NOSSAMAN LLP 1 PAUL S. WEILAND (CA 237058) 2 pweiland@nossaman.com BENJAMIN Z. RUBIN (CA 249630) 3 brubin@nossaman.com ASHLEY J. REMILLARD (CA 252374) aremillard@nossaman.com 4 18101 Von Karman Avenue, Suite 1800 5 Irvine, CA 92612-0177 Telephone: (949) 833-7800 Facsimile: (949) 833-7878 6 7 Attorneys for Plaintiff Dennis D. Murphy 8 9 UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT 10 EASTERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA 11 DENNIS D. MURPHY, Case No: 12 Plaintiff, 13 **COMPLAINT FOR DECLARATORY** VS. RELIEF, INJUNCTIVE RELIEF, AND 14 ATTORNEYS' FEES AND COSTS UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF 15 AGRICULTURE; TOM VILSACK, in his [FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT, official capacity as Secretary of the Department 5 U.S.C. $\S 552(a)(4)(B)$, (E) 16 of Agriculture; UNITED STATES FOREST SERVICE; THOMAS TIDWELL, in his official 17 capacity as Chief of the United States Forest Service. 18 19 Defendants. 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 Case No. COMPLAINT FOR DECLARATORY AND INJUNCTIVE RELIEF

[Freedom of Information Act, 5 U.S.C. § 552]

INTRODUCTION

A popular Government, without popular information, or the means of acquiring it, is but a Prologue to a Farce or a Tragedy;

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or, perhaps both. Knowledge will forever govern ignorance: And a people who mean to be their own Governors, must arm themselves with the power which knowledge gives. James Madison, letter to W. T. Berry (Aug. 4, 1822), in 9 The Writings of James Madison,

comprising his Public Papers and his Private Correspondence, including his numerous letters and documents now for the first time printed, 1819-1836, at 103 (Gaillard Hunt, ed., 1910), available at http://files.libertyfund.org/files/1940/1356.09 Bk.pdf.

* * *

- 1. Plaintiff Dennis D. Murphy is a renowned conservation biologist and author and editor of United States Forest Service ("Forest Service") technical publications and assessments; he also holds a special use permit from the Forest Service for a residence he maintains at Upper Echo Lake, south of Lake Tahoe in the Sierra Nevada mountains of California. In light of the Forest Service's Upper Echo Lake Hazardous Fuels Reduction Project ("Project") and in furtherance of his interests in the Project area, Dr Murphy, through his attorney of record at Nossaman, submitted a request under the Freedom of Information Act ("FOIA"), 5 U.S.C. § 552, to the Forest Service on September 18, 2014 (the "FOIA Request"), attached hereto as **Exhibit 1** and incorporated herein by this reference.
- 2. The Forest Service acknowledged receipt of the FOIA Request by way of an e-mail dated September 18, 2014. See Exhibit 2 attached hereto and incorporated herein by this reference.
- 3. The FOIA Request seeks specific public records to or from two expressly identified Forest Service officials directly involved in the approval process for the Project.
- 4. On September 24, 2014, the Forest Service sent a denial of the fee waiver request made by Dr. Murphy in connection with the FOIA Request. See Exhibit 3 attached hereto and incorporated herein by this reference.
- 5. Dr. Murphy appealed the denial of fee waiver (hereinafter "Fee Appeal") by letter dated and submitted on October 17, 2014. See Exhibit 4 attached hereto and incorporated

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herein by this reference. The Forest Service granted Dr. Murphy's Fee Appeal thereby reversing itself and granting a fee waiver, by letter dated January 6, 2015. See Exhibit 5 attached hereto and incorporated herein by this reference.

