



# RECREATION REPORT: RIM FIRE RECOVERY PROJECT



**United States  
Department  
of Agriculture**

**Forest  
Service**

Pacific  
Southwest  
Region

Stanislaus  
National  
Forest



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## Introduction

The Rim Fire started on August 17, 2013 in a remote area of the Stanislaus National Forest near the confluence of the Clavey and Tuolumne Rivers about 20 miles east of Sonora, California. Over the next several weeks it burned about 256,428 acres, including 154,430 acres of National Forest System (NFS) lands, becoming the third largest wildfire in California history. The burned area contains hazardous, dead, dying, and fire damaged trees as well as areas with increased flood, debris flow, and rock fall potential. The Rim Fire Recovery (Rim Recovery) project boundary includes all NFS lands within the fire plus a few locations where road and roadside improvements extend slightly outside the perimeter. The intent of this report is to evaluate and disclose the potential effects of the Rim Recovery project to recreation and visual resources in the project area.

### **Analysis Framework: Statute, Regulation, Forest Plan and Other Direction**

The Forest Plan Compliance (project record) document identifies the Forest Plan S&Gs that specifically apply to this project and related information about compliance with the Forest Plan. In addition, the Forest Plan includes a specific goal applicable to recreation and the Rim Recovery project:

- Forest Goal for Recreation: Provide a wide range of recreation opportunities directed at various experience levels to meet current and projected demand, including campgrounds, hiking trails, picnic areas, off-highway vehicle (OHV) trails, etc. (USDA 2010a, p. 6).
- Forest Management Direction for Visual Resources: Meet adopted Visual Quality Objectives (VQOs) on all projects. Maintain high visual quality in areas of concentrated public use and in areas seen from major travel routes. Allow management activities in certain areas to dominate the surrounding characteristic landscape, but they should borrow from natural forms and appear as natural occurrences when viewed from background distances. Consider private land concerns during the evaluation of proposed management activities adjacent to privately developed subdivisions and recreation areas. Particular attention will be given to visual quality in the foreground view areas of these private developments as well as any other values relating to their attendant use and enjoyment of the National Forest. (USDA 2010a)

### **Effects Analysis Methodology**

The geographic extent of this analysis is the Rim Recovery project area and includes the Cherry Valley recreation area. This unit of spatial analysis is used for determining direct, indirect and cumulative effects. A short-term timeframe of three years allows the activities associated with this project to be mostly completed. A long-term temporal bound of 10 years allows completed activities associated with this project to be established.

#### ***Assumptions Specific to Recreation***

- The National Visitor Use Monitoring (NVUM data) report accurately expresses recreation use.
- Action alternatives will not cause long-term changes to recreation opportunities.
- Dust associated with the removal of logs from the Forest will be abated.

- Though the most updated dispersed camping and route data were used for this analysis, conditions change on the ground.
- Noise and ground disturbances caused by any of the action alternatives will be temporary in nature.
- As environmental documents are completed, actions implemented, and safety from hazard tree removal is in place the temporary Forest Order (STF 2014-01) to prohibit public use may be selectively lifted.
- The Rim Fire Recovery project will provide safety and access to recreation opportunity areas.
- Due to stringent operating specifications within timber sale contracts; there is an expectation that dust associated with the removal of logs from the Forest will be reduced

#### ***Data Sources***

- Stanislaus GIS Library
- National Visitor Use Monitoring (NVUM) data (USDA 2014a)
- Recreation Facility Analysis (USDA 2007a)
- Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS), Management Area and project area maps from GIS library
- Visual Quality Objectives from the Forest Plan (USDA 2010a)

#### ***Recreation Indicators***

- Developed Recreation Opportunities – describe the changes in the recreation setting
- Dispersed Recreation Opportunities – describe the changes in the recreation setting

#### ***Recreation Methodology by Action***

The recreation indicators identified and compared the effects of the alternatives on developed recreation, dispersed recreation and diversity of vegetation. Discussed the changes in recreation and visual resource opportunities as a result of each alternative. In each of the alternatives the recreation analysis objective evaluates how well each alternative narrows the gap between the existing setting and the desired sustainable setting; and the effect on “sense of place”.

### **Affected Environment**

#### ***Existing Conditions***

##### ***Rim Fire Closure***

Numerous recreation and visual resources in the Rim Fire area have been damaged. The setting and diversity has changed as a result. Maintenance and rehabilitation is ongoing. Falling trees, rock falls, and debris flows will create an increased workload over the long-term to maintain these resources to Forest Service standards. Regulatory, information, directional, and interpretive signs have been damaged during the fire. Because roads and other developed facilities within the project area are faced with hazard trees that pose a threat to human health and safety, there is a need to remove those hazards to provide a safe environment for administration and public use of those facilities.

On April 14, 2014, the Forest Supervisor issued the current temporary Forest Order (STF 2014-01), opening portions of the previous closure area and prohibiting public use within the remaining portions of the burn area until November 18, 2014. A total of 7 campgrounds, 5 semi-developed dispersed camping or concentrated use areas, 6 day use areas, 11 non-motorized trails, 5 OHV riding areas, 4 developed recreation sites

under special use permits, and 475 inventoried dispersed campsites are located within the closure. Additionally, numerous outfitters and guides have special use permits (rafting, hiking, bicycling, fishing, etc.). These locations are the key locations where people view the landscape setting.

**Recreation Visitor Use**

Before the Rim Fire, Forest recreation use within the project area included OHV use, passenger car driving, rafting, boating, hunting, swimming, mining, wood cutting, camping (dispersed and developed), hiking, cycling (mountain and road), fishing, backpacking, horseback riding, and winter sports. These opportunities will once again be available after the hazard trees are abated and the area is re-opened for public access. Obviously, the fire has modified the recreation setting, that provides the opportunity for recreation activities to create experiences that people remember, and changed the existing forest condition. Some of the traditional activities that have been attractive to the forest visitor will be less attractive because of the fire. Dispersed camping may be less attractive without the canopy of trees, as an example, while water features will remain as an attraction. New visual attractions will become apparent as people discover the changes within the seen environment.

The Stanislaus National Forest ranks in the top five National Forests in California for overall annual recreation use (USDA 2014a). The Forest receives more visitation than any other National Forest on the Sierra Nevada western slope. The Recreation Facility Analysis (RFA) projected an increase in overall recreation use of 43 percent over the next 20 years (USDA 2007a). This is dramatically higher than the average forest nationally, but typical of adjacent Forests in the central Sierra. The expected increase in visitor use will create challenges as demand for all types of activities approach capacity.

