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## The Karuk Tribe Presses Timber Plan In Court

By Russell “Buster” Attebery, Karuk Tribe Chairman

The 2014 wild fires in the heart of the Klamath Basin were some of the largest and most destructive the region has ever seen. The Beaver Fire, the July Complex, and the Happy Camp Complex burned a total of 183,100 acres, including 162,300 acres of National Forest Land. The size and severity of the fires are a reflection of decades of poor forest management and forest service policy. Moving forward, the fires provide us with a rare opportunity to begin the slow process of restoring our forests in a manner that provides for environmental restoration, community fire protection, and economic opportunity.

Sadly, Klamath National Forest (KNF) may squander this opportunity. Forest Supervisor Patricia Grantham recently signed a Record of Decision to implement the Westside Salvage Logging Plan. The Westside Plan fails to meet our region’s needs in a variety of ways. It fails to protect fisheries and water quality, does little to help our communities adapt to the realities of living in a fire prone environment, and has little to no chance for full implementation because it fails to meet legal requirements. The result of KNF’s efforts to push their Westside Plan is that we will be robbed of an opportunity to restore burned areas or promote a sustainable logging industry.

The Karuk Tribe has taken the lead in offering an alternative proposal. The Karuk Alternative includes about 2,000 acres of logging (versus the 5,800 acres of clear cut proposed by KNF), strategically includes provisions to enhance community fire safety, and has the support of a wide range of conservation groups. In addition, our proposal supports the Klamath Forest Plan to implement thousands of acres of roadside hazard tree removal. Most importantly, our proposal complies with environmental laws that so often derail timber projects. Put concisely, we want to log where cutting trees is the most beneficial to humans and not log in areas where we would do the most harm to watersheds and fisheries.

Unfortunately, KNF refused to even analyze the Karuk Alternative in their Environmental Impact Statement, instead pressing forward with a plan that appears doomed for failure. Although the Tribe’s attempt to have the courts issue a Temporary Restraining Order against the forest was denied, we will appeal the decision. The lawsuit could have been avoided if only KNF would meet its legal and moral obligations to properly consult with the Karuk Tribe.

It was a difficult decision for the Tribe to file litigation against KNF over the Westside Project. After all, we are very supportive of logging and we see a dire need to thin overly dense stands of conifers. The Karuk Plan seeks to make our forests fire resilient in order to protect our homes while allowing fire to play its natural role in the forest ecosystem. However, the Tribe cannot in good conscious allow a repeat of the same post-fire logging practices that created the tinder box that just went up in flames and further degrades fisheries and water quality. We must do things

differently. The first step of doing things differently is for KNF to engage in good faith discussions with the Tribe and local communities. Everyone in this community has to live with one another and with fire. The health and safety of future generations demand we set aside our differences and work together to ensure a future that includes a healthy environment and a healthy economy.

The Karuk Alternative to the Westside Project can be found in Appendix G of the Westside EIS at

<http://www.karuk.us/images/docs/dnr/Karuk%20Alternative%20Narrative%20KNF%20Final.pdf>