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Testimony for the Subcommittee on Federal Lands

**“Locally-elected Officials Cooperating with Agencies in Land Management Act”**

Thursday April 28, 2016

Mr. Chairman and members of the subcommittee:

Good afternoon. Thank you for the opportunity to speak on this very important subject, improving Coordination and cooperation between the United States Forest Service, the Bureau of Land Management, local communities, and Indian tribes, regarding the management and use of National Forest System lands and public lands.

Tuolumne County lies within the heart of the Central Sierra Nevada Mountain range. According to the 2010 census the county has a total area of 2,221 square miles. Tuolumne County is just slightly smaller than the state of Delaware. Of Tuolumne County's 1,030,812 acres, 75% is federal lands and includes large portions of Yosemite National Park, the Stanislaus National Forest (SNF), and Bureau of Land Management (BLM) lands.

Local government is charged with the responsibility to protect the local tax base and the value of private property, and to promote economic stability. We provide for public safety and the well being of the local community, both for our residents and the visitors to our county. In Tuolumne County these critical functions are entangled with federal land management decisions. Unfortunately the process for managing our public lands is broken, and is manifested in the frequency and size of catastrophic wildfires, as well as the decline in economic vitality in our rural county.

A brief history of the Stanislaus National Forest Land Management Plan decisions and the resulting implications to our county is important for perspective on the vital importance of Coordination to Counties. My example will refer to timber harvest, however similar implications can be applied to all of the multiple use activities including, but not limited to recreation, travel management and grazing.

The Stanislaus National Forest Plan under the 1976 National Forest Management Act (and its 1982 version implementing regulations) was completed in 1991. The plan assigned 487,982 acres of productive forest land as available for active forest management (i.e. including timber harvest). This productive forestland grows at the rate of 222 million board feet (mmbf) per year (attachment #1 and #2). The assigned average annual allowable sale quantity from those lands is 146 mmbf (Stanislaus National Forest Plan, 1991, pg 8). From 1980-1990 the Stanislaus National Forest sold 132.7 mmbf annually. Under the 1991 Plan (the basis since for SNF growth

removal), the Stanislaus National Forest on average has sold a mere 34.5 mmbf annually from 1991-2015. This precipitous decline was statewide on the national forest lands. (Attachment 3). Tuolumne County did not have a local Coordination Plan in place prior to 2012 (The Tuolumne County Land Use Plan). Consequently any communication with the Forest Service which occurred during the 1991 Forest Plan revision and the 2001 Sierra Nevada Framework update was not Coordination. The following has resulted:

There are 6.4 direct jobs and 12.8 indirect and induced jobs per million board feet harvested (2001 McKillop “Economic Impacts of Revised 2001 Ancient Trees Initiative”.) The precipitous 74% decline in sold volume cost our local area 629 direct jobs averaging \$50,000/year per job, and 1,188 indirect and induced jobs at \$30,000/year per job. Due to the decline in timber harvest on the Stanislaus, the local area has lost an estimated 1,800 forest related jobs and an approximate loss of economic payroll activity in excess of 65 million dollars. As an example, in 1995 the Fiberboard plywood plant in Tuolumne County at Standard closed. The plant employed 170 people, each with a living wage job.

The national forest of the Sierra Nevada can sustain 20-100 trees per acre, depending on slope, slope position, and aspect. Due to poor, inadequate forest management, which included the lack of massive growth removal, over the past 25 years the tree density has dramatically increased to an average 278 trees per acre. Fast-forward to the summer of 2013 where we had the confluence of drought, hot dry weather and most importantly an overgrown national forest, and the perfect storm was created in Tuolumne County. The National Disaster Rim Fire was in our backyard.

The Rim Fire burned for over 2 months, and is the largest timber fire to occur in California history; burning over 257,000 acres totaling 402 square miles with fire suppression cost of \$127 million dollars. Recreation, one of the current economic drivers in Tuolumne County, came to a virtual halt for the remainder of 2013 and well into 2014, particularly on the Highway 120 Groveland corridor serving the North Gateway to Yosemite National Park.