- 6. More than seven months after Dr. Murphy filed the FOIA Request, the Forest Service issued a response. See Exhibit 6 attached hereto and incorporated herein by this reference. The agency found and produced 539 pages of responsive records: 217 pages were withheld entirely and thus produced as blank, other than the notation that they were withheld; 134 pages were withheld in part; and 188 pages were disclosed.
- 7. Two days later, by letter dated and submitted April 9, 2015, Dr. Murphy filed a second appeal (hereinafter "Formal Appeal"). See Exhibit 7 attached hereto and incorporated herein by this reference. The Forest Service acknowledged receipt of the Formal Appeal by email dated April 10, 2015.
- 8. As of the date of filing this Complaint, more than eight months after filing the Formal Appeal, and more than 15 months after submitting the FOIA Request, the Forest Service has failed to act on the Formal Appeal. Thus, the agency has violated and continues to violate the mandatory requirement in FOIA that it reach a determination on a Formal Appeal within 20 workdays of receiving it.
- 9. Through Nossaman, Dr. Murphy has made multiple, good faith attempts to convince the Forest Service to respond to the appeal, but to no avail. By this action, Dr. Murphy seeks to compel the Forest Service to fulfill its legal obligation under FOIA to furnish all records responsive to the FOIA Request.
- 10. The public records sought are of vital importance. The Project apparently was justified in the first instance based on false information regarding wildfire risk in the Project area, and there is evidence that agency personnel turned a blind eye to potential adverse environmental effects of the Project during its approval process. Without access to the public records relating to the Project, neither Dr. Murphy nor the public at large may assess the agency's conduct and the true impacts of the Project.

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JURISDICTION AND VENUE

- 11. The Court has jurisdiction over this action pursuant to the Freedom of Information Act, 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(4)(B) and 28 U.S.C. § 1331 (federal question). Dr. Murphy filed an administrative appeal pursuant to 7 C.F.R. § 1.14 before bringing this action. See Exhibit 7. Defendant Forest Service did not provide a determination of the Formal Appeal within the 20workday limit provided by law, and, as of the date of filing this Complaint, still has not provided a determination of the Formal Appeal. Thus, Plaintiff exhausted his administrative remedies.
- 12. Pursuant to 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(4)(B), this Court is authorized to grant injunctive relief ordering the Defendants to respond to the FOIA Request. An actual controversy exists between the parties within the meaning of 28 U.S.C. § 2201. Thus, this Court also may grant declaratory and injunctive relief pursuant to 28 U.S.C. §§ 2201 and 2202.
- 13. Venue is proper in this Court pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1391(b) (suit may be brought in the District where a substantial part of the activities that are the subject of the action are situated) and 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(4)(B) ("[T]he district court of the United States in the district in which the complainant resides, or has his principal place of business, or in which the agency records are situated, or in the District of Columbia, has jurisdiction to enjoin the agency from withholding agency records and to order the production of any agency records improperly withheld from the complainant.").

PARTIES

- 14. Plaintiff Dr. Murphy is a renowned conservation biologist. He has an undergraduate degree in entomology from the University of California, Berkeley, and a doctoral degree in biological sciences from Stanford University, where he studied under Professor Paul Ehrlich. Further, Dr. Murphy is a Pew Scholar in Conservation and the Environment, recipient of the California Governor's Leadership Award in Economics and the Environment, and an Adjunct Research Professor in Biology at the University of Nevada, Reno.
- 15. Dr. Murphy is past president of the Society for Conservation Biology. He has served on the Board on Environmental Studies and Toxicology and the Water Science and

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Technology Board at the National Research Council, the action agency for the National
Academy of Sciences. He has also served on three committees under that organization: the
Committee on Hydrology, Ecology, and Fishes of the Klamath River, the Committee on
Endangered and Threatened Species in the Platte River Basin, and the Committee on Scientific
Issues in the Endangered Species Act. He is currently co-chair of the Independent Science
Advisory Panel on endangered species and federal operations of the six dams on the Missouri
River.

16. Dr. Murphy has testified on ten occasions in front of United States Senate and House of Representatives committees and subcommittees on issues related to implementation of the Endangered Species Act. Additionally, he has petitioned the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for the listing of eleven species.