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Percent of National Forest Visits Indicating Use of Special Facilities or Areas

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| Special Facility or Area      | % of National Forest Visits |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Scenic Byway                  | 9.5                         |
| Developed Swimming Site       | 25.4                        |
| Visitor Center or Museum      | 0.5                         |
| Designated ORV Area           | 10.2                        |
| Forest Roads                  | 17.4                        |
| Interpretive Displays         | 2.2                         |
| Information Sites             | 7.4                         |
| Developed Fishing Site        | 10.4                        |
| Motorized Single Track Trails | 5.1                         |
| Motorized Dual Track Trails   | 6.6                         |
| None of these Facilities      | 50.1                        |

Visitor use estimates for the entire Forest are based on the NVUM survey conducted in 2012 and updated in April of 2014 (USDA 2014a), prior to the Rim Fire. Recreation use on the Stanislaus National Forest for this period was estimated at 1,817,200 National Forest visits and 2,100,300 site visits. The survey assessed existing recreation demand on the forest by asking visitors what they did during their visit. This assessment resulted in two categories of visitor use: all activities in which they participated in and the main activity (the primary purpose for their visit to the Forest). The survey highlighted the fact that the two uses may or may not be related. For example, 59.2 percent of the forest visitors reported participating in the viewing of natural features, but only 12.3 percent reported this as their main activity. The top five recreation activities visitors participated

in were hiking/walking, relaxing, viewing natural features, viewing wildlife, and driving for pleasure. Each visitor also picked one of these activities as their main activity for their current recreation visit to the forest. Table 1 identifies the main activities as relaxing, hiking and walking, viewing natural features, fishing, and downhill skiing. (USDA 2014a).

Table 1 National Visitor Use Monitoring Activity Participation

| Activity                   | Percent Participation <sup>1</sup> | Percent Main Activity <sup>2</sup> | Average Hours Doing Main Activity |
|----------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Hiking and Walking         | 63.0                               | 14.4                               | 3.5                               |
| Relaxing                   | 62.0                               | 16.0                               | 14.2                              |
| Viewing Natural Features   | 59.2                               | 12.3                               | 3.5                               |
| Viewing Wildlife           | 45.1                               | 0.2                                | 3.2                               |
| Driving for Pleasure       | 28.6                               | 2.5                                | 2.4                               |
| Picnicking                 | 27.4                               | 3.4                                | 5.4                               |
| Fishing                    | 20.5                               | 9.5                                | 5.1                               |
| Other Non-motorized        | 18.2                               | 5.5                                | 3.1                               |
| Developed Camping          | 12.6                               | 3.5                                | 38.3                              |
| Nature Study               | 8.7                                | 0.3                                | 1.1                               |
| Downhill Skiing            | 8.6                                | 8.1                                | 5.2                               |
| Some Other Activity        | 8.3                                | 4.8                                | 4.5                               |
| Non-motorized Water        | 7.8                                | 4.6                                | 6.9                               |
| Hunting                    | 7.3                                | 5.3                                | 12.5                              |
| Gathering Forest Products  | 6.9                                | 1.0                                | 4.9                               |
| Resort Use                 | 6.2                                | 0.3                                | 35.3                              |
| Primitive Camping          | 6.0                                | 0.7                                | 38.6                              |
| Visiting Historic Sites    | 5.7                                | 0.2                                | 1.3                               |
| OHV Use                    | 5.4                                | 1.7                                | 7.9                               |
| Motorized Trail Activity   | 5.4                                | 2.1                                | 6.3                               |
| Bicycling                  | 5.4                                | 1.3                                | 3.3                               |
| Motorized Water Activities | 4.8                                | 0.5                                | 7.3                               |
| Nature Center Activities   | 3.5                                | 0.0                                | 0.0                               |
| Backpacking                | 3.0                                | 1.1                                | 30.5                              |
| Horseback Riding           | 1.3                                | 0.3                                | 6.3                               |
| Cross-country Skiing       | 1.0                                | 0.5                                | 3.7                               |
| Other Motorized Activity   | 0.5                                | 0.0                                | 0.0                               |
| Snowmobiling               | 0.3                                | 0.2                                | 6.4                               |
| No Activity Reported       | 0.2                                | 0.2                                |                                   |

<sup>1</sup>Survey respondents could select multiple activities so this column may total more than 100 percent.

<sup>2</sup>Survey respondents were asked to select just one of their activities as their main reason for the forest visit. Some respondents selected more than one, so this column may total more than 100 percent.

Most visitors to the Forest participate in a variety of activities. Many activities, such as viewing natural features, can be either motorized or non-motorized. The overwhelming majority of forest visitors arrive in a motorized vehicle; the exception being immediately adjacent residents who hike or bicycle. This means that motorized and non-motorized activities are often combined as part of creating the total recreation experience.

Based on the 2012 NVUM data, an estimated 76,500 individual recreation site visits have been “lost” because of the fire and closure orders. An individual recreation site is defined as a single user visiting a single site. Because several users visit more than one individual recreation site on their visit, total individual visits to the National Forest “lost” due to the fire and closure orders is estimated to be 53,000. These figures are only valid

under the assumption that none of the visits had a temporal or spatial substitute on the forest. That is, none of the visits either occurred at some other place on the forest or at some other time on the forest. If any such spatial or temporal substitution occurred, then these figures overstate the losses on the forest but not within the Rim Fire area.

