2021. As in the Draft ROD, the Final ROD adopted many aspects of Alternative 5, including the Minimum Snow Depth Requirements, Season of Use Designations, Temporary Winter Stream Crossings, OSV-use trail designations (both non-groomed and those available for grooming), and the OSV-use designations within the Mi-Wok, North Highway 4, and Spicer OSV-use areas. The Final ROD also includes OSV-use designations in the Alpine, Alpine East, Eagle, Highway 108, and Highway 108 East OSV-use areas which differ from Alternative 5. The changes made to the total acreage available for cross-country OSV use between the Draft ROD and the Final ROD are summarized below.

	<b>Total acreage available for cross-country OSV use</b>	<b>Percentage of Forest open to cross-country OSV use</b>
Draft ROD Selected Alternative	129,780	14.5%
Final ROD Selected Alternative	119,104	13.2%

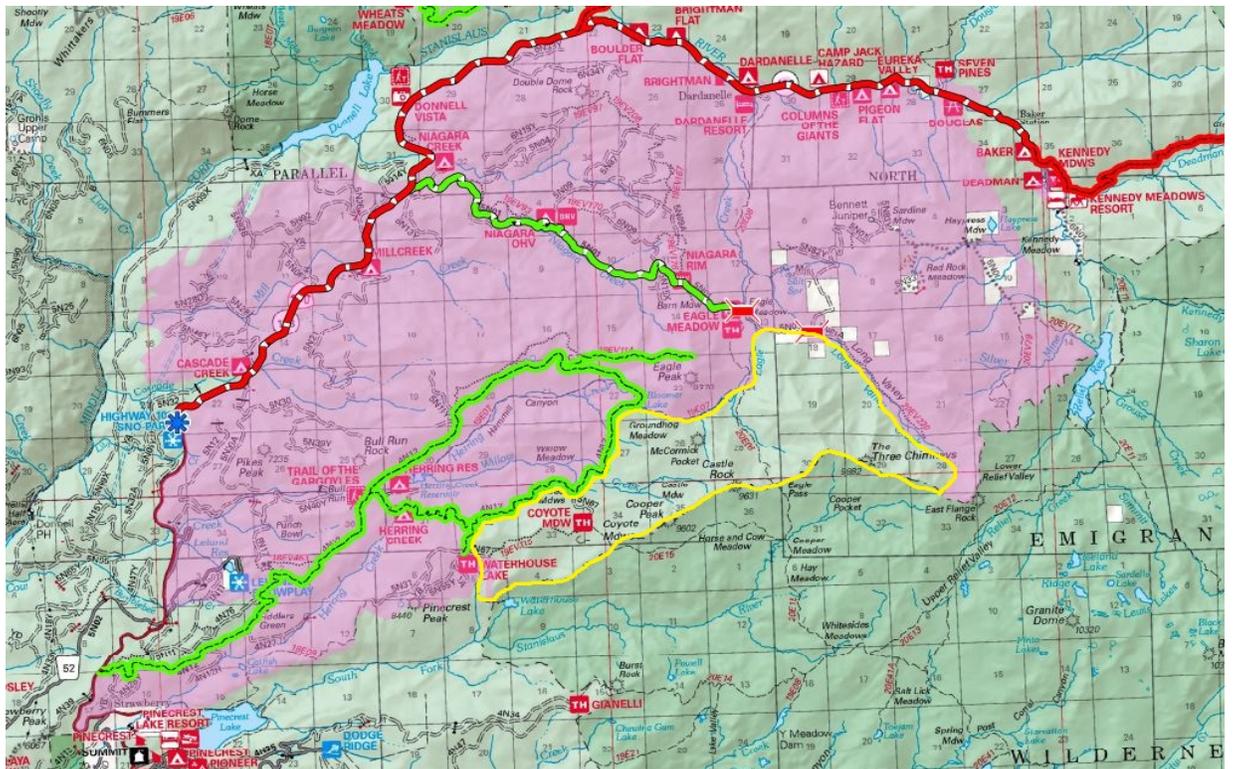
Source: Draft ROD at 1; Final ROD at 2.

57. The Final ROD deviates significantly from the Draft ROD by omitting quality, high-elevation areas including Castle Rock, Three Chimneys and Cooper Peak off of Highway 108 (Map 1) and the area between Highland Lakes Road and Pacific Valley (Map 2). The pink areas of the maps below show where OSV use is permitted under the Final ROD and the yellow-outlined areas show the quality, high-elevation areas in which the Final ROD excludes OSV use. The following two maps illustrate a comparison of FEIS Map 5 and the Draft ROD Map with the Final ROD map.

Map 1



Map 2



1           58.     Although the yellow-outlined exclusionary areas shown in Maps 1 and 2  
2 permitted OSV use in Alternative 5, the Final ROD does not explain why the Forest Service  
3 ultimately *excluded* OSV use from these areas.

