

Regional Order No. 20-12
USDA Forest Service
Pacific Southwest Region
Emergency Forest Closure

Pursuant to 16 U.S.C. 551 and 36 C.F.R. 261.50(b), and to provide for public safety and protect natural resources, the following acts are prohibited on National Forest System lands within the Pacific Southwest Region. This Order is effective from September 15, 2020, through September 21, 2020.

1. Going into or being upon National Forest System lands within the National Forests listed below.
 - a. Inyo National Forest
 - b. Sierra National Forest
 - c. Sequoia National Forest
 - d. Stanislaus National Forest
 - e. Los Padres National Forest
 - f. Angeles National Forest
 - g. San Bernardino National Forest
 - h. Cleveland National Forest

36 C.F.R. 261.52(e).

2. Being on a National Forest System road within the National Forests listed below.
 - a. Inyo National Forest
 - b. Sierra National Forest
 - c. Sequoia National Forest
 - d. Stanislaus National Forest
 - e. Los Padres National Forest
 - f. Angeles National Forest
 - g. San Bernardino National Forest
 - h. Cleveland National Forest

36 C.F.R. 261.54(e).

3. Being on a National Forest System trail within the National Forests listed below.
 - a. Inyo National Forest
 - b. Sierra National Forest
 - c. Sequoia National Forest
 - d. Stanislaus National Forest
 - e. Los Padres National Forest

- f. Angeles National Forest
- g. San Bernardino National Forest
- h. Cleveland National Forest

36 C.F.R. 261.55(a).

Pursuant to 36 C.F.R. 261.50(e), the following persons are exempt from this Order:

1. Persons with Forest Service Permit No. FS-7700-48 (Permit for Use of Roads, Trails, or Areas Restricted by Regulation or Order), specifically exempting them from this Order
2. Any Federal, State, or local officer, or member of an organized rescue or fire fighting force in the Performance of an official duty.
3. Persons with a Forest Service non-special-use written authorization to conduct non-recreational activities, such as harvesting timber or forest products, or grazing livestock.
4. Owners or lessees of land, to the extent necessary to access their land.
5. Residents, to the extent necessary to access their residences.
6. Persons engaged in a business, trade, or occupation are not exempt from the prohibitions listed above, but may use National Forest System roads to the extent necessary to carry out their business, trade, or occupation.

These prohibitions are in addition to the general prohibitions contained in 36 C.F.R. Part 261, Subpart A.

A violation of these prohibitions is punishable by a fine of not more than \$5,000 for an individual or \$10,000 for an organization, or imprisonment for not more than 6 months, or both. 16 U.S.C. 551 and 18 U.S.C. 3559, 3571, and 3581.

Done at Vallejo, California, this 14th day of September 2020.

X 

Signed by: RANDY MOORE
RANDY MOORE
Regional Forester Pacific Southwest Region



File Code: 5330**Date:** September 14, 2020**Route To:****Subject:** Regional Order No. 20-12**To:** File

I have decided to issue Forest Order No. 20-12 to prohibit going into or being upon National Forest System lands in the following National Forests: Cleveland NF, Angeles NF, San Bernardino NF, Los Padres NF, Sequoia NF, Sierra NF, Stanislaus NF and Inyo NF. This order will be in effect from September 15, 2020, at 12:00 a.m. Pacific Time, through September 21, 2020. This Regional Order will protect natural resources and provide for the safety of forest visitors by preventing them from getting trapped on National Forest System lands during emergency circumstances.

California is experiencing an unprecedented and dire fire season. There are 18 National Forests in California, totaling approximately 20 million acres. Currently, 13 of 18 National Forests in the Pacific Southwest Region in California have large fires. Nearly all fires are now large, “complex” fires (a series of fires in close proximity to one another that have burned into a single large unit). In a typical fire season, California will see some 300,000 acres burn. This year, more than 3 million acres have already burned statewide.

To date in 2020, 1,148 wildfires have burned 839,677 acres of National Forest System lands in the Pacific Southwest Region. Currently, there are 19 uncontained large wildfires in Northern California with 25 new fires reported. In Southern California, there are eight uncontained large wildfires with 19 new fires reported.