### ***Sense of Place***

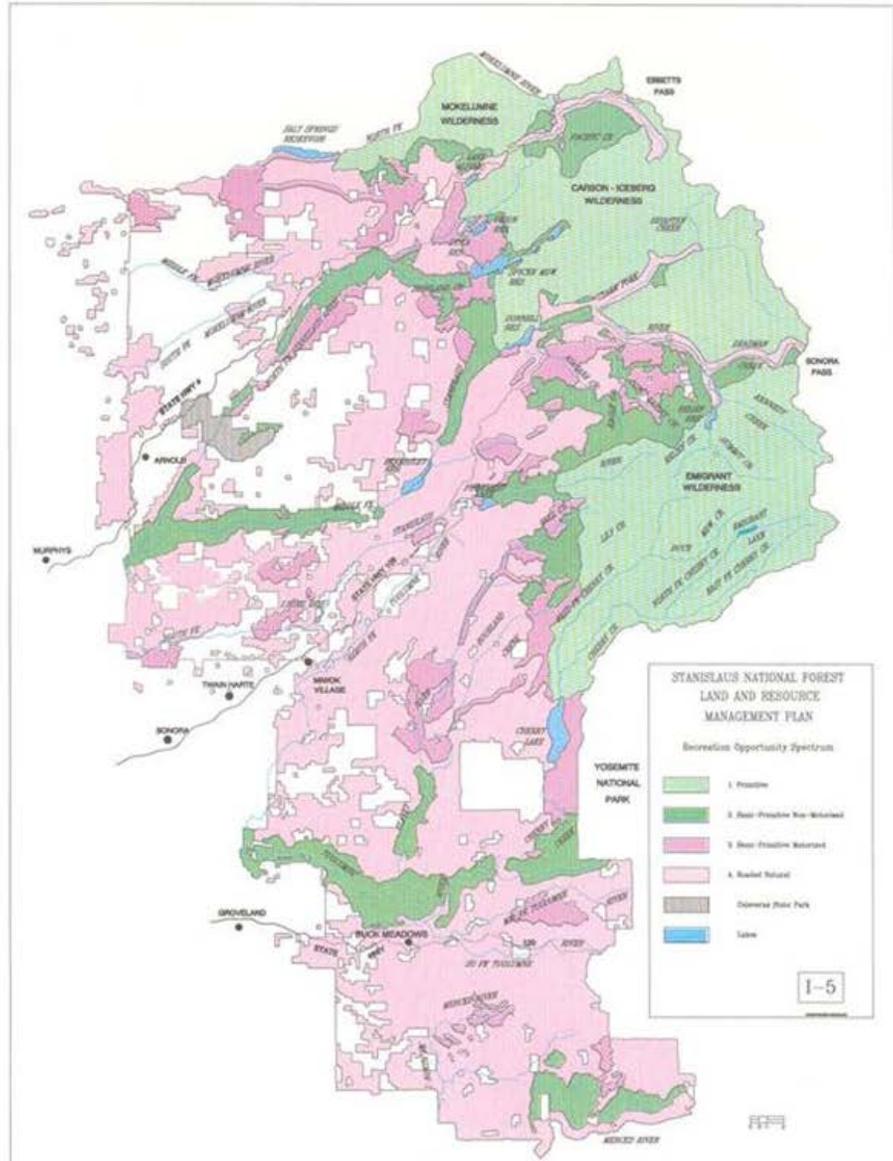
Visitors sometimes feel a strong sense of place and attachment to a site they frequently use. Attachments to a particular area vary substantially. This is dependant on several factors that live in the memory of recreationists. Place attachment is strongest when there are distinctive and memorable qualities to the setting, the activity that occurs there, and the duration or repetition of the activity. While a one-time visit to a common firewood gathering spot may be forgotten, the next cutting trip may be to a different area, with no regret. The annual trek to a 4<sup>th</sup> generation hunting camp, however, is imbedded in family ritual, and embellished through storytelling and photographs. Attachment to place grows through familiarity with the understanding of the area's features. Whether a "cool swimming hole" for local teenagers or a "sacred site" for Native Americans, strong attachment occurs when the meaning of a place is shared with others. The place may even be given a name. "God's Bath" on the Clavey River is an example. These "special places" have a unique identity and cannot be easily substituted for another place with similar qualities. (USDA 2003)

Several tools describe the recreation and visual setting that establishes the sense of place within the project area. Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) identifies possible mixes or combinations of activities, settings, and probable experience opportunities that are arranged along a spectrum, or continuum (USDA 1986). ROS as a management tool is based upon these facts:

- Visitors engage in an ACTIVITY
- The forest provides the SETTING
- The end products/outcomes are the EXPERIENCES

The attributes of ROS are the physical (type of access, remoteness, size), the social (user density, encounters), and the managerial (type of facilities, visitor management and naturalness) characteristics of the place (ROS Users Guide, USDA 1986). For the Rim Fire Recovery area the naturalness of the place has been altered.

ROS is designed as a scale from Primitive (P), to Semi-primitive non-motorized (SPNM), to Semi-primitive Motorized (SPM), to Roaded Natural (RN), to Rural (R), to Urban (U). ROS is an outcomes based approach to managing the recreation setting. In the alternatives the recreation objective is to narrow the gap between the existing condition and the desired, sustainable recreation setting.



The Forest Plan integrates ROS into the management prescriptions and associated standards and guidelines. Table 2 displays the ROS classes that exist within the project area: Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized and Roded Natural<sup>1</sup>. The Rim Fire has altered all three of these components and it will be years before the area returns to the natural appearances that people remember from before the fire. Recreation Opportunity Spectrum Classes are identified in the Forest Plan and at T:\FS\Reference\GIS\r05\_stf\Data\STFLibrary\LandMgtPlans

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Table 2 Recreation Opportunity Spectrum Classes within the Rim Recovery project area

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<sup>1</sup> Not all ROS classes are present with the Rim Recovery project area (Table 3.08-2). The full range of ROS classes include: 1) Primitive; 2) Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized; 3) Semi-Primitive Motorized; 4) Roded Natural; 5) Rural; and, 6) Urban.

| ROS  | General Direction   | Standards and Guidelines  |
|--|---|---|
| Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized<br><br>NMFPA* | Manage the area so that on-site controls are minimized and restrictions are subtle. Provide a range of semi-primitive non-motorized recreation opportunities and experiences. | Meet the ROS objective of Semi-primitive Non-motorized. Interaction between visitors is low but there is evidence of other users. Motorized use is normally prohibited, except for: 4N80Y, 5N02R (NMFPA). Resource improvements will normally be limited to minimum, unobtrusive facilities.  |
| Roaded Natural                             | Manage the area so there is only moderate evidence of the sights and sounds of man. Provide a range of roaded natural recreation opportunities and experiences.               | Meet the ROS objective of Roaded Natural. Interaction between users is usually low to moderate with evidence of other users prevalent. Resource modification practices are evident. Conventional motorized use is provided for in construction standards And facilities designs. A full range of other resource activities is permitted to the extent that the general practice description is met. |

\*NMFPA=Non-motorized Forest Plan Amendment (USDA 2010a, p. 2)