4           59.     Despite stating that the FEIS’s effects analysis showed that “the mere presence  
5 of OSV use within Near Natural management areas did not assuredly cause a substantially  
6 adverse impact or lessening of protections for any one species,” the Final ROD nonetheless  
7 chose to reduce the area available for OSV use in the Pacific Valley and Eagle/Night Near  
8 Natural areas “to mollify the persistent and growing wildlife concerns.” Final ROD at 7.

9           60.     The Final ROD imposes seasonal closure dates for 411 acres near Sonora Pass to  
10 minimize the potential for OSV use to cause adverse impacts to potential Sierra Nevada Red  
11 Fox breeding. Yet the FEIS concedes that there is *no evidence* regarding potential impacts of  
12 OSV use on Sierra Nevada Red Fox. FEIS at 44. Rather, evidence shows that the red fox  
13 population in this area is increasing even though OSVs have historically accessed this area past  
14 this seasonal closure date when there was adequate snow depth. Final ROD at 8.

15           61.     The Final ROD designates 119,104 acres for cross-country OSV use—at least a  
16 66% decrease from the acreage previously available for OSV use as shown under Alternative 2  
17 in the FEIS. In this regard, the Final ROD designates a very similar amount of acreage for OSV  
18 use as Alternative 3, which represented the most OSV-restrictive of the five alternatives.

19           62.     In sum, the Final ROD strongly favors non-motorized recreation over OSV  
20 recreation. It effectively creates new non-motorized areas in the Stanislaus National Forest  
21 without a sound basis or explanation. *See* ROD at 11 (“Although this Decision does not  
22 specifically designate non-motorized winter recreation areas on the Forest, *OSV use was not*  
23 *designated in specific areas to maintain desired, accessible, quiet areas for nonmotorized*  
24 *winter recreation opportunities and solitude.*”) (Emphasis added). The Final ROD thus fails to  
25 establish a manageable system of designated NFS trails and areas on NFS lands for OSV use,  
26 and therefore does not meet the purpose and need of the Project.

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**FIRST CLAIM FOR RELIEF**

**(Violation of National Environmental Policy Act—Failure to Adequately Consider Environmental Impacts)**

63. Plaintiffs reallege the paragraphs above as though set forth fully herein.

64. NEPA requires that federal agencies take a “hard look” at all direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts of their proposed actions, using high-quality information, accurate scientific analyses, and scientific integrity. Defendants violated these requirements by relying on the DEIS and FEIS that failed to take a “hard look” at the impacts of OSV-use designation, including by

- a) Failing to consider a true “no-action” alternative that accurately reflects baseline conditions;
- b) Failing to provide sufficient data or analysis to explain the adoption of a 12-inch minimum snow-depth requirement;
- c) Failing to cite high quality scientific evidence in support of the Final ROD’s directive to “minimize the proportion NFS lands designated for motorized use located within known occupied Sierra Nevada red fox territories or within identified suitable habitat”;
- d) Failing to sufficiently analyze and support site-specific conclusions, including the Forest Service’s assumption that snow accumulation is categorically inadequate for OSV use below 5,000 feet in elevation and in failing to allow OSV use in certain Near Natural areas and recommended wilderness areas;
- e) Failing to adequately address the reason for excluding areas within the southern reaches of the Eagle Meadows area from OSV use; and
- f) In other ways to be enumerated in the briefing in this matter.

65. For the foregoing reasons, the Court should hold that the Decision is arbitrary, capricious, an abuse of discretion, and not in accordance with NEPA and the APA and therefore must be reversed, set aside, and vacated under the APA, 5 U.S.C. §706(2)(A), (D).



**THIRD CLAIM FOR RELIEF**

**(Violation of the National Forest Management Act—Inconsistency with the Forest Plan)**

73. Plaintiffs realleges the paragraphs above as though set forth fully herein.

74. The NFMA is one part of the statutory framework for management of the National Forest System. 16 U.S.C. §§1600 *et seq.* The NFMA requires the Forest Service to develop a land and resource management plan for each National Forest, including the Stanislaus National Forest. 16 U.S.C. §1604. Pursuant to the NFMA, the Decision must be consistent with the Stanislaus Forest Plan. 16 U.S.C. §1604(i).

75. The Stanislaus Forest Plan’s goal for recreation includes providing “a wide range of recreation opportunities directed at various experience levels to meet current and projected demand, including campgrounds, hiking trails, picnic areas, OHV trails, etc.” and, more specifically, to “provide a variety of off-highway vehicle (OHV) recreational opportunities in a manner consistent with protection of wildlife and other resources, and with non-motorized recreation.” Stanislaus Forest Plan Direction at 4.

76. Contrary to the Stanislaus Forest Plan, the Decision eliminates OSV use in unique, high-elevation, high-volume snow areas. By removing almost all high elevation alpine areas from OSV use, the Decision fails to designate a variety of OSV recreational opportunities consist with the Forest Plan’s goal for recreation. In this and other ways to be established in the briefing in this case, the Decision violates the NFMA and its implementing regulations.