17. Dr. Murphy has expertise in conservation planning for a wide variety of vertebrates and invertebrates in California and elsewhere in the West. He has served federal and state governments in science-driven regional conservation planning efforts targeting northern spotted owls (*Strix occidentalis caurina*), California gnatcatchers (*Polioptila californica*), bighorn sheep (*Ovis canadensis*), desert tortoise (*Gopherus agassizii*), and a host of other listed species. In addition, he has led or been involved with the development of adaptive management strategies for protected lands in six western states, in planning efforts that have included numerous species that inhabit the Project area and the habitats that support those species, and species that are related to and have similar ecological attributes as those known to inhabit the project area – including mountain and Sierra Nevada yellow-legged frogs (*Rana boylii, Rana muscosa*, and *Rana sierrae*), red-legged frogs (*Rana aurora* and *Rana draytonii*), and Amargosa (*Anaxyrus nelsoni*), arroyo (*Anaxyrus californicus*), and western (*Anaxyrus boreas*) toads.

18. Every year since his birth, Dr. Murphy has visited the Project area. He holds a special use permit from the Forest Service for a residence he maintains in the Project area. His father and grandfather maintained a residence in the Project area before him; his son has visited

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19. Dr. Murphy enjoys the environmental integrity and beauty of the Project area. He regularly recreates in and studies the ecology of the area. He is intimately familiar with the local ecosystem, including the resident animals and plants and the habitats that support them. Dr. Murphy derives significant use and enjoyment from the aesthetic, recreational, and

the area on multiple occasions each year of his life. Dr. Murphy has visited the Project area

over 500 times in his lifetime and has concrete plans to continue doing so in the future.

conservation benefits derived from the natural, near-wilderness state of the Lower and Upper

Echo Lakes and the alpine landscape that surrounds them.

20. Dr. Murphy has also conducted research in the Lake Tahoe basin, including the Project area, in his capacity as a conservation biologist. Further, Dr. Murphy is the lead editor of the two-volume Lake Tahoe Watershed Assessment prepared for the Forest Service, a presidential deliverable from the first ever Lake Tahoe Summit, which was published in 2000, and the *Proceedings of the Sierra Nevada Science Symposium*, the Forest Service's synthesis of the state of the environmental science for the mountain range, published in 2004, and was a key contributor to the Forest Service's 2010 volume, An Integrated Science Plan for the Lake Tahoe Basin.

- 21. Defendant United States Department of Agriculture is a department of the United States Government, established by statute.
 - 22. Defendant Tom Vilsack is the Secretary of the Department of Agriculture.
- 23. Defendant United States Forest Service is a department of the United States Government, established by statute.
 - 24. Defendant Thomas Tidwell is the Chief of the United States Forest Service.
- 25. The Forest Service's violations of FOIA have impeded Dr. Murphy's ability to understand the factual basis for the Project. If the relief herein requested is granted, then his right to the requested public records will be vindicated, the knowledge gained from those public records is likely to add to the fund of information that citizens may use in making vital political choices regarding management of Forest Service lands in the Lake Tahoe Basin Management