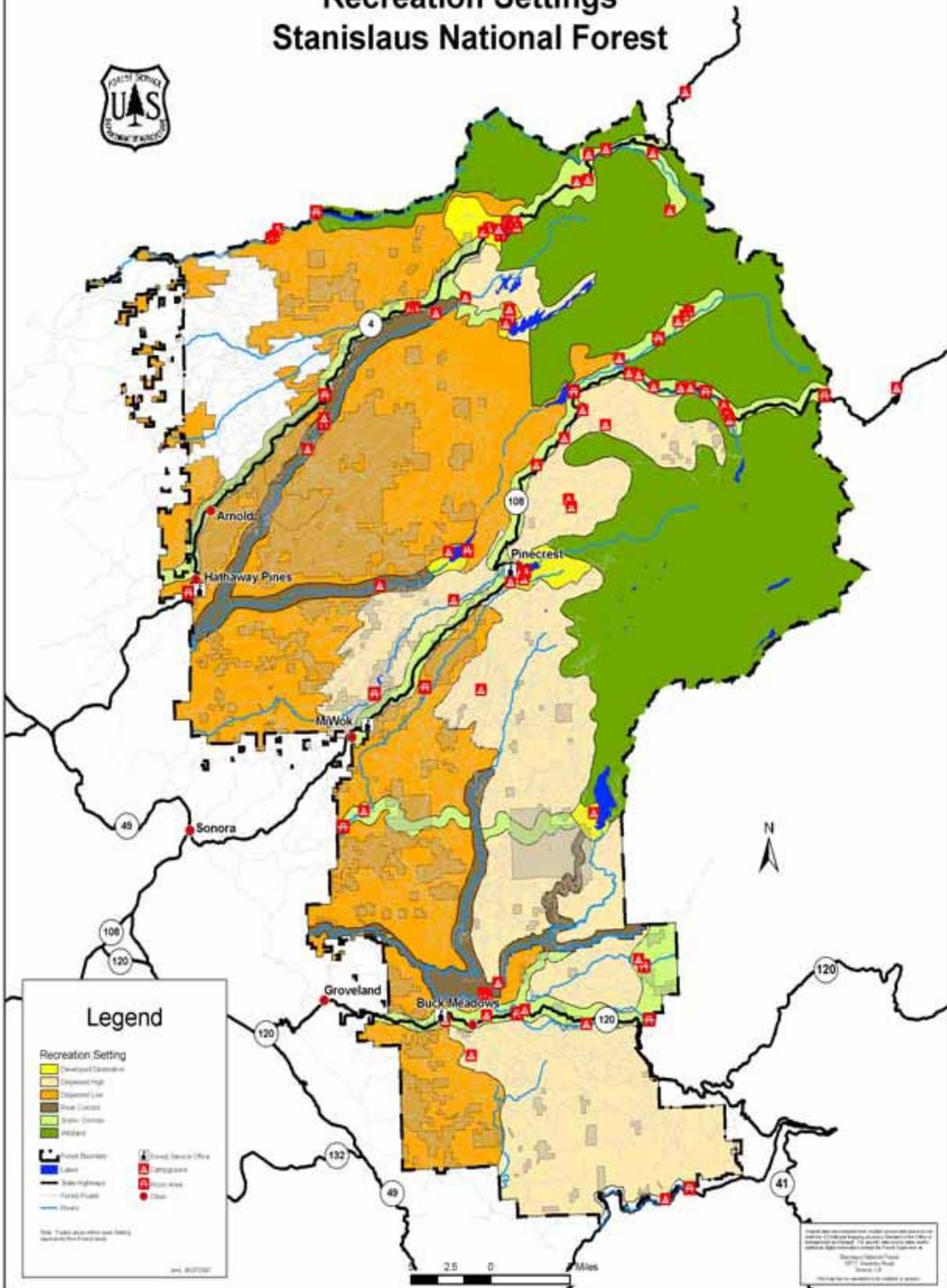
The Recreation Facility Analysis (USDA 2007a) further defines the sense of place for the Stanislaus National Forest as an overnight destination for families with strong connections to the water and forested environment.

The STF defines the emphasis of its niche in this way: “Nestled between Lake Tahoe and Yosemite, the Stanislaus National Forest awaits visitors with the restorative power of its diverse landscapes. Amid soaring crests, sparkling mountain lakes, towering forests, and canyons carved by cool rushing rivers, visitors discover connections with nature and the spirit of the Sierra Nevada”.

The RFA goes further to describe the settings and visitors attracted to the forest. “The diverse settings offer a wide range of opportunities for visitors year-round. Family oriented overnight activities are most popular and in highest demand, with a much higher-than-average participation by children.”

Visitors use the Stanislaus as an oasis to escape from summer’s heat, winter fog, and urban life. This forest is an overnight destination for visitors, whether they come from nearby or far away. Overall, downhill skiing is the #1 activity. When not just relaxing, visitors pursue a variety of activities; viewing scenery/wildlife, hiking, fishing, camping, picnicking, and OHV use.