77. The Decision’s inconsistency with the Stanislaus Forest Plan violates NEPA and is arbitrary, capricious, an abuse of discretion, in excess of statutory authority and limitations, and otherwise not in accordance with the law. 5 U.S.C. §706(2).

**FOURTH CLAIM FOR RELIEF**

**(Violation of the National Forest Management Act and National Environmental Policy Act—Inadequate Scientific Information in the Evaluation of Effects)**

78. Plaintiffs reallege the paragraphs above as though set forth fully herein.

79. The Stanislaus Forest Plan’s goal for recreation includes providing “a variety of off-highway vehicle (OHV) recreational opportunities in a manner *consistent with protection of*

1 *wildlife and other resources*, and with non-motorized recreation.” Stanislaus Forest Plan  
2 Direction at 4 (emphasis added).

3 80. In addition to failing to provide a variety of OSV recreational opportunities, the  
4 Decision is inconsistent with the Forest Plan because it eliminates historic OSV areas based on  
5 the assumptions that OSV use will endanger or harm wintering wildlife, including the Sierra  
6 Nevada red fox, without the best available scientific information, as the NFMA regulations  
7 require, and without accurate scientific analysis or high quality information, as NEPA and its  
8 regulations require. In this and other ways to be established in the briefing in this case, the  
9 Decision violates NEPA, NFMA and their implementing regulations.

10 81. The Decision’s failure to use the best available science to support its  
11 determinations regarding the protection of wildlife is arbitrary, capricious or not in accordance  
12 with NFMA, in violation of 5 U.S.C. §706(2)(A).

13 82. Similarly, the Decision’s failure to use accurate scientific analysis or high-quality  
14 information to support its determinations regarding the protection of wildlife is arbitrary,  
15 capricious or not in accordance with NEPA, in violation of 5 U.S.C. §706(2)(A).

16 **FIFTH CLAIM FOR RELIEF**

17 **(Violation of the Travel Management Rule—Arbitrary Application**  
18 **of the Minimization Criteria)**

19 83. Plaintiffs reallege the paragraphs above as though set forth fully herein.

20 84. The Travel Management Rule requires the Forest Service to consider and apply  
21 specific criteria with the objective of minimizing damage to forest resources, harassment of  
22 wildlife, disruption of wildlife habitat, and conflicts between motor vehicle use and existing or  
23 proposed recreational uses of the Forest. 36 C.F.R. §212.55(b). The Forest Service must not  
24 only consider these specific criteria but affirmatively demonstrate how it evaluated and applied  
25 the minimization criteria in any decision designating trails and areas for motor vehicle use with  
26 the objective of minimizing impacts and conflicts.

27 85. The Final ROD’s exclusion of high-elevation areas included but not limited to  
28 the areas around Castle Rock, Three Chimneys, and Cooper Peak, and between Highland Lakes

1 Road and Pacific Valley, is not supported by the Travel Management Rule's required analysis  
2 of general and specific criteria. These areas were included in the OSV-use designations under  
3 Alternative 5 and the OSV-use designation adopted in the Draft ROD.

4 86. The Forest Service's failure to adequately consider the Travel Management  
5 Rule's specific criteria as to the exclusion of certain high-elevation areas renders the Forest  
6 Service's Decision arbitrary, capricious, an abuse of discretion, or otherwise not in accordance  
7 with law, entitling Plaintiffs to the relief requested below.

8 87. Additionally, the Forest Service's decision to restrict OSV use in order to  
9 minimize impacts to the Sierra Nevada red fox was arbitrary, capricious, an abuse of discretion,  
10 or otherwise not in accordance with law, entitling Plaintiffs to the relief requested below.

## 11 **VII. PRAYER FOR RELIEF**

12 WHEREFORE, Plaintiffs respectfully requests the following relief:

- 13 A. Enter judgment in favor of Plaintiffs on all claims for relief raised in the  
14 Complaint;
- 15 B. Declare unlawful and set aside the Decision;
- 16 C. Remand the Decision for further analysis and action in accordance with  
17 applicable law;
- 18 D. Enjoin the Defendants from relying on, implanting, or enforcing the Decision,  
19 including without limitation any of the OSV use designations or restrictions in  
20 the Decision pending the Defendants' completion and circulation of an  
21 environmental document and new Decision complying in full with the  
22 requirements of NEPA, NFMA, and the APA;
- 23 E. Award Plaintiffs its costs, including reasonable attorney's fees, pursuant to the  
24 Equal Access to Justice Act, 28 U.S.C. §241 *et seq.*, Federal Rule of Civil  
25 Procedure 54, and any other applicable rule or statute; and  
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F. Such further relief as is just and that this Court may require.

DATED this 13th day of October 2021.

HOLLAND & HART LLP

By:           /s/ Frank Z. LaForge            
Frank LaForge  
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