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1	Unit, and the information can assist Dr. Murphy in his efforts to assess and mitigate the harm to		
2	his aesthetic, conservation, and recreational interests in the Project area.		
3	LEGAL BACKGROUND		
4	26. In Public Law 110-175, § 2, Dec. 31, 2007, 121 Stat. 2524, Congress found that		
5	(1) The Freedom of Information Act was signed into law on July 4, 1966, because the American people believe that (A) our		
6	constitutional democracy, our system of self-government, and our commitment to popular sovereignty depends upon the consent of		
7	the governed; (B) such consent is not meaningful unless it is informed consent; and (C) as Justice Black noted in his		
8	concurring opinion in <i>Barr v. Matteo</i> (360 U.S. 564 (1959)), 'The effective functioning of a free government like ours depends		
9 10	largely on the force of an informed public opinion. This calls for the widest possible understanding of the quality of government service rendered by all elective or appointed public officials or		
11	employees.'		
12	(2) the American people firmly believe that our system of government must itself be governed by a presumption of		
13	openness;		
14	(3) the Freedom of Information Act establishes a 'strong presumption in favor of disclosure' as noted by the United States		
15	Supreme Court in <i>United States Department of State v. Ray</i> (502 U.S. 164 (1991)), a presumption that applies to all agencies governed by that Act; [and]		
16	(4) 'disclosure, not secrecy, is the dominant objective of the Act,'		
17 18	as noted by the United States Supreme Court in <i>Department of Air Force v. Rose</i> (425 U.S. 352 (1976)).		
19	Pub. L. No. 110-175, § 2, Dec. 31, 2007, 121 Stat. 2524.		
20	27. Congress enacted FOIA in 1966 "to improve public access to information held by		
21	government agencies." Natural Resources Defense Council, Inc. v. U.S. Envtl. Prot. Agency,		
22	581 F. Supp. 2d 491, 496 (S.D.N.Y. 2008) (quoting <i>Pierce & Stevens Chem. Corp. v. U.S.</i>		
23	Consumer Prod. Safety Comm'n, 585 F.2d 1382, 1384 (2d Cir. 1978)). The act "expresses a		
24	public policy in favor of disclosure so that the public might see what activities federal agencies		
25	are engaged in." Id. (quoting A. Michael's Piano, Inc. v. F.T.C., 18 F.3d 138, 143 (2d Cir.		
26	1994)). FOIA is intended to "ensure an informed citizenry, vital to the functioning of a		
27	democratic society, needed to check against corruption and to hold the governors accountable to		
28	the governed." NLRB v. Robbins Tire & Rubber Co., 437 U.S. 214, 242 (1978). To this end,		

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1	FOIA requires a federal agency to disclose records in its possession unless they fall under one		
2	of nine enumerated and exclusive exemptions. 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(3), (b); see also Dep't of the		
3	Air Force v. Rose, 425 U.S. 352, 361 (1976).		
4	28. FOIA provides that but for certain exceptions not applicable here:		
5	[E]ach agency, upon any request for records which (i) reasonably		
6	describes such records and (ii) is made in accordance with published rules stating the time, place, fees (if any), and		
7	procedures to be followed, shall make the records promptly available to any person.		
8	5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(3)(A).		
9	29. "Agency records" are materials that the agency either created or obtained that are in		
10	the agency's control at the time the FOIA request is made; "control" means that "the materials		
11	came into the agency's possession in the legitimate conduct of its official duties." Or. Natural		
12	Desert Ass'n v. Gutierrez, 409 F. Supp. 2d 1237, 1243 (D. Or. 2006) (citing United States		
13	Dep't of Justice v. Tax Analysts, 492 U.S. 136, 145 (1989) for the proposition that "district		
14	court opinions and orders filed in civil tax cases and contained in the case files of the		
15	Department of Justice Tax Division were agency records under FOIA").		
16	30. In responding to a FOIA request, the producing agency "shall provide the record in		
17	any form or format requested by the person if the record is readily reproducible by the agency		
18	in that form or format." 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(3)(B).		
19	31. Under FOIA, "an agency shall make reasonable efforts to search for the records in		
20	electronic form or format, except when such efforts would significantly interfere with the		
21	operation of the agency's automated information system" and "the term 'search' means to		
22	review, manually or by automated means, agency records for the purpose of locating those		
23	records which are responsive to a request." <i>Id.</i> § 552(a)(3)(C)-(D).		
24	32. Under the statute, the agency is required to respond to a FOIA request within 20		
25	business days, excluding Saturdays, Sundays, and legal holidays. 5 U.S.C. 552(a)(6)(A)(i).		
26	Failure to respond in a reasonable timeframe is itself a violation of law. Or. Natural Desert		

Ass'n v. Gutierrez, 409 F. Supp. 2d at 1248 (holding that "an untimely response is a violation of

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FOIA, regardless of the final outcome of the request"); Gilmore v. United States Dep't	of
Energy, 33 F. Supp. 2d 1184, 1188 (N.D. Cal. 1998) (same).	

