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Subject: Regional Order No. 20-01

To: File

I am issuing Regional Order No. 20-01 to provide for public and employee health and safety by closing all Developed Recreation Sites on National Forest System lands with the State of California.

Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is an infectious and potentially fatal disease caused by a newly discovered coronavirus which leads to respiratory illness. The virus is thought to spread mainly between people who are in close contact with one another (within about 6 feet) through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes. As of March 24, 2020, the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported a total of 44,183 cases of COVID-19 nationwide with almost 2,000 cases in California alone.

There is currently no vaccine to prevent COVID-19. As a result, the best way to prevent illness is to avoid being exposed to the virus. The President's Coronavirus Guidelines suggest that individuals avoid social gatherings in groups of 10 or more people, remain home wherever possible, and avoid discretionary travel. In addition, in states with evidence of community transmission, the Guidelines require closure of indoor and outdoor venues where groups of people congregate. California has seen rapid community spread of the coronavirus. As a result, the Governor of California recently issued Executive Order N-33-20, which directs all individuals living in the state to stay home or at their place of residence. These requirements were implemented to preserve the public health and safety, and to ensure the healthcare delivery system is capable of serving all residents.

There are 18 National Forests in California spanning the length of the state. In many instances our Forests lay at the doorstep of major population centers including San Francisco, Los Angeles and San Diego. This proximity to large populations in conjunction with improving springtime weather conditions has led to an increase in visitation across the Region. Despite the State order, droves of people have been gathering in national forests, both in groups larger than 10 and without adhering to the 6-foot social distancing requirement. The following are examples of the challenges increased recreational use is posing for COVID-19 response and the health and safety of not only the public, but Forest Service and local law enforcement personnel attempting to address these situations:

- **Angeles National Forest:** The San Gabriel Canyon filled with visitors this weekend, including long lines of vehicles parked along the roadsides causing pedestrian-vehicle safety issues with people walking in the roadway (see photo attached). The Forest



Supervisor reported that use levels were “worse than July 4th” and that it was a “zoo.” An off-highway vehicle area on the Forest was teaming with hundreds of visitors, collecting in massive groups beyond the 10-person limit and making social distancing impossible. The resultant strain on law enforcement and other personnel prompted local officials to since close Los Angeles County parks and trails.

- **Stanislaus National Forest:** The Pinecrest Lake area is an extremely popular recreation destination, particularly in the summer. However, this weekend the area was completely packed, beyond what is typical this time of year. With neighboring Yosemite National Park completely closed, visitors took to this area causing similar issues to those experienced in Southern California. Local Forest Service employees reported encountering visitors self-identifying as being from the Bay Area having travelled up to the Forest (some 3 hours’ drive) to get away from the city, counter to the statewide Executive Order.

Therefore, this closure order is needed to protect public and employee health and safety, along with natural and cultural resources by prohibiting people from visiting and utilizing designated recreation sites on National Forests. This order will close key recreational facilities such as campgrounds, day use sites, and picnic areas as these are attractions that draw large numbers of people and require significant management oversight, especially during the high-use conditions now being realized. This management burden puts Forest personnel at additional risk of exposure to COVID-19. And in several instances already, Forest employees have run out of the necessary personal protective equipment and cleaning supplies to perform site maintenance activities safely while mitigating the risk of exposure.

While designated recreation sites will be closed, the general Forest area including the extensive trail system will remain open and available to the public. Hiking and walking outdoors is widely considered beneficial to maintaining one’s health and is a deterrent to contracting COVID-19. It is the intent of the Agency and the Region to maintain trail access to the extent practicable.

Trails are accessed by trailheads. Trailheads vary across the state with regard to their level of development. Some are simply dirt pull-outs along the roadside, while others are highly developed paved parking areas with multiple restrooms, running water systems, and picnic benches. Most visitor groups on trails consist of less than 10 people and once they park and head out on their hike they can maintain more than 6 foot distance between others. In addition, the timing of use is often dispersed throughout the day. Where trail conditions and use levels are such that risks cannot be mitigated, local Line Officers may take additional actions to spread out use.

Forests across the Region have reached out to their local government officials to discuss this order and all were supportive of the action. Public information officers on Forests have connected with the public and fielded calls related to the open or closed status of facilities. Feedback has been supportive of this decision. State and local governments have taken similar steps already, closing park areas, campgrounds, and similar recreation infrastructure.

I have concluded that this decision may be categorically excluded from documentation in an Environmental Impact Statement or Environmental Assessment under the National

Environmental Policy Act. This action falls within the category identified in 36 CFR 220.6(d)(1) – prohibitions to provide short-term resource protection or to protect public health and safety – and does not require documentation in a decision memo, decision notice, or record of decision. I have determined that there are no extraordinary circumstances associated with this temporary closure. Implementation of the decision may begin immediately.



RANDY MOORE

Regional Forester Pacific Southwest Region

Enclosure - Regional Order No. 20-01