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IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE NORTHERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA
SAN FRANCISCO DIVISION

ANIMAL LEGAL DEFENSE FUND,, *et al.*,

Plaintiffs,

v.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF
AGRICULTURE, *et al.*,

Defendants.

No. 3:17-cv-00949-WHO

**DEFENDANTS' OPPOSITION
TO PLAINTIFF'S MOTION FOR
PRELIMINARY INJUNCTION**

Date: May 17, 2017

Time: 2:00 p.m.

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25
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27
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION 1

STATEMENT OF ISSUES 1

BACKGROUND 1

ARGUMENT 4

I. Plaintiffs’ Request for a “Mandatory” Preliminary Injunction That Would Effectively Grant Them Full Relief on the Merits Is “Highly Inappropriate” 4

II. The Mandatory Preliminary Injunction Should Be Denied Because Plaintiffs Cannot Show a Likelihood of Success on the Merits, Let Alone That the Law and Facts “Clearly Favor” Their Position..... 5

 A. Plaintiffs Cannot Prevail On Their FOIA Claim 5

 1. The Court Lacks Jurisdiction to Grant the Relief Sought Because FOIA Does Not Authorize Courts to Order Publication of Records 6

 2. Plaintiffs Cannot Invoke the Court’s FOIA Jurisdiction Because They Do Not Show that the Records Have Been “Improperly Withheld” 6

 a. Plaintiffs have not shown that § 552(a)(2)(D) requires disclosure 6

 b. Plaintiffs have not shown that § 552(a)(2)(A) requires disclosure 9

 3. Plaintiffs Have Not Shown That They Properly Exhausted Their Administrative Remedies Under FOIA 10

 4. Plaintiffs’ FOIA Claim Is Not Ripe..... 12

 5. Plaintiffs Are Unlikely to Prevail on the Merits of Their FOIA Claim..... 13

 B. Plaintiffs’ APA Claims are Not Likely to Succeed 14

 1. Judicial Review Is Unavailable Under the APA Because FOIA Provides an Adequate Remedy For Plaintiffs’ Alleged Injuries..... 14

 2. Plaintiffs Do Not Challenge Any Final Agency Action Subject to Judicial Review Under the APA..... 16

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
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10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28

3. Plaintiffs’ APA Claims Fail for Numerous Other Reasons 17

III. Plaintiffs Have Not Established That Irreparable Harm, Let Alone Extreme or Very Serious
Damage, Will Result Absent the Mandatory Preliminary Injunction 17

A. Plaintiffs’ Claimed Economic Injuries Do Not Constitute Irreparable Harm 18

B. Plaintiffs’ Non-economic, Informational Injuries Are Not Irreparable 20

C. Injury to Plaintiffs’ Goodwill Is Too Speculative To Constitute Irreparable
Harm22

IV. The Balance of Hardships and Public Interest Favor the Agency 23

CONCLUSION 25

TABLE OF AUTHORITIES

<u>Cases</u>	<u>Page(s)</u>
<i>Abbott Labs. v. Gardner</i> , 387 U.S. 136 (1967)	12
<i>Air Transp. Ass’n of Am. v. Export-Import Bank of the U.S.</i> , 840 F. Supp. 2d 327 (D.D.C. 2012)	19
<i>Am. Farm Bureau Fed’n v. EPA</i> , 836 F.3d 963 (8th Cir. 2016)	23
<i>Am. Freedom Def. Initiative v. King County.</i> , 796 F.3d 1165 (9th Cir. 2015)	5, 17, 25
<i>Am. Immigration Lawyers Ass’n v. Exec. Office for Immigration Review</i> , 830 F.3d 667 (D.C. Cir. 2016)	9, 10
<i>Am. Petrol. Inst. v. EPA</i> , 683 F.3d 382 (D.C. Cir. 2012)	13
<i>Ariz. Hosp. & Healthcare Ass’n v. Betlach</i> , 865 F. Supp. 2d 984 (D. Ariz. 2012)	19
<i>Associated Gen. Contrs., Inc. v. Coal. for Econ. Equity</i> , 950 F.2d 1401 (9th Cir. 1991)	18-19
<i>Benhoff v. DOJ</i> , No. 16-cv1095, 2016 WL 6962859 (S.D. Cal. Nov. 29, 2016)	11
<i>Bennett v. Spear</i> , 520 U.S. 154 (1997)	16
<i>Bernhardt v. Los Angeles County</i> , 339 F.3d 920 (9th Cir. 2003)	24, 25
<i>Bird-B-Gone, Inc. v. Bird Barrier Am., Inc.</i> , No. 12-cv-0178, 2013 WL 11730662 (C.D. Cal. Mar. 20, 2013)	22
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<i>Cal. Pharmacists Ass’n v. Maxwell-Jolly</i> , 596 F.3d 1098 (9th Cir. 2010)	24
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<i>CREW v. DOJ</i> , 164 F. Supp. 3d 145 (D.D.C. 2016)	11
<i>CREW v. DOJ</i> , 846 F.3d 1235 (D.C. Cir. 2017)	6, 11, 15
<i>CREW v. FEC</i> , 711 F.3d 180 (D.C. Cir. 2013)	14