# Recreation Settings Stanislaus National Forest

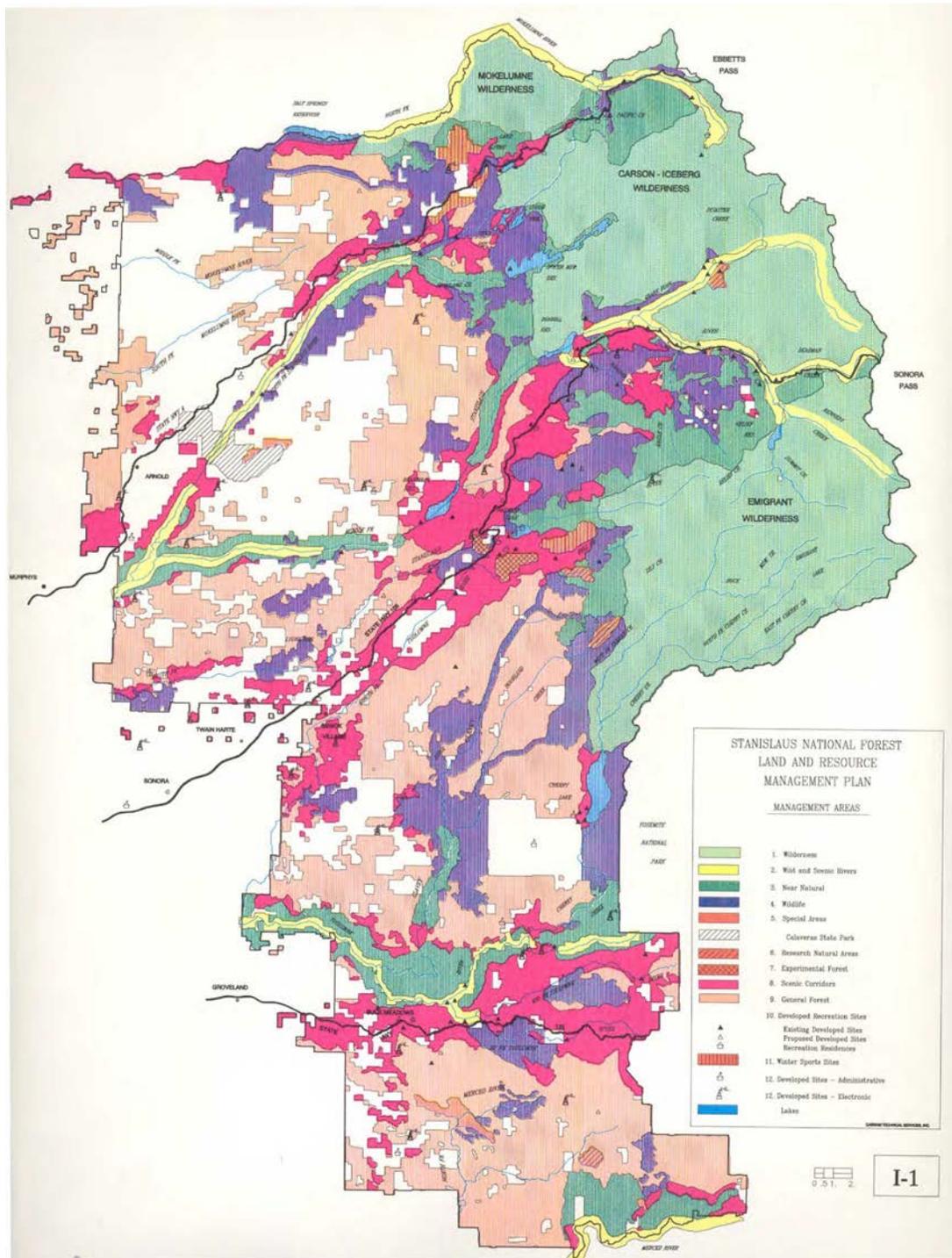


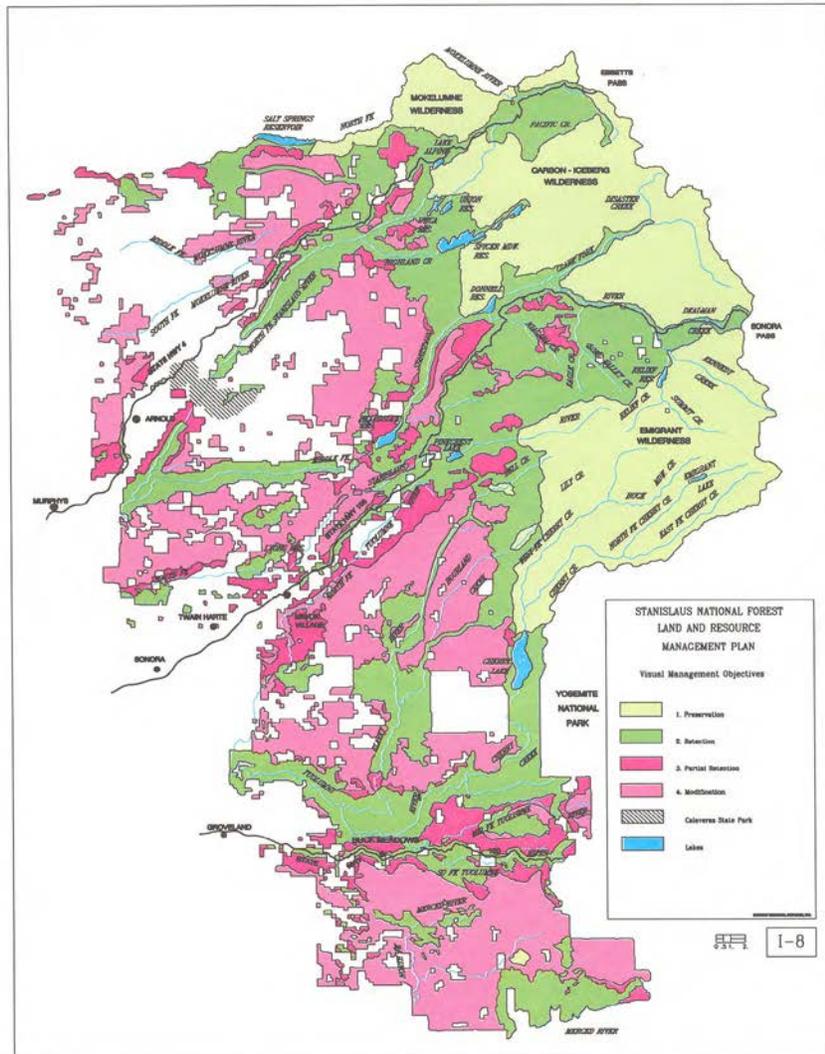
## Legend

- Recreation Setting**
- Developed Recreation
  - Developed High
  - Developed Low
  - Open Country
  - Water Country
  - Wetland
- Forest Boundary**
- Lakes**
- State Highways**
- Forest Roads**
- Forest Service Office**
- Campground**
- Fire Area**
- Water**
- Note: Product is for informational purposes only. Accuracy is not guaranteed.
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Stanislaus National Forest  
1972  
United States Forest Service  
Stanislaus, CA

Management Areas, established as part of the Land and Resource Management Plan (USDA 2010), help define management emphasis within the recreation setting. Visual Quality Objectives (VQOs) define the recreation setting further by describing the seen environment and providing guidelines for maintaining the scenic integrity of the places people visit. The VQOs within the project area are Retention, where alterations are not noticed, and Partial Retention, where changes in the setting are noticed but generally maintain the integrity of the viewed landscape (USDA 1995).





### **Recreation Access**

Recreation is increasing in importance as a use of the Stanislaus National Forest. Although much of the road system was built primarily for timber management access, recreation is now the dominant use on many roads. Tourism is the largest sector of the local economy and National Forest recreation is a significant component.

Traditionally, high volumes of traffic occur during peak seasons on Forest Service Maintenance Level 3, 4, and 5 roads that are subject to the Federal Highway Safety Act. These higher maintenance level roads provide access to most developed recreation and

some dispersed sites. Currently, most access to developed sites is closed. The Rim HT project is expected to remove the hazard trees, opening many of these roads to public use. Logging trucks and related timber removal equipment will be operating along main corridors seven days a week. Evergreen Road on the Groveland Ranger District, however, will have no harvest operations implemented during weekends from Memorial Day and to Labor Day to allow safe public access. Evergreen Road is a main artery that provides access to several popular recreation areas:

- Dimond O Campground (Forest Service);
- Middle Fork Day-Use (Forest Service);
- Carlon Day-Use and Trailhead (Forest Service), which provides trail access to Carlon Falls in Yosemite National Park;
- Peach Growers Recreation Residence Tract, which encompasses 20 Forest Service special use cabins, roads and water infrastructure;
- Evergreen Lodge (Privately owned historic Yosemite lodge); and,
- Camp Mather (City and County of San Francisco family camp).