- 33. "An agency shall not assess search fees . . . under this subparagraph if the agency fails to comply with [the 20-workday time limit], [or] if no unusual or exceptional circumstances . . . apply to the processing of the request." 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(4)(A)(viii).
- 34. If a requesting party believes that the agency has improperly withheld all or part of the responsive agency records within its control, or that the agency has failed to respond to all aspects of its request, it must ordinarily file an administrative appeal before it may bring an action in federal court. 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(4)(B), (6).
- 35. However, if an agency fails to respond within the 20-workday time limits set forth in 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(6), a person making a FOIA request is deemed to have exhausted its administrative remedies. 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(6)(c)(i).
- 36. If the agency does not respond to a FOIA appeal within 20 workdays, the FOIA appellant has the right to file an action to enforce its FOIA rights in district court. 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(6)(A)(ii).
- 37. FOIA places the burden of justifying a FOIA denial on the agency, not the person who requests the records. 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(4)(B). "The burden is on the agency to demonstrate, not the requester to disprove, that the materials sought are not 'agency records' or have not been 'improperly withheld." *United States Dep't of Justice v. Tax Analysts*, 492 U.S. at 142 n.3.
- 38. FOIA provides: "The court may assess against the United States reasonable attorney fees and other litigation costs reasonably incurred in any case under this section in which the complainant has substantially prevailed." 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(4)(E). For purposes of FOIA, a plaintiff has substantially prevailed "if the complainant has obtained relief through either [¶] a judicial order, or an enforceable written agreement or consent decree; or [¶] (II) a voluntary or unilateral change in position by the agency, if the complainant's claim is not insubstantial." *Id.* § 552(a)(4)(E)(ii)(I)-(II).

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39.	Moreover,	FOIA	provides	that

Whenever the court orders the production of any agency records improperly withheld from the complainant and assesses against the United States reasonable attorney fees and other litigation costs, and the court additionally issues a written finding that the circumstances surrounding the withholding raise questions whether agency personnel acted arbitrarily or capriciously with respect to the withholding, the Special Counsel shall promptly initiate a proceeding to determine whether disciplinary action is warranted against the officer or employee who was primarily responsible for the withholding. The Special Counsel, after investigation and consideration of the evidence submitted, shall submit his findings and recommendations to the administrative authority of the agency concerned and shall send copies of the findings and recommendations to the officer or employee or his representative. The administrative authority shall take the corrective action that the Special Counsel recommends.

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5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(4)(F)(i) (emphasis added).

FACTUAL ALLEGATIONS COMMON TO ALL CLAIMS FOR RELIEF

- 40. On September 18, 2014, Dr. Murphy through his counsel of record at Nossaman, requested that the Forest Service produce the following records:
 - All e-mail, including all attachments, sent by or received by Nancy Gibson pertaining to the Upper Echo Lake Hazardous Fuels Reduction Project.
 - All e-mail, including all attachments, sent by or received by Sarah Muskopf pertaining to the Upper Echo Lake Hazardous Fuels Reduction Project.

See Exhibit 1.

- 41. That same day, the Forest Service sent an e-mail indicating that it received the FOIA Request. *See* Exhibit 2.
- 42. On September 24, 2014, Regional Forester Randy Moore of the Forest Service sent a denial of the fee waiver request made by Dr. Murphy in connection with the FOIA Request. *See* Exhibit 3.
- 43. Dr. Murphy appealed the denial of fee waiver by letter dated and submitted on October 17, 2014. *See* Exhibit 4. The Forest Service granted Dr. Murphy's Fee Appeal thereby reversing itself and granting a fee waiver, by letter dated January 6, 2015, signed by Andria Weeks. *See* Exhibit 5.