1 *City of Oakland v. Lynch*,
798 F.3d 1159 (9th Cir. 2015) 14

2

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152 F. Supp. 3d 1 (D.D.C. 2015) *passim*

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396 F.3d 1265 (D.C. Cir. 2005) 15

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No. 07-5278, 2007 WL 4208311 (N.D. Cal. Nov. 27, 2007) 20

6

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542 F. Supp. 2d 1181 (N.D. Cal. 2008) 20

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15 F. Supp. 3d 32 (D.D.C. 2014) 20, 21

9

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543 F.3d 586 (9th Cir. 2008) 16

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No. 15-cv-03295, 2016 WL 6873541 (N.D. Cal. Nov. 22, 2016) 23

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840 F.3d 710 (10th Cir. 2016) 22

13

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786 F.3d 733 (9th Cir. 2015) 4, 17

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No. 13-cv-03939, 2014 WL 187386 (N.D. Cal. Jan. 16, 2014) 14, 15

16

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563 F.3d 519 (D.C. Cir. 2009) 14, 15

18 *Golden Gate Rest. Ass’n v. City of San Francisco*,
512 F.3d 1112 (9th Cir. 2008) 24

19

20 *Goldie’s Bookstore, Inc. v. Superior Court of Cal.*,
739 F.2d 466 (9th Cir. 1984) 22

21 *Gulf Oil Corp. v. Brock*,
778 F.2d 834 (D.C. Cir. 1985) 12, 13

22

23 *Humane Society of the United States v. USDA*,
No. 1:05-cv-00197 (D.D.C. 2005) 2, 24

24 *In re Steele*,
799 F.2d 461 (9th Cir. 1986) 5, 10

25 *Irons v. Schuyler*,
465 F.2d 608 (D.C. Cir. 1972) 11

26

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493 U.S. 146 (1989) 24

28

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514 F. Supp. 2d 7 (D.D.C. 2007) 20

2

3 *Kennecott Utah Copper Corp. v. U.S. Dep’t of the Interior*,
88 F.3d 1191 (D.C. Cir. 1996) 6

4 *Kissinger v. Reporters Comm. for Freedom of Press*,
445 U.S. 136 (1980) 6

5

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680 F.3d 1068 (9th Cir. 2012) 4, 18

7 *Long v. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms*,
964 F. Supp. 494 (D.D.C. 1997) 12

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No. 16-cv-1333, 2016 WL 6304654 (D.D.C. Oct. 27, 2016) 12, 21

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600 F.3d 1104 (9th Cir. 2010) 4

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819 F.3d 1084 (9th Cir. 2016) 16

12

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506 F.3d 713 (9th Cir. 2007) 23

14 *NLRB v. Sears, Roebuck & Co.*,
421 U.S. 132 (1975) 9

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394 F.3d 665 (9th Cir. 2005) 12

16

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852 F.3d 1114 (D.C. Cir. 2017) 11

18 *Rent-A-Center, Inc. v. Canyon Television & Appliance Rental, Inc.*,
944 F.2d 597 (9th Cir. 1991) 22

19

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54 F. Supp. 3d 5 (D.D.C. 2014) 20, 21

21 *San Luis & Delta-Mendota Water Auth. v. Jewell*,
747 F.3d 581 (9th Cir. 2014) 17

22

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968 F.2d 974 (9th Cir. 1992) 5, 17