Some access routes show resource damage due to rain on slopes with no ground cover or vegetation. Lumsden Road (1N10) with numerous debris slides since the Rim Fire accesses dispersed areas and developed sites including the Merals Pool put-in for whitewater boating.

Visual Quality Objectives (VQOs) are established primarily from viewpoints along major highways, county roads, and primary forest roads. Roads make the view possible but can also degrade the view, when viewed from a distance. VQOs are based on the premise that National Forest Visitors prefer to see naturally appearing scenery. Road cuts and fills seen in the distance may appear unnatural, failing to meet VQOs. Vegetative growth over time softens the impact of road scars.

#### ***Developed Recreation Opportunities***

Developed recreation sites provide infrastructure which typically include running water, structures, vault toilets, signage, barrier posts, interior roads, campfire rings, grills and picnic tables. Developed campgrounds within the affected area are Dimond O, Lost Claim, Lumsden Bridge, Lumsden, South Fork, Sweetwater, and Cherry Valley. Upper and Lower Carlon, Middle Fork, and Rainbow Pool Day Use Areas, Rim of the World Vista, Cherry Creek and Merals Pool Boat Launches are also found within the Rim Fire perimeter. Developed recreation sites under special use permit within the Rim Fire perimeter include Berkeley-Tuolumne Camp, Peach Growers Recreational Residence Tract, and San Jose Camp. A majority of the Berkeley-Tuolumne Camp was destroyed in the Rim Fire and is currently not available for use. San Jose Camp received some fire damage, and a vault toilet was burned at the South Fork Campground. Camp Tawonga is a privately owned camp that is accessed by Cherry Lake Road or Evergreen Road and Forest Route 1S02. Hazard trees within the Forest Service sites are addressed in the HT project that precedes the actions described in this analysis. Over 400 acres of treatment are proposed under the action alternatives reviewed under the action alternatives of this analysis.

#### ***Dispersed Recreation Opportunities***

Dispersed recreation is also an important use of the Stanislaus National Forest. Large numbers of people and vehicles use forest roads to access dispersed recreation, however the use and traffic is less concentrated.

Touring, or driving for pleasure by motorized vehicle, is a dominant recreation activity. Hunters, anglers, campers, picnickers, hikers, bikers, wood cutters, forest product gatherers, sightseers, bird watchers, nearby residents, rock climbers, spelunkers, kayakers, boaters, swimmers, target shooters and other recreationists also travel to their activity along forest roads. The journey to and from the activity is part of the recreation experience.

Camping often serves as a base for many other activities. Many participants enjoy camping in trailers, RVs, campers, and in tents near their vehicle. Outside of developed campgrounds, these “camps” are often established along roads or on short spurs off these roads.

Dispersed recreation opportunities include non-motorized system trails and motorized recreation opportunities. The project area provides a variety of dispersed recreation opportunities that include 475 inventoried dispersed campsites. Over 6,650 acres of treatment are proposed within ¼ mile of the inventoried dispersed camps in the action alternatives reviewed as part of this analysis. Developed-dispersed camping and concentrated use areas within the Rim Fire perimeter include Camp Clavey, Cherry Borrow, Cherry Valley, Joe Walt Run, and Spinning Wheel. Forest Service Maintenance Level 2 roads proposed for hazard tree removal in this project access many dispersed sites.

Non-motorized system trails include Andresen Mine, Carlon Falls, Hamby, Golden Stairs, Humbug/Duluke, Indian Creek, Kibbie Ridge/Huckleberry, North Mountain, Preston Falls, Tuolumne River Canyon, West Side Trail, and Lake Eleanor. Some trails access various points of interest along the Tuolumne Wild and Scenic River corridor and serve as important emergency access points for river users. Wilderness trailheads within the project area provide access to trails in Yosemite and Emigrant Wildernesses.

Motorized recreation opportunities typically provide a variety of settings and a diversity of OHV trails varying in length, degree of difficulty, and access to other recreation opportunities. Motorized Recreation Areas include Jawbone Pass, Pilot Ridge, Tuolumne Rim, Two-mile/Middle Clavey/Reynolds Creek, and West Side Rail Tour.

A Burned Area Emergency Response (BAER) team began assessing the Rim Fire area for post-fire emergencies on September 9, 2013. BAER is a rapid assessment of burned watersheds to identify imminent post-wildfire threats to human life and safety, property and critical natural or cultural resources on NFS lands and takes immediate actions to implement emergency stabilization measures before the first major storms. The Forest invested 4,600,000 dollars in BAER treatments including the following areas.

- **Roads:** out-sloped road surface, maintained and constructed drainage features (e.g., rolling dips, cleaned and replaced culverts), replaced guardrails and reflectors, installed and closed gates to close burned area to public use according to closure (STF 2014-01), felled hazard trees at intersections, cleared trees that fell across roads, replaced traffic control barriers, installed signs (e.g., warning, regulatory, and hazard signs), and continued storm patrolling.
- **Trails:** maintained and installed drainage dips, removed burned wooden retaining features and replaced with rock or rerouted trail, felled hazard trees at trailheads, cleared trees that fell across trails, replaced traffic control barriers on motorized trails, installed warning and hazard signs, closed public access to trails through winter, and continued storm patrolling.

- **Facilities:** sealed burned vault toilets, removed and replaced burned traffic barriers, installed warning and hazard signs, felled hazard trees, closed public access to trails through winter, and continued storm patrolling.

## **Environmental Consequences**

### ***Alternative 1 (Proposed Action)***

#### **DIRECT AND INDIRECT EFFECTS**

Alternative 1 would improve administrative, visitor, and traffic safety and provide overall net benefits for recreation and visual resources because areas of the forest that are currently closed could be opened for public use. Treatment of fire-killed trees would remove dead trees from the project area; thereby, recovering commercial value and reducing excessive fuel loads. Recreation resources may need to be temporarily closed during hazard tree removal efforts, biomass removal, burning, road maintenance and other support activities, which would displace users and may affect scenic quality on a temporary basis. Evidence of disturbed settings would be apparent immediately after treatment but would recover visually more quickly than the areas that are left untreated. A natural appearing landscape would result, over time.

A limited amount of noise from chainsaws, skidders, loaders, logging trucks and personnel associated with the abatement and removal of hazard trees is expected during project implementation. Hazard tree operations can treat from 0.5 to several miles of road per day, assuring limited impacts, which would not exceed more than a few days in any one location. Noise disturbances to users of facilities within this project are inevitable, but would be very limited in duration and amount.

Upon completion of project work and the removal of hazard trees recreation visitor use would begin to grow although not immediately to the same levels as before the fire. Growth to those levels would only occur after a longer recovery period. Water attractions would become the first to show full use. New opportunities to interpret the growth of an ecosystem would increase in importance.