In Southern California, to-date this year there have been 555 wildfires burning 197,443 acres on National Forest System lands. Light to moderate initial attack activity is expected through the middle of next week as humidity will continue to be low with poor recoveries other than along the immediate coast. Despite generally light winds, the fire threat will be moderate through the middle of next week due to the low humidity, warm temperatures, and overly dry fuels conditions. Extreme fire behavior and dangerous rates of spread are possible at any time of day. Looking ahead, the potential for extreme fire activity will be likely to continue until enough precipitation occurs to significantly increase fuel moisture. Fires on National Forests in Southern California: Creek on the Sierra NF, El Dorado on the San Bernardino NF, Bobcat on the Angeles NF, Dolan on the Los Padres NF, SQF Complex on the Sequoia NF, Valley on the Cleveland NF.

Extreme weather conditions have made this situation significantly worse this year. Record high temperatures, unprecedented dry lightning events, and multiple heatwaves across the state have made conditions extremely dry and susceptible to fire ignition. Temperatures have reached over



100 degrees for most of the state several weeks running, even in areas along the coast that are typically cooler. In addition to the heat and high temperatures, significant wind events have occurred fueling blazes out of control. This week major wind events are forecasted for northern and southern California. The combination of record heat and wind are recipe for significant fire danger and potential disaster.

Nationally, and within California, firefighting resources continue to operating at maximum capacity and there are significant shortages of resources. Our firefighting organization has been in Preparedness Level 5 (PL5), the highest level of fire response preparedness, for several weeks. Nationally there are no Type 1 Incident Management Teams available and only two Type 2 teams available. All fire engines and major firefighting equipment are already assigned to existing fires or positioned to prevent new fire starts from escaping initial attack. This scarcity of resources has caused the agency to seek assistance from the U.S. Army as well as other countries including Canada, Mexico, and Australia. This situation means that should additional fires break, the agency may not be able to respond in a timely manner, further risking life and property.

National Forests in California have seen record numbers of visitors this summer. Reports indicate that use levels normally associated with peak holidays such as Memorial Day and the 4th of July are being seen every day throughout the summer. This has held true this Labor Day weekend as well. Campgrounds and dispersed use areas are reported as full to capacity and overflowing. Parking lots spill over into roadways. Conflicts between use groups are up, including criminal activity. And trash and human waste are collecting faster than staffs are able to clear and clean facilities. These visitor use levels and related management issues further exacerbate a challenging fire situation creating a heightened level of risk.

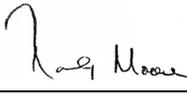
In southern California and the southern Sierra Nevada mountain foothills, the situation is particularly dire. Climates are typically drier in these parts of the state. And years of drought and major tree mortality in the Sierra foothill areas has created fuel types and conditions particularly suited to fire ignition. When we consider this in relation to the high levels of public use and recreation that occurs in these areas, there is a recipe for potential disaster. There are 40 million people in close proximity to the forests in southern California and use is high and difficult to manage. For example, on the San Bernardino and Angeles National Forests, there are major roads leading up steep canyons accessing remote communities and forest areas. On most days forest recreation was so crowded that parked cars along roadsides blocked traffic. In more than one such instance, emergency vehicles were prevented from accessing those in need because of the crowds. A similar situation occurred nearly a month ago on the Angeles National Forest where visitors were entrapped by a wildfire and had to run for their safety. And finally, recently the Creek Fire on the Sierra National Forest grew exponentially one afternoon due to high winds encircling a popular boat launch and lake area. As a result, 150 people were entrapped and had to be evacuated by helicopters from the Army National Guard.

This Regional Order includes an exemption for persons with a Forest Permit for Use of Roads, Trails, or Areas Restricted by Regulation or Order (Form FS-7700-48). Authorization under this exemption will only be provided if I or my delegate determine that the risk to personal health and safety is reasonable considering the circumstances of the request. We may also require

appropriate personal protective equipment and other necessary safety measures. I hereby delegate the authority to sign Form FS-7700-48 granting an exemption to this Regional Order to Forest Supervisors on the Cleveland NF, Angeles NF, San Bernardino NF, Los Padres NF, Sequoia NF, Sierra NF, Stanislaus NF and Inyo NF.

I have concluded that this decision may be categorically excluded from documentation in an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) or Environmental Assessment (EA) 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 after I issue this Order.

X 

Signed by: RANDY MOORE

RANDY MOORE

Regional Forester Pacific Southwest Region

Enclosure – Regional Order No. 20-12