24 *Skelton v. U.S. Postal Serv.*,
678 F.2d 35 (5th Cir. 1982) 9

25 *Spurlock v. FBI*,
69 F.3d 1010 (9th Cir. 1995) 6

26

27 *Stuhlberg Int’l Sales Co. v. John D. Brush & Co.* ,
240 F.3d 832 (9th Cir. 2001) 22

28

1 *Taiebat v. Scialabba*,
 No. 17-cv-0805, 2017 WL 747460 (N.D. Cal. Feb. 27, 2017) 5

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 689 F.2d 865 (9th Cir. 1982) 10

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11 7 C.F.R. § 1.8(d) 12

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 13 Transparency and Open Government,
 74 Fed. Reg. 4685 (Jan. 21, 2009) 8

14 **Legislative Materials**

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INTRODUCTION

1
2 In early February, the United States Department of Agriculture (“USDA”), acting through
3 its component agency (“APHIS,” or collectively with USDA, the “agency” or “defendant”)
4 temporarily removed from its website certain categories of records pertaining to its administration
5 of the Animal Welfare Act (“AWA”). Citing the need to properly address privacy concerns, the
6 agency emphasized the decision was not final but was a precautionary measure to protect
7 individual privacy during an ongoing review process. Pursuant to that ongoing review, the
8 agency has already reposted many thousands of records to the website.

9 Unwilling to allow that process to play out, plaintiffs now seek a highly disfavored
10 “mandatory” preliminary injunction that would, if granted, compel the agency to immediately
11 publish thousands of records that the agency has determined could violate personal privacy
12 interests. Plaintiffs cannot meet not the requirements for a preliminary injunction, let alone make
13 the heightened showing necessary to justify a mandatory one. Their claims are jurisdictionally
14 defective and otherwise improper, so they cannot establish a likelihood of success on the merits.
15 Nor can they demonstrate serious and irreparable harm, and certainly not harm more urgent and
16 significant than the agency’s competing privacy concerns.

STATEMENT OF ISSUES

17
18 Whether the Court should compel defendants, via mandatory preliminary injunction, to
19 terminate an ongoing review process and immediately publish thousands of records.

BACKGROUND

21 APHIS administers and enforces the AWA and its associated regulations requiring
22 federally established standards of care and treatment for certain animals. Animals covered by the
23 AWA may include those in zoos, circuses, marine mammal facilities; those destined for
24 commercial pet trade; those transported on commercial airlines or other common carriers; and
25 those used for research. Declaration of Kevin Shea ¶ 6 (“Shea Decl.”) (attached). APHIS
26 employs inspectors nationwide who conduct inspections to ensure that regulated facilities are in
27 compliance with AWA standards and regulations, documenting any noncompliant items in a
28

1 written inspection report. *Id.* ¶¶ 8-10. Deficiencies discovered in inspections may form the basis
2 for letters of warning and other regulatory correspondence, as well as enforcement actions, such
3 as voluntary settlement agreements that may involve monetary penalties or other sanctions. *Id.*
4 ¶¶ 10-13. APHIS may also initiate adjudicatory enforcement actions through administrative
5 complaints initiated by its Office of the General Counsel. *Id.* ¶ 12. These adjudicatory
6 proceedings are resolved by USDA administrative law judges (ALJs) and the USDA Judicial
7 Officer, who issue final decisions on behalf of the Secretary of Agriculture for purposes of
8 judicial review. *Id.* ¶¶ 12, 16.

9 For years, APHIS made certain AWA compliance and enforcement records available on
10 the APHIS website. *Id.* ¶ 4. APHIS began posting AWA inspection reports and research facility
11 annual reports on its website in the late 1990s or early 2000s, but terminated this practice due to
12 security concerns following the September 11 terrorist attacks. *Id.* ¶ 14. Between 2005 and 2009,
13 the agency was involved in litigation related to annual reports of animal research facilities. *See*
14 *Humane Society of the United States (“HSUS”) v. USDA*, 1:05-cv-00197 (D.D.C. 2005). The
15 lawsuit eventually settled without a substantive ruling, and the agency resumed posting certain
16 annual reports on its website pursuant to the settlement.¹ *Id.* ¶ 15. The agency also resumed
17 posting inspection reports around this time. *Id.* In 2010, APHIS began posting to its website
18 official warnings and enforcement information including pre-litigation settlement agreements,
19 administrative complaints, and decisions and orders issued by USDA ALJs and the Judicial
20 Officer (consent decisions and orders, default decisions, initial decisions and orders, final
21 decisions and orders, and dismissal orders). *Id.* ¶ 16. All categories of records were posted
22 proactively, without waiting for a specific FOIA request. *Id.* ¶ 17. If posted information turned
23 out to be responsive to a FOIA request, APHIS generally referred requesters to the website, rather
24 than processing and releasing records already available on the agency website. *Id.* The agency
25 previously maintained a public search tool, through which anyone could search for information
26 involving the agency’s AWA compliance activities – including inspection reports and research

27
28 ¹ Records that were subject to the prior settlement are now posted on the website.