An assessment generated by Earth Economics “The Economic Impact of the 2013 Rim Fire on Natural Lands”, reported that the first year after the Rim Fire, environmental benefit losses would range from \$100 million to \$736 million dollars on National forest lands. Additionally the estimate of direct damage to environmental benefits provided by private lands and loss within the Rim Fire perimeter was estimated at \$10 million to \$62 million. The fire-related private property loss was estimated between \$49.7 million to \$265 million. A supplemental analysis was used to compare pre-fire carbon storage with post-fire carbon storage. The value of the total carbon storage loss was estimated at \$102 million to \$797 million dollars. The authors of the report stated that because only 10 environmental benefits were valued of the 18 that were identified, this value range signifies a “below basement” appraisal, an underestimate of the true range of damages. (Summary pg. 2) The collective loss of environmental benefits on the national forest and private property, combined with the loss of carbon storage and the loss of private property, resulted in the Rim Fire impact ranging from an underestimated low of \$262 million dollars to \$1.8 billion dollars.

The California drought, coupled with the grossly overgrown national forest, means we are now facing a catastrophic insect epidemic, which began on the Sierra and Sequoia National Forests

and has marched north to the Stanislaus and Eldorado National Forests. In the fall of 2015 the Sierra National Forest measured 60% of their pine vegetative stands as dead. They anticipate 85% of their pine vegetation type is dead today. USFS Region 5 reported up to 14 million dead trees in April of 2015, growing to 40 million at the end of 2015, and now estimated as high as 73 million. This disaster crosses all boundary lines: USFS and BLM, state lands and private property. While I implore the federal government for a national emergency declaration, that is not the topic of discussion today.

I have been invited to discuss the unprecedented need for improved Coordination (as defined in federal law) between locally elected officials, USFS, BLM, and Indian tribes. Tuolumne County has lived with the Rim Fire Disaster and now the Pervasive Tree Mortality Disaster because Coordination was not requested or offered in either the 1991 Stanislaus Forest Plan revision or the 2001 Sierra Nevada Framework. We are living with the consequences of diminished timber infrastructure and workforce resources.

We continue to hear from the USFS that they are incapable of harvesting over 30 mmbf off of the Stanislaus due to restrictions within their land use plan. They have presented this with a series of overlay maps. The first map shows the entire national forest. This is followed by the lands, which are “physically suitable for harvest”, and then the “mature, physically suitable for management”. The following overlays take out “Designated Wilderness and Wild and Scenic Rivers”, “recommended or proposed Wilderness and Wild and Scenic Rivers”, “Near Natural” areas, “special areas and developed recreational areas” (RNA’s), “Owl and Goshawk protected activity centers” (PAC), “Old Forest Emphasis Areas” and lastly “Wild Land Urban Interface Areas” (attachment #4). All of these special designations have not been managed with a timber harvest for over 25 years, which has only increased the fire susceptibility of the area.

Sadly the Rim Fire devastated portions of the Emigrant Wilderness, the majority of the Tuolumne Wild and Scenic River, and the proposed Clavey Wild and Scenic River which burned with such intensity that it will never recover naturally. Near Natural areas, and Old Forest Emphasis Areas, now stand devoid of any live trees. The Rim Fire Burn Area Emergency Response team (BAER) reported 46 Spotted Owl Activity Centers (21% of the SNF total), 25 Goshawk Activity Centers (26% of the SNF total) and 13 Great Grey Owl Activity Centers (52% of the SNF total) were affected within the Rim Fire perimeter. The lack of timber management for more than 25 years means we have all lost: The Tuolumne County economy has lost, the citizens have lost peace of mind and the right to pursue constitutionally protected rights, the environment has lost air and water quality, and either directly or indirectly, we have all lost. Natural disturbance agents, predominately wildfire, insect and disease have taken over management of the National Forest in Tuolumne County and in the State of California.

