



RURAL COUNTY REPRESENTATIVES  
OF CALIFORNIA

April 2, 2020

Mr. Sonny Perdue  
Secretary  
United States Department of Agriculture  
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20250

**RE: Request for Closure of National Forest System Lands Upon Local Request  
During the COVID-19 Pandemic**

Dear Secretary Purdue:

On behalf of the Rural County Representatives of California (RCRC), I am writing to urgently request that the USDA Forest Service (USFS) Pacific Southwest Region (Region 5) and Intermountain Region (Region 4) be given the authority to close targeted portions or, if need be, entire national forests within their jurisdiction in California upon a county's request. RCRC is an association of thirty-seven rural California counties, and the RCRC Board of Directors is comprised of elected supervisors from those member counties.

Rural counties throughout the nation are facing a myriad of challenges in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, with the public health and safety of residents of paramount importance. RCRC's thirty-seven member counties contain more than 70 percent of California's national forest system lands, and normally welcome the economic and social benefits afforded to our communities by the lands managed by the USDA Forest Service. However, increased and irresponsible public usage of federal lands by those who either ignore or misunderstand the orders put forth by public health officials (which are made by many county public health officers is creating unique challenges). For a large number of rural California counties, controlling the movement of people – particularly urban/suburban non-residents drawn to rural recreation locales - is making it nearly impossible to control the spread of the Coronavirus into communities which lack the capacity to provide healthcare to their residents who may become infected.

For example, Tuolumne County is experiencing an influx of non-resident visitors to the Stanislaus National Forest. While Region 5 leadership is currently working diligently with the County to target areas for closure to bring some relief, we strongly

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believe that closure of the entire forest needs to be an option to discourage non-resident visitation at this time.

RCRC appreciates the formal closure of developed areas in national forest system lands. However, non-residents are simply circumventing those closures by parking outside of those areas and venturing into the forests as they would under normal circumstances. RCRC formally requests that USDA initiate a system to allow Region 4 and Region 5 the discretion to fully close upon request of all/either the Board of Supervisors, Sheriff, or Public Health Officer until the county can fully work through this pandemic. Closure could be either targeted portions or the entirety of a specified national forest, which is consistent with recent policy adopted by the U.S. Department of Interior to address closures of National Park Service Lands. We would expect these closures would occur after close consultation with county public health officials.

We appreciate your immediate response and attention to this urgent request to help ensure the public health and safety of rural county residents. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you would like to discuss this request further.

Sincerely,



STACI HEATON  
Senior Regulatory Affairs Advocate

cc: Nora Rasure, Region 4 Regional Forester  
Randy Moore, Region 5 Regional Forester  
Members of the Alpine County Board of Supervisors  
Members of the Calaveras County Board of Supervisors  
Members of the Mono County Board of Supervisors  
Members of the Tuolumne County Board of Supervisors