



YSS

Yosemite Stanislaus Solutions

August 22, 2014

United States Department of Agriculture
Attention: Secretary Tom Vilsack
1400 Independence Avenue, Southwest Room 200-A
Washington, D.C. 20250

Subject: Biomass Crop Assistance Program Matching Payment Funds for Rim Fire Restoration

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

The Yosemite-Stanislaus Solutions (YSS) collaborative group is a highly diverse coalition of interests who share a common goal. The YSS mission is to restore and maintain healthy forests and watersheds, fire-safe communities, and sustainable local economies using a science-based approach.

YSS is assisting the Stanislaus National Forest and affected private landowners to rehabilitate and restore the portion of the Tuolumne River watershed devastated by the 2013 Rim Fire. The task of fully restoring the health of this portion of the Tuolumne River Watershed is immense and will undoubtedly take years of concentrated effort and millions of dollars to accomplish. YSS is supportive of prudent salvage logging to generate value to fund other critical projects such as hazardous fuel reduction, reforestation, and meadow restoration. YSS is also committed to assist the Stanislaus National Forest by helping to identify and secure funding sources for the many tasks and projects that will likely not be funded by the Agency's annual budgets.

One of the critical Rim restoration components is reduction of the residual dead fuels to a level that will make the Rim Fire and surrounding areas more resilient to future wildfires in this fire-prone watershed. To accomplish that goal, as much as 2.2 million tons of dead biomass will need to be removed from the 154,530 acres of the Rim Fire on National Forest land. The region is fortunate to have 5 existing bioenergy facilities within reach of the Rim Fire area that, combined, utilize nearly 900,000 Bone Dry Tons (BDT) of biomass fuel annually to produce 110 MW of renewable power for CA ratepayers. However, **without outside transportation assistance, such as the \$20/Bone Dry Ton that is available under the Matching Payment portion of BCAP, little of this dead biomass will ever reach these renewable energy facilities.**

The matching payment funds under the BCAP are the subject of YSS' request. YSS sees the BCAP Matching Payment Program as an ideal funding mechanism to assist the Stanislaus National Forest in their hazardous fuel reduction efforts. However, because of one program restriction, *very little of the hazardous fuels available to be removed right now will actually be removed under the 2014 BCAP.* We are referring to the requirement that all hazardous fuel must be delivered to an energy facility by September 26, 2014 to receive up to \$20/BDT in matching payments. Currently most logging contractors are busily committed to removing the quickly deteriorating large hazard trees along the main Forest roads and cannot stop what they are doing on short notice and focus on hazardous fuel removal for a short 4-6 weeks. **If the USDA changed the delivery date to match the end of the normal operating season (such as extending it 2 additional months), then as much as 25,000 BDT could be removed using 2014 Matching Payment Program funds.**

There is a second challenge to utilizing BCAP Matching Payment funds for hazardous fuel reduction in the Rim Fire area in 2015 and beyond. Although the 2014 Farm Bill designates \$25 million/year for BCAP over the next 4 years, the USDA still has statutory discretion to designate between 10% and 50% of the funds to go towards Matching Payments each year. This means the Matching Payment fund could be as little as \$2.5 million or as much as \$12.5 million for the entire U.S. each year. To make matters even more uncertain for the Stanislaus NF attempting to plan its Rim restoration projects over the next few years, the annual BCAP funding decision will not be known until the national budget is approved, nearly halfway through each Fiscal Year. Due to the scale of excess fuel caused by the massive Rim Fire, the Stanislaus NF, Qualified Bioenergy Facilities, and the local logging and chipping contractors need a more certain annual funding commitment to be able to count on and best utilize BCAP funds for the purpose they were intended.

An earmark set-aside of \$2-3 million/year of the Matching Payment funds (for restoration of the Rim Fire) would greatly enhance the hazardous fuel reduction work that is so strongly needed.

Such an earmark would provide transportation assistance to remove up to 600,000 BDT of dead biomass over the next 4 years so that the material can be converted to renewable energy at the 5 local bioenergy facilities. That funding would also provide rural jobs and tax revenue for the local communities, provide a net reduction in GHG emissions, and help the Stanislaus NF achieve its hazardous fuel reduction goals.

YSS encourages your strong consideration of this important matter.

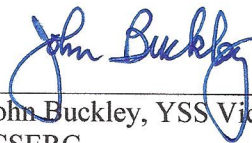
American Forest Resource Council
Blue Mountain Minerals
Central Sierra Audubon Society
CT Bioenergy Consulting
Gold Rush News
Mule Deer Foundation
Stanislaus Trail Bike Association
Tuolumne County Farm Bureau
Tuolumne Band of Me-Wuk Indians
Tuolumne River Trust
Yosemite Deer Herd Advisory Council

American Motorcyclist Association, District 36
California Forestry Association
Central Sierra Environmental Resource Center
James R. Dambacher Construction
Merced Dirt Riders/4x4 in Motion
Sierra Pacific Industries
Tuolumne County
Tuolumne County Sportsmen, Inc.
Tuolumne County Alliance for Resources
and the Environment

Respectfully,



Mike Albrecht, YSS Chair
TuCARE



John Buckley, YSS Vice-Chair
CSERC

cc: Governor Jerry Brown
Senator Barbara Boxer
Senator Dianne Feinstein
Congressman Tom McClintock
Senator Tom Berryhill
Assemblymember Frank Bigelow
Director Val Dolcini

Chief Thomas Tidwell
Director Neil Konze
Regional Forester Randy Moore
Forest Supervisor Susan Skalski