Today Tuolumne County has a Coordination document in place, and wants meaningful Coordination with both the USFS and the BLM, as directed by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). Coordination will be requested when the Stanislaus National Forest engages in the Stanislaus National Forest Land Management Plan update. USFS Region Five has suggested the land planning revision could start in 2017. That process is expected to take several years to complete and then must pass through the objection period. Tuolumne County cannot continue to wait idly for the opportunity to Coordinate, all the while putting our community and

the environment at risk. There was 10.9 billion board feet of standing volume on the Stanislaus National Forest prior to the Rim Fire which consumed 0.5 billion board feet. There is currently about 10.4 billion board feet of standing volume. At today's average lumber value of \$340/mbf that is a monetary value of 3.5 billion dollars. It is time to reverse years of inadequate forest management and return to meaningful, responsible management that will ensure both monetary and social benefits, as well as environmental health for the land and animal species.

Non Government Organizations (NGO's) represent special interest and often interject supposition into the land management process used by the USFS and the BLM. Special interest groups have a place in land management discussions, however today both the USFS and the BLM are reactive in their land management decisions because single-issue activists have hijacked the process utilizing the courts and equal access to justice for the sole purpose of being obstructionists. The land management decision process must strengthen local government Coordination and the USFS and BLM must be accountable for insuring local Coordination is achieved.

This proposed legislation recognizes the important participation by a variety of local interest groups represented on Resource Advisory Committees (RAC's). RAC's appointed by local county government and confirmed by the Secretary of Agriculture, are an important asset for local government and this legislation confirms and expands their role in Section 103.

Of particular interest to Tuolumne County is the language in Section 102 "Improved Federal Land Management Agency Coordination with Governing Body of Affected Communities." Congress specifically set forth, with minimum requirement for Coordination in federal law, and did not leave this subject to revision through the rule making process by the federal agencies required to carry out this duty.

Through this section of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act, Congress defined five essential elements of Coordination that federal agencies are required to fulfill:

1. Keep apprised of state, local and tribal land use plans;
2. Assure that consideration is given to local plans when developing a federal plan, policy or management action;
3. Provide early notification (prior to public notice) to local government of development of any plan, policy or action;
4. Provide opportunity for meaningful input by local government into development of the plan, policy or action; and
5. Make all practical effort to resolve conflicts between federal and local policy, and reach consistency.

We see this legislation as an opportunity to improve Coordination with the USFS and the BLM, particularly if the agencies are accountable for Coordinating.

I conclude with a seldom-referenced quote from Gifford Pinchot, considered the father of the United States Forest Service:

*"The object of our forest policy is not to preserve the forests because they are beautiful-or because they are refuges for the wild creatures of the wilderness-but the making of prosperous homes-every other consideration becomes secondary."*

In Tuolumne County healthy forests, prosperous homes and community safety need to be synonymous.