1 facility annual reports – through its Animal Care Information System (ACIS). *Id.* ¶ 18. APHIS
2 also maintained publicly accessible copies of regulatory correspondence, enforcement records,
3 and adjudicatory records on its website, separate from the search tool. *Id.* ¶ 19.

4 Between 2012 and 2016, APHIS began reviewing a Privacy Act System covering AWA
5 records, concerned that records it made publicly available online may contain information
6 implicating substantial privacy concerns. *Id.* ¶¶ 20-21. The agency decided in November 2016 to
7 temporarily remove certain categories of records from its website to allow a document-by-
8 document review for any personal information that may raise privacy concerns. *Id.* ¶ 23. On
9 February 3, 2017, the agency temporarily removed the ACIS search tool from its website, as well
10 as other categories of information it had previously made available online, to facilitate this
11 comprehensive review. *Id.* ¶¶ 24-25. Immediately thereafter, APHIS began the review process to
12 determine if additional redactions are necessary, and to re-post reviewed documents where
13 appropriate. *Id.* ¶ 26. Nearly three-quarters of Animal Care employees have been involved in
14 this effort to review and re-post documents. *Id.* As of this filing, after devoting almost four
15 thousand staff workhours to this endeavor, the agency has re-posted over twenty thousand records
16 – including all of the research facility annual reports, the entire list of licensees, and a substantial
17 portion of the inspection reports. *Id.* ¶¶ 26-29. The agency has also provided a link to documents
18 it once posted that remain accessible elsewhere, such as adjudicatory decisions available on
19 USDA’s Office of ALJ website. *Id.* ¶ 31. APHIS anticipates expending hundreds of additional
20 staff hours in this ongoing document review process in the coming months. *Id.* ¶¶ 26, 28. At the
21 same time, the agency continues to process FOIA requests for records previously posted online.

22 Plaintiffs, various organizations dedicated to animal welfare, brought this action, seeking
23 an order compelling the agency to restore all removed records to its public website. *See* Compl.
24 (ECF No. 1). Plaintiffs claim that APHIS was required by the Freedom of Information Act
25 (FOIA) to make the removed documents publicly available. *Id.* ¶¶ 44-46. Alternatively,
26 plaintiffs claim that the agency violated the Administrative Procedure Act (APA) by removing
27 records and/or failing to post them on the website. *Id.* ¶¶ 59-72. On March 29, 2017, Plaintiffs
28

1 filed this motion for a preliminary injunction, *see* Pl.’s Mot. for Prelim. Inj. (“Pl. Mot.”) (ECF
 2 No. 17), requiring the agency “to continue its years-long practice of allowing public access to the
 3 continually updated records in the APHIS databases” Pl. Mot. 20. In effect, the relief
 4 sought would compel the agency to immediately and publicly disclose many thousands of records
 5 that the agency has determined could implicate significant privacy concerns in their current form.

ARGUMENT

I. Plaintiffs’ Request for a “Mandatory” Preliminary Injunction That Would Effectively Grant Them Full Relief on the Merits Is “Highly Inappropriate”

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 9 Under any circumstances, a preliminary injunction is “an extraordinary and drastic
 10 remedy” that should not be granted “unless the movant, *by a clear showing*, carries the burden of
 11 persuasion.” *Lopez v. Brewer*, 680 F.3d 1068, 1072 (9th Cir. 2012) (emphasis added). A
 12 plaintiff “must establish that he is likely to succeed on the merits, that he is likely to suffer
 13 irreparable harm in the absence of preliminary relief, that the balance of equities tips in his favor,
 14 and that an injunction is in the public interest.” *Winter v. Nat. Res. Def. Council*, 555 U.S. 7, 20
 15 (2008).