#### ***Developed Recreation Opportunities***

Lumsden Bridge, Lumsden Campground and South Fork Campground would not be affected from the proposed activities. Sweetwater, Lost Claim, and Dimond O Campgrounds and Peach Growers Recreation Residence Tract are immediately adjacent to proposed tractor logging units and would experience temporary negative effects from noise, dust, and increased traffic associated with the cutting and removal of trees. Loading for hazard tree operations along Highway 120, where Sweetwater and Lost Claim Campgrounds are located, will be avoided during the weekends (3:00 pm Friday through Sunday). Because logging operations would not occur along or adjacent to Evergreen Road on weekends during the peak summer season (from July 3 through July 5, during Memorial Day and Labor Day weekends, and during the special event on Evergreen Road), negative effects are lessened for Dimond O Campground and Peach Growers Recreation Residence Tract, along with the private properties of Camp Mather and Evergreen Lodge. The reduced logging operations and hauling during peak travel time for visitors to the forest should reduce the potential for accidents related to industrial vehicles in use in the project area.

Activities are planned on NFS land adjacent to privately owned Camp Tawonga (Table 3). The camp would experience temporary negative effects from noise, dust, and increased traffic associated with the cutting and removal of trees. It should take 30 days or less to log and haul the dead timber on tractor units within 1 mile of the camp.

Appropriate safety procedures related to traffic management requirements will be included in all Timber Sale contracts and may include placing warning or closure signs in locations that ensure maximum visibility for forest visitors.

Table 3 Tractor Units within 1 Mile of Camp Tawonga

| Units         | Alternative 1<br>(Proposed Action) | Alternative 2<br>(No Action) | Alternative 3 | Alternative 4 |
|---------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------|---------------|---------------|
| Tractor Units | 13                                 | 0                            | 14            | 14            |
| Acres         | 1,321                              | 0                            | 1,263         | 1,263         |

Cherry Valley Campground is adjacent to proposed treatment units (helicopter and tractor) as well as hazard tree removal activities occurring along the roads accessing this area. Due to heavy logging traffic on travel routes that access Cherry Lake Road, Cherry Valley campground would be closed for at least the 2014 season. Under the Forest Order discussed earlier in this section (STF 2014-01), the Forest is currently closed until hazard trees along roads are abated either under the Rim HT project or this EIS. Closure of Cherry Valley Campground would have a temporary negative financial effect to the campground concessionaire and temporary negative effects to forest visitors who prefer camping in Cherry Valley.

Recreation would become easier to manage and meet the ROS direction once the hazard trees have been removed. Safety risks would be minimized once dead trees are felled. Roads, hiking trails and facilities would become available for use. The physical setting would be diverse, and offer the landscape variety sought by the visitor. Social constraints would be lifted and impacts created by displacement of use would be lessened. Increased use and wear at Yosemite facilities would be eased as people return to sites on the forest as well. Managerial direction would shift from closure to opening areas favored by users.

Temporary noise distractions will be part of this alternative. The noise will be most noticeable within ¼ mile of the developed sites that remain open during treatment. Table 4 shows the acreage of treatment within this distance to all developed sites as well as to designated dispersed sites that would not be available until after treatment is completed.

Table 4

| Alternative | Treatment Acres within ¼ mile of Recreation Sites | Treatment Acres within ¼ mile of Dispersed Sites |
|-------------|---|--|
| 1           | 451   | 6,650  |
| 2           | 0   | 0  |
| 3           | 404   | 6,887  |
| 4           | 404   | 6,468  |

None of the factors that help establish or are used to measure sense of place are affected by the proposed actions, however an evolving sense of place will be established under all of the alternatives as the environmental setting changes through time.

#### ***Dispersed Recreation Opportunities***

Considering the volume of dispersed recreation on the Stanislaus National Forest and the size and scale of the Rim Recovery project, many dispersed areas would be impacted either by or through project activities directly (e.g., landings placed on top of dispersed camping sites) or indirectly through log hauling and continued closed access routes to the sites. However, these sites are currently closed under Forest Order STF 2014-01. The positive effects of this alternative are to provide safe dispersed recreation areas and safe access. As access routes are cleared of hazard trees the Forest would open to public use including the 99 miles of motorized and non-motorized trails currently closed due to hazard trees. Not all hazardous trees would be removed along motorized and non-motorized trails; however, they would be removed in treatment areas thereby reducing safety risks along segments of trails. Any trails damaged by project activities would be re-established to allow them to be utilized again. Once the forest is reopened to public use there would remain the temptation for cross-country trails to become established. Opening existing trails under this alternative would lessen the need for unauthorized trails to show up on the landscape because adequate trail routes would be available to meet current needs. There may remain the need for recovery signage to encourage visitors to stay on designated trails, and funding for additional OHV patrols. Finally, although gravel would be used on some roads that currently have a native surface; these roads are expected to return back to their native state at the conclusion of the logging period due to the significant wear and tear imposed by the industrial traffic.

#### **CUMULATIVE EFFECTS**

Appendix B identifies other actions within the Rim Fire area including ecological restoration, soil improvement, transportation and motorized trail improvement projects. Those projects would add to the overall health of the forest and enhance recreation opportunities within the Rim Fire area. Cumulative effects would include the temporary negative effects of noise, dust and increased traffic on the recreation experiences of Forest users; however, the Rim HT project and the Rim Recovery would provide safe access and safe travel to developed recreation sites and dispersed recreation areas. The Rim Fire had the largest effect on recreation settings as many of the places people are attracted to have been changed. The visual and recreational setting will continue to evolve.

Hazard tree and other projects are expected to occur in the foreseeable future. Some proposed activities may temporarily limit access for recreation opportunities, displacing recreation use to other areas in the vicinity during project implementation. Since all projects on NFS lands are designed to meet Forest Plan direction for recreation and ROS, Alternative 1 would not result in cumulative, long-term effects on recreation.

#### ***Alternative 2 (No Action)***

#### **DIRECT AND INDIRECT EFFECTS**

Under Alternative 2, current management plans would continue to guide management of the project area. No hazard tree removal or road maintenance would be implemented to accomplish project goals, and thousands of currently hazardous trees would be left to fall on their own as a result of the forces of wind, snow and gravity. These trees would not be removed, would contribute to accumulation of woody debris, and may pose a risk

for more intense wildfire behavior. Hazard trees and other trees previously felled during fire suppression or BAER activities would not be removed from areas adjacent to Level 2 roads, motorized or non-motorized trails, dispersed campsites, and other recreational areas.