**Enclosure #1**

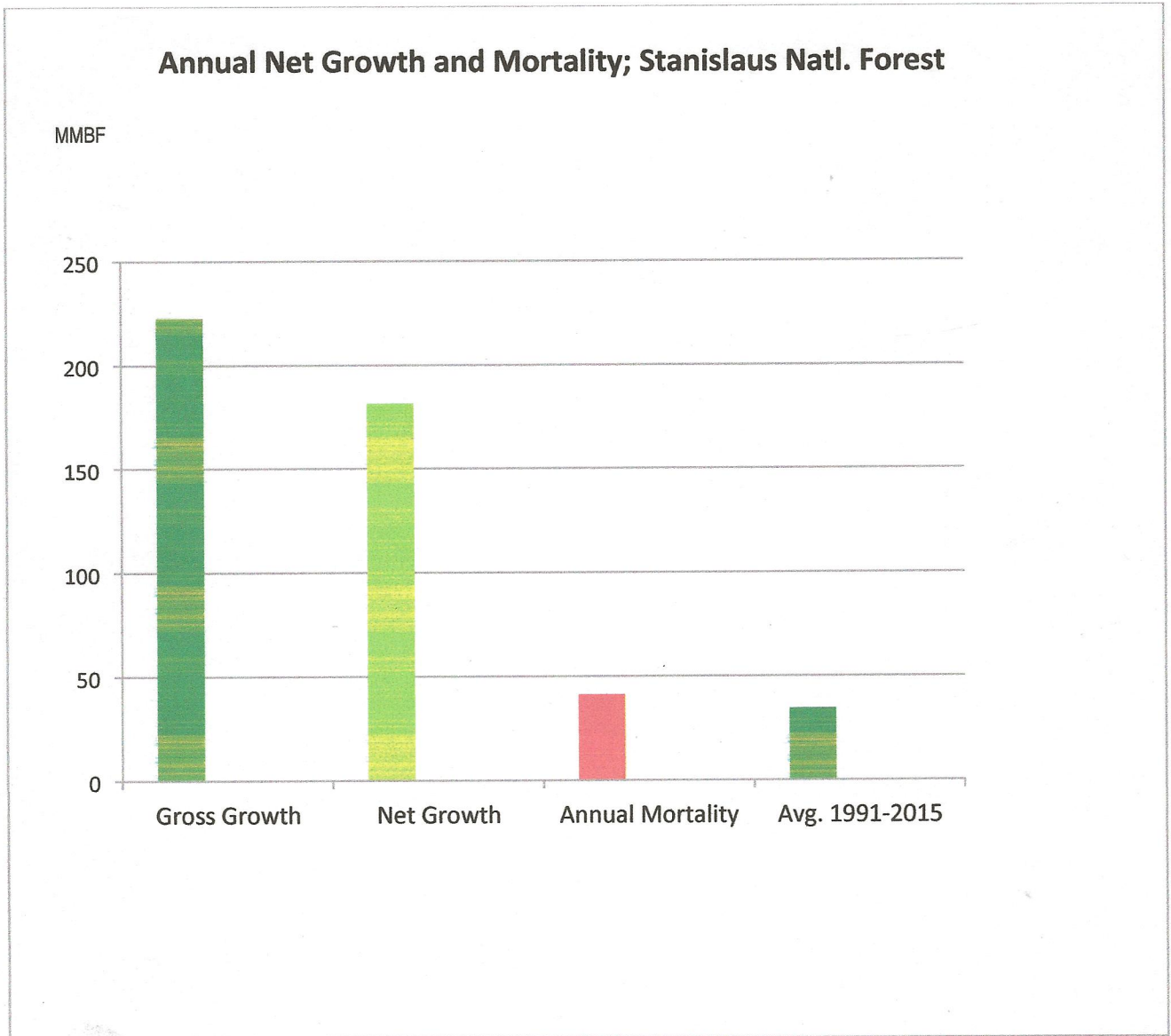
**Stanislaus National Forest Facts and Figures**

<b>Total Acres</b>	896,993	
<b>Acres Forested</b>	745,607	
<b>Acres Not Forested</b>	151,386	
<b>Acres of Productive Forestland</b>	620,547	
<b>Acres of Non-Productive Forestland</b>	125,060	
<b>Acres of Productive Reserved</b>	132,565	
<b>Acres Productive Not Reserved</b>	487,982	
<b>Tentatively Suitable Available Productive Forestland</b>	385,691	
<b>Softwood volume in growing stock (&gt;5" dbh) on productive forestland</b>	10,878.78	mmbf
<b>Average # of Trees/acre on productive not reserved forestland</b>	278	