16 Here, plaintiffs seek a highly disfavored “mandatory” preliminary injunction that would
 17 require the agency to take action and alter the status quo. *Garcia v. Google, Inc.*, 786 F.3d 733,
 18 740 (9th Cir. 2015). As worded in their proposed order, plaintiffs seek a preliminary injunction
 19 barring the agency “from enforcing its policy announced on February 3, 2017, blocking access to
 20 Animal Welfare Act records, and requiring USDA to continue its years-long practice of allowing
 21 public access to the continually updated records in the APHIS databases.” (ECF No. 18). In
 22 actual effect, however, the relief sought would compel the agency to immediately and publicly
 23 disclose many thousands of records that the agency has determined could implicate significant
 24 privacy concerns in their current form, and to continue publishing similar records in the future.²

25
 26 ² Plaintiffs’ characterization of the relief sought as merely “prohibitory” is meritless and
 27 based largely on semantic word-play. Contrary to their suggestion, the “last uncontested status”
 28 refers to the status quo “at the time the suit was filed.” *N.D. ex rel. parents acting as guardians ad
 litem v. Hawaii Dept. of Educ.*, 600 F.3d 1104, 1112 n.6 (9th Cir. 2010). Here, the records had
 been removed from the website when the lawsuit was filed, so the injunction would require the

1 Such mandatory preliminary relief should be denied “unless the facts and law clearly favor the
 2 moving party.” *Id.* (citation omitted). Further, such injunctions “are not granted unless extreme
 3 or very serious damage will result and are not issued in doubtful cases.” *Am. Freedom Def.*
 4 *Initiative v. King County*, 796 F.3d 1165, 1173 (9th Cir. 2015) (“*AFDF*”) (citation omitted).

5 Even more problematic, the mandatory relief sought here would effectively grant
 6 plaintiffs full relief on their claims, and is thus not “preliminary” at all. The Ninth Circuit
 7 rejected a very similar preliminary injunction – seeking “judgment on the merits in the guise of
 8 preliminary relief” – calling it “highly inappropriate.” *See Senate of State of Cal. v. Mosbacher*,
 9 968 F.2d 974, 978 (9th Cir. 1992). *See also, e.g., Taiebat v. Scialabba*, 2017 WL 747460, at *3
 10 (N.D. Cal. 2017); *Daily Caller v. U.S. Department of State*, 152 F.Supp.3d 1, 6–7 (D.D.C. 2015).

11 **II. The Mandatory Preliminary Injunction Should Be Denied Because Plaintiffs Cannot**
 12 **Show a Likelihood of Success on the Merits, Let Alone That the Law and Facts**
 13 **“Clearly Favor” Their Position**

14 **A. Plaintiffs Cannot Prevail On Their FOIA Claim**

15 FOIA creates three different types of disclosure obligations under 5 U.S.C. §§ 552(a)(1),
 16 (a)(2), and (a)(3). The most frequently litigated, § 552(a)(3), provides that agencies must “make .
 17 . . records promptly available” in response to specific requests. In addition, FOIA contains two
 18 provisions requiring government agencies to affirmatively make certain types of records available
 19 to the public. *See id.* § 552(a)(1), (2). The affirmative disclosure provision at issue here –
 20 sometimes called the “reading room” provision – requires agencies to make certain records
 21 “available for public inspection” by electronic means, *id.* § 552(a)(2), typically on an agency
 22 website. FOIA vests jurisdiction in federal district courts to enjoin an “agency from withholding
 23 agency records and to order the production of any agency records improperly withheld from the
 24 complainant.” *Id.* § 552(a)(4)(B). However, plaintiffs seeking to enforce disclosure obligations
 25 under FOIA must first submit a request for the records sought and exhaust their remedies with
 26 respect to that request. *See In re Steele*, 799 F.2d 461, 466 (9th Cir. 1986).

27 _____
 28 status quo to be altered by reposting those records that have not already been reposted. In any
 event, the relief plaintiffs seek would require the agency to “take action.” *Garcia*, 786 F.3d at 740.

