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October 20, 2005

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**Court Tells Forest Service to Obey the Law, Protect Public's Rights**

*Judge Clarifies Ruling that Halted Agency Projects Nationwide to Create Backlash*

(Fresno, CA) – U.S. District Court Judge James K. Singleton, Jr., issued an order late yesterday that vindicated conservation groups' efforts to keep the public involved in Forest Service decisions that affect America's National Forests. In a motion to clarify, the judge found that, by over-applying his previous decision and blocking normal public use such as firewood gathering, the Bush administration was improperly implementing the Court's previous orders. The agency's overreaction ignored legal precedent and sought to create a public backlash against the Court's decision and conservation groups' claims that the public has a right to be involved in government actions.

“The judge acted on behalf of the public in both protecting their rights to be heard on Forest Service decisions as well as in explaining that the agency was over-reaching. Small business owners and lots of people who use public lands were being hurt by the agency's strategy of over-reacting to make a political point,” said Matt Kenna of the Western Environmental Law Center, representing the plaintiff conservation groups which include Heartwood, Sierra Club, Center for Biological Diversity, and Earth Island Institute.

The Court said that the Forest Service must implement prior regulations which required public comment and appeal on potentially harmful activities such as timber sales, oil and gas development, and creation of new motorized trail routes. The ruling came just as national conservation groups, as well as members of the Senate and Congress, had expressed their dismay at the Forest Service's politically motivated move.

“The judge called a spade a spade and made clear that the Bush administration was playing political games and Americans were paying the price,” said Carl Pope, Sierra Club Executive Director. “What the administration did in this case was part of a larger pattern of both limiting public participation part and placing blame on conservation groups.”

“This is the second time the judge sided with conservationists and the American people and rejected the administration’s attempts to write the public out of decisions regarding their National Forests,” said Jim Bensman of Heartwood. “There is a difference between simple and controversial activities, between mushroom gathering and 250-acre timber sales, distinctions which the judge has again required the Forest Service to recognize.”

*The Western Environmental Law Center is a nonprofit public interest law firm that works to protect and restore Western wildlands and to advocate for the right of Western communities to a clean and healthy environment.*

*The Sierra Club’s members are more than 750,000 of your friends and neighbors. Inspired by nature, we work together to protect our communities and the planet. The Club is America’s oldest, largest, and most influential grassroots environmental organization.*

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