**Annual net growth = 0.37 mbf/acre on productive not reserved  
(1.7 tons/acre/year of new growth)**

**(Source: Forest Service Region 5 Westcore Datatables)**

**Enclosure #2 - Stanislaus National Forest Annual Net Growth & Annual Mortality (million board feet)**



**Stanislaus National Forest**

**Gross Annual Growth 222.5 million board feet/year**

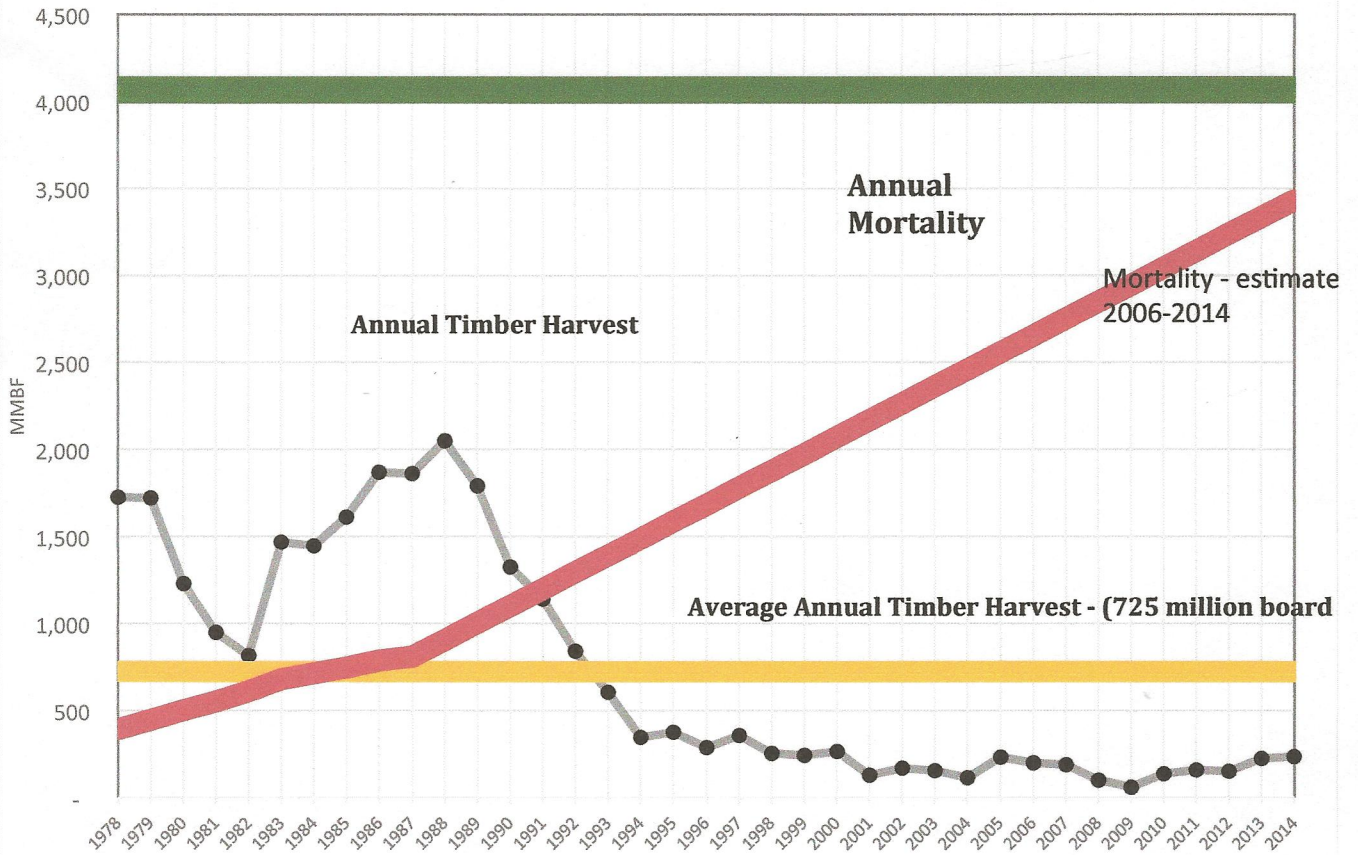
**Annual Mortality 41.1 million board feet/year**

**Average Sold annual volume 1991-2015 = 34.5 million board feet per year**

**Enclosure #3 – Statewide National Forest Growth, Mortality, and Harvest**

**California Public Timberland Growth, Harvest and Mortality (Billion Board Feet/Year)**  
**Timberland = 9,635,200 acres**