***Developed Recreation Opportunities***

In a 2004 study of more than 200 BAER reports, many direct and indirect impacts and potential risks to recreation due to resource damage caused by fire were identified following fires on National Forests across the nation (Chavez 2004). Table 5 lists some potential impacts and risks to developed recreation sites. Some impacts, such as falling snags, would be long-term issues resulting from the Rim Fire. If trails and campsites remain closed it is likely that unauthorized sites and trails would be established throughout the burned area, creating further soil and erosion impacts. The current surge of use and wear on Yosemite National Park facilities would continue if forest facilities remain unavailable for use.

Table 5 Alternative 2: Potential Impacts and Risks to Developed Recreation

| <b>Developed Recreation Impacts</b>            | <b>Direct</b> | <b>Risks</b> |
|--|---------------|--------------|
| Closure, blocked, or restricted access         | X             | X            |
| Drinking water source damage                   | X             | X            |
| Falling snags or hazard trees                  |               | X            |
| Facilities and improvements damaged            | X             |              |
| Tree stands severely damaged                   | X             |              |
| Plugged culverts                               | X             | X            |
| Degraded water quality for recreation purposes |               | X            |

Although the sense of place would evolve similar to other alternatives, the recreation setting would contain more risks and evolve differently. The physical setting would pose additional safety risks from falling snags and trees; the social setting, described as part of the ROS used to manage the recreation setting, would remain at least partially closed; and the managerial setting would focus on guiding people from hazards to places that provide for safe recreation use. Additional wear and crowding would occur in those remaining safe locations for people to enjoy. The diversity of the landscape, as it recovers, would not offer the scenic variety desired by the majority of viewers. People’s attachment to the places they remember and value may be removed from those areas available to use and enjoy because of possible closure and the changes brought about because of the fire.

***Dispersed Recreation Opportunities***

Continued closure of portions of the burn area would limit access to dispersed recreation opportunities and displace users. Alternative 2 indirectly would contribute to the proliferation of unplanned, unauthorized, non-sustainable roads, trails and areas created by unauthorized cross-country travel. Impacts include compacted soil, soil and vegetation loss, and habitat disturbance. Table 6 lists some potential impacts and potential risks to dispersed recreation areas (Chavez 2004). Many of these would be long-term impacts resulting from Alternative 2. Risks along both motorized and non-motorized trails would remain higher in Alternative 2 if the trails are opened for use. As recently as June of 2014, Yellowstone National Park reported the death of a hiker struck by a falling tree that was killed in a 1988 fire (USDI 2014); similar long-term hazards remain with this alternative.

## Yellowstone Visitor Killed By Falling Tree

**Date: June 10, 2014**

National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
Yellowstone National Park  
P.O. Box 168  
Yellowstone National Park, WY 82190  
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
June 10, 2014 14-038  
Al Nash or Dan Hottle  
(307) 344-2015  
[YELL\\_Public\\_Affairs@nps.gov](mailto:YELL_Public_Affairs@nps.gov)

YELLOWSTONE NATIONAL PARK NEWS RELEASE  
Yellowstone Visitor Killed By Falling Tree

An international visitor to Yellowstone National Park died Monday afternoon after being struck by a falling tree. The 36-year old man was from Taiwan, the Republic of China. He was part of a group that was hiking the Fairy Falls trail, which is north of the Old Faithful area and west of the Grand Loop Road. The man left the trail and ascended a nearby tree-covered slope in an apparent attempt to get a better view of Grand Prismatic Spring, when a lodgepole pine tree fell and struck him in the head.

Other visitors who witnessed the incident made their way back to the trailhead, where they encountered two park maintenance employees working in the area, who relayed the information to Yellowstone law enforcement rangers. The victim was moved by rangers to the trailhead to await helicopter transport to a medical facility, but after attempts to revive him failed, he was declared dead at the scene.

Yellowstone rangers who responded reported windy weather conditions in the area at the time, and that the fallen tree had been a standing, dead lodgepole, fire-killed during the park's 1988 fires.

The victim's name is being withheld pending notification of family members. The incident remains under investigation by the National Park Service.

Last Updated: 06/10/2014

### **CUMULATIVE EFFECTS**

A total of 475 inventoried dispersed campsites exist within the project area. Continued closure of portions of the burn area under Alternative 2 would displace users to other available areas within the Rim Fire. Displaced users may impact sensitive meadows and riparian areas. Intense heat from campfires can damage vegetation and soil. Repeated use of a dispersed campsite can result in soil compaction, soil and vegetation loss, habitat disturbance, and heritage resource degradation. As such, Alternative 2 would contribute towards adverse cumulative effects on recreation and possibly other resources in the Rim Fire perimeter.

Table 6 Alternative 2: Potential Impacts and Risks to Dispersed Recreation

| <b>Dispersed Recreation Impacts</b>    | <b>Direct</b> | <b>Risks</b> |
|--|---------------|--------------|
| Closure, blocked, or restricted access | X             | X            |
| Drinking water source damage           | X             | X            |
| Falling snags or hazard trees          |               | X            |
| Flooding, water erosion                |               | X            |
| Landslides and debris flows            |               | X            |
| Loss of soil productivity              |               | X            |
| Noxious weed infestation               |               | X            |
| Tree stands severely damaged           | X             |              |
| Unstable hillsides                     | X             |              |

|  |   |   |
|--|---|---|
| Falling rock                                   |   | X |
| Increased unauthorized motorized use           |   | X |
| Plugged culverts                               | X | X |
| Sign, guardrail and cattleguard damage         | X | X |
| Stranding people                               |   | X |
| Stump burnout                                  | X |   |
| Unstable trail conditions                      | X |   |
| Degraded water quality for recreation purposes |   | X |
| Vandalism or theft of cultural resource sites  |   | X |

### ***Alternative 3***

#### **DIRECT AND INDIRECT EFFECTS**

Same as Alternative 1.

#### **CUMULATIVE EFFECTS**

Same as Alternative 1.

### ***Alternative 4***

#### **DIRECT AND INDIRECT EFFECTS**

Same as Alternative 1.

#### **CUMULATIVE EFFECTS**

Same as Alternative 1.

### **Summary of Effects Analysis across All Alternatives**

Although the proposed acreages and treatments change across the alternatives, the effects of Alternatives 1, 3 and 4 would be the same. These include temporary negative effects of noise, dust and increased traffic on the recreation experiences of Forest users; however, the positive effect of improved forest health would benefit recreation.

Alternative 2 would have long-term negative indirect and cumulative effects to developed and dispersed recreation opportunities due to limited or no access and increased safety risks.

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