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1	44. More than seven months after Dr. Murphy filed the FOIA Request, Regional
2	Forester Randy Moore of the Forest Service issued a response. See Exhibit 6. The agency
3	found and produced 539 pages of responsive records: 217 pages were withheld entirely and thus
4	produced as blank pages other than the notation they were withheld; 134 pages were withheld in
5	part; and 188 pages were disclosed.
6	45. Two days later, by letter dated and submitted April 9, 2015, Dr. Murphy filed the
7	Formal Appeal. See Exhibit 7. The Forest Service acknowledged receipt of the Formal Appeal
8	with an e-mail dated April 10, 2015.
9	46. The Forest Service did not reach a determination on the Formal Appeal within the
10	20 working days provided by FOIA. 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(6)(A)(ii).
11	47 Indeed, the Forest Service has not responded to the Formal Appeal in the eight

- 47. Indeed, the Forest Service has not responded to the Formal Appeal in the eight months since it was filed.
- 48. Through counsel, Dr. Murphy e-mailed the Forest Service's Government Information Specialist, Saundra Dover, on multiple occasions since filing the Formal Appeal to request a response to the Formal Appeal. Though Ms. Dover responded to those e-mails, she never sought additional time to respond to the appeal beyond the timeframe established by FOIA, or provided a time estimate for completion of the response.
- 49. Having received no response to the Formal Appeal, Plaintiff now brings this action seeking declaratory and injunctive relief, as well as the litigation costs and attorneys' fees incurred in this litigation to compel production of the responsive records.

CLAIM FOR RELIEF

Failure to Timely Respond to Formal Appeal in Violation of the Freedom of Information Act

- 50. Paragraphs 1 through 49 are realleged and incorporated as if fully set forth herein.
- 51. Plaintiff filed the Formal Appeal on April 9, 2015, but Defendant Forest Service did not provide a determination within the 20 workdays as provided by law. Thus, Plaintiff has exhausted his administrative remedies.

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1	4)	In the alternative, to the	he extent that any records responsive to the FOIA Request	
2	are withheld, in whole or in part, on the basis of privilege or other statutory exemption, the			
3	Court should order Defendants to furnish such records to the Court for an in camera inspection			
4	for the Court's determination as to whether all or portions of such records may be exempt from			
5	public disclosure pursuant to 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(4)(B), and, after such in camera inspection, the			
6	Court should direct Defendants to furnish to Nossaman a copy of such records, or all portions			
7	thereof subject to permissive or mandatory disclosure;			
8	5) Prohibit Defendants from charging any search fee to locate the agency records			
9	responsive to the FOIA Request that it failed to produce within the time limit imposed by 5			
10	U.S.C. § 552(a)(6) (see 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(4)(A)(viii));			
11	6)	6) Retain jurisdiction over this matter until such time as Defendants have fully		
12	complied with the requirements of FOIA;			
13	7)	Award Plaintiff his co	osts of litigation and attorneys' fees under FOIA, 5 U.S.C.	
14	§ 552(a)(4)(E);			
15	8)	Award Plaintiff his co	osts and reasonable attorneys' fees and expenses pursuant to	
16	the Equal Access to Justice Act, 28 U.S.C. § 2412; and			
17	9)	Grant such other furth	ner relief, including injunctive relief, as the Court may	
18	deem just and	d proper.		
19	Dated: Janua	ary 5, 2016	NOSSAMAN LLP PAUL S. WEILAND	
20			BENJAMIN Z. RUBIN ASHLEY J. REMILLARD	
21			ASHEDI J. KEMILEME	
22			By: /s/ Paul S. Weiland	
23			Attorneys for Plaintiff Dennis D. Murphy	
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