

P R E S S R E L E A S E

**Karuk Tribe • Environmental Protection Information Center • Center for Biological Diversity
Klamath Siskiyou Wildlands Center • Klamath Riverkeeper • Western Environmental Law
Center**

For Immediate Release: March 3, 2016

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TRIBE AND CONSERVATIONISTS FILE SUIT TO PROTECT WILD SALMON, RURAL RIVER COMMUNITIES

Groups Seek Alternatives to Flawed Forest Service Salvage Plan

Happy Camp, CA – Today the Karuk Tribe, along with the Environmental Protection Information Center (EPIC), Klamath-Siskiyou Wildlands Center (KS Wild), Center for Biological Diversity, and Klamath Riverkeeper, filed suit in federal court challenging a massive post-fire logging plan in Klamath National Forest that will increase fire danger, degrade water quality, and harm at-risk salmon populations. The Tribe leads a diverse plaintiff group united by a common interest in restoring healthy relationships between people, fire, forests and fish.

The groups seek to protect rural communities from fire risks, restore watershed health, and provide economic opportunities for locals. The group is challenging a post-fire timber sale, the Westside Project, which fails rural river communities by implementing the same management practices that have for decades resulted in a landscape prone to dangerous fire events, degraded water quality, and contributed to declining salmon populations. The suit alleges the Klamath National Forest Plan, as approved by National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Fisheries, illegally increases the risk of extinction for threatened populations of coho salmon.

The Westside project would clear-cut 6,800 acres on burned forest slopes above tributaries of the Klamath River. This aggressive approach would fail to resolve long-term fire management issues and exacerbate wildfire impacts to recovering watersheds. The steep and rugged terrain contains old-growth forests and nurtures some of the most important salmon habitat on the West Coast. NOAA Fisheries is required to review Forest Service logging plans to determine if such projects will have harmful effects on ESA listed coho. In this case, NOAA Fisheries green lighted the Forest Service plan despite the obvious harm to coho spawning and rearing habitat.

“This project was ill-conceived from the start and failed to adequately take into account the input of the Karuk Tribe which has managed these forests since the beginning of time,” said Karuk Chairman Russell “Buster” Attebery. “We will not allow the Forest Service to further degrade our fisheries, water quality, or sacred sites while ignoring our call for community fire protection.”

The Tribe’s alternative proposal ensures that future fire events will be healthy for the environment and safe for local residents while providing marketable timber. The Forest Service did not analyze the Karuk Alternative because it rushed the environmental review process under the pretense of a “public emergency.”

“Unlike the massive Forest Service clear-cutting plans, the Karuk Alternative focuses on restoration,” explains George Sexton of the Klamath-Siskiyou Wildlands Center. “It recognizes the need to restore watersheds and the natural fire regime while protecting homes and communities.”

“The Klamath River and its tributaries are strongholds for struggling salmon populations; they are also home to many rare and endemic species. Logging these steep slopes would only increase the perilous position our fisheries and wildlife are facing,” said Kimberly Baker of EPIC. “The Forest Service plan to clear-cut thousands of acres above the Klamath River disregards the reasonable Karuk Alternative and hurts at-risk salmon and river communities,” said Kerul Dyer of Klamath Riverkeeper. “A healthy Klamath River requires sensible forest restoration that addresses the needs of both fish and people, like that laid out in the Karuk plan.”

"We have a chance right now to restore healthy relationships among people, fire and forests," said Jay Lininger, senior scientist with the Center for Biological Diversity. "It requires a fundamentally different approach from what the Forest Service put forward."

The groups are challenging the illegal harm to fish and watersheds that will result from the proposed post-fire clear cutting timber sales in hopes that the federal government will change course. Initial arguments will likely be heard by the District Court in the very near future. The Western Environmental Law Center represents all of the plaintiffs and EPIC is represented by in-house counsel.

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