**Average Annual Gross Growth - (4.07 billion board feet/year)**

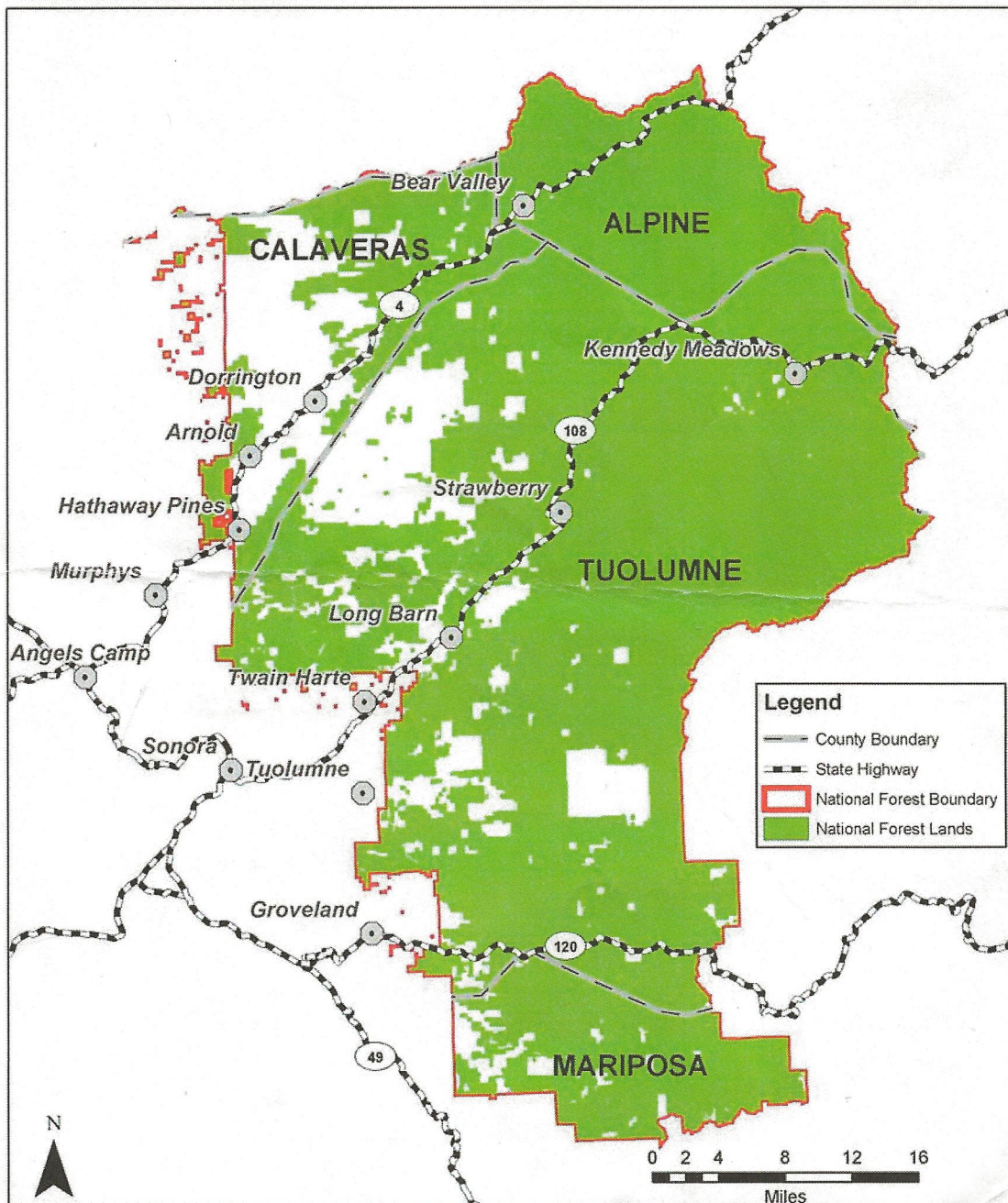


ources: California Board of Equalization Harvest Statistics; U.S. Forest Service FIA 2001-2010 plot data; PNW-RB-058

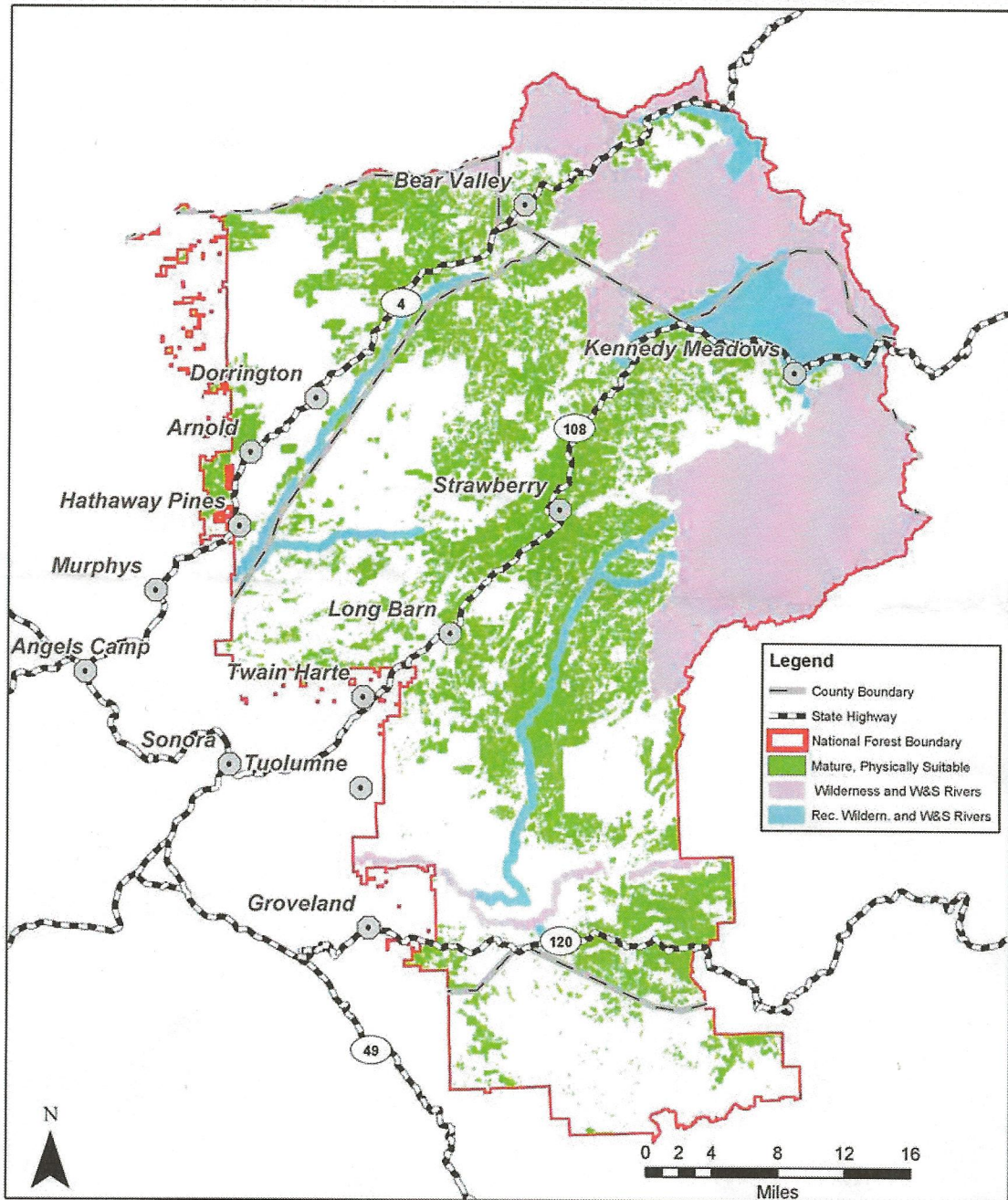
- Annual Timber Harvest 1978-2014 (MMBF)
- Average Annual Timber Harvest 1978-2014 (MMBF)
- Average Annual Gross Growth (MMBF)



STANISLAUS NATIONAL FOREST  
NATIONAL FOREST LANDS WITHIN THE PROCLAIMED BOUNDARY



# STANISLAUS NATIONAL FOREST RECOMMENDED WILDERNESS AND W&S RIVERS



STANISLAUS NATIONAL FOREST  
 OLD FOREST EMPHASIS AREAS