1 **1. The Court Lacks Jurisdiction to Grant the Relief Sought Because**
 2 **FOIA Does Not Authorize Courts to Order Publication of Records**

3 At the outset, plaintiffs' claim must fail because FOIA does not entitle them to the relief
 4 sought here, namely, an order requiring the agency to make records available to the public. The
 5 judicial review provision, 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(4)(B), "is aimed at relieving the injury suffered by
 6 the individual complainant, not by the general public." *Kennecott Utah Copper Corp. v. U.S.*
 7 *Dep't of the Interior*, 88 F.3d 1191, 1203 (D.C. Cir. 1996). And contrary to Plaintiffs'
 8 suggestion, *see* Pl. Mot. 5, this provision only "authorizes district courts to order the 'production'
 9 of agency documents, not 'publication.'" *Id.* (affirming dismissal of claim under § 552(a)(1) for
 10 lack of jurisdiction). Thus, "a court has no authority under FOIA to issue an injunction
 11 mandating that an agency 'make available for public inspection' documents subject to the
 12 reading-room provision." *CREW v. DOJ*, 846 F.3d 1235, 1243 (D.C. Cir. 2017).

13 **2. Plaintiffs Cannot Invoke the Court's FOIA Jurisdiction Because They**
 14 **Do Not Show that the Records Have Been "Improperly Withheld"**

15 Under § 552(a)(4)(B), federal jurisdiction in a FOIA case depends on a showing that an
 16 agency has "improperly withheld" agency records from the plaintiff. *Kissinger v. Reporters*
 17 *Comm. for Freedom of the Press*, 445 U.S. 136, 150 (1980); *see also Spurlock v. FBI*, 69 F.3d
 18 1010, 1015 (9th Cir. 1995). Plaintiffs cannot make this threshold jurisdictional showing. They
 19 do not assert, as FOIA plaintiffs typically do, that the agency violated an obligation under
 20 § 552(a)(3) to produce records in response to a specific request. Rather, they assert that the
 21 agency violated FOIA's reading room provision by removing records from the agency's website
 22 that were previously posted there. Pl. Mot. 4-6. But they cite no categorical disclosure obligation
 23 under § 552(a)(2) that could apply here and thus cannot show any "improper[]" withholding
 24 sufficient to invoke the Court's FOIA jurisdiction.

25 **a. Plaintiffs have not shown that § 552(a)(2)(D) requires disclosure**

26 Plaintiffs wrongly assert that all previously posted records are subject to mandatory
 27 disclosure under § 552(a)(2)(D) because they are "frequently requested." That provision applies
 28 only to records that: (1) have previously "been released to any person" in response to a FOIA

1 request under § 552(a)(3); and (2) the agency determines “have become or are likely to become
2 the subject of subsequent requests for substantially the same records,” or if the records have been
3 requested “[three] or more times.” 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(2)(D). Thus, no matter how “frequently
4 requested” a record might be, § 552(a)(2)(D) does not even potentially require disclosure until it
5 is actually processed and “released” in response to a FOIA request under § 552(a)(3). *See id.* §
6 552(a)(2)(D)(i). Plaintiffs do not show that the removed records meet this threshold requirement.

7 Nor could they make such a showing. By their own admission, the agency posted these
8 categories of records “routinely,” *i.e.*, without waiting until they were specifically requested,
9 processed, and released to a person under § 552(a)(3). Pl. Mot. 4-5; Compl. ¶ 1; Shea Decl. ¶ 17
10 (explaining that the records were posted proactively). And there is no suggestion that these
11 records were “released” in response to a request *after* being posted on the website.³ To the
12 contrary, the Complaint suggests that before the records were removed from the website, they
13 never needed to be requested (let alone processed and released) because they were already easily
14 accessible to the public. And even when they were requested, Plaintiffs acknowledge, the agency
15 responded “*not* by releasing the records to the requester,” but by simply directing the requester to
16 the website. *See* Pl. Mot. 7 (emphasis added); Shea Decl. ¶ 17.

17 Plaintiffs cite a 2009 letter from APHIS leadership as “evidence” the records were subject
18 to mandatory disclosure under § 552(a)(2)(D), *see* Pl. Mot. 6, but that letter in no way suggests
19 that such posting was legally required. Quite the opposite, it emphasizes that posting records on
20 the agency website has been part of a broader effort to go *beyond* what FOIA legally requires, in
21 the interest of promoting transparency and making records “available online even before we
22 receive a single FOIA request for them.” *See* USDA, APHIS’ Commitment to Transparency,
23 <https://go.usa.gov/x58Mm> (last visited Apr. 26, 2017). It cited the President’s statement that
24 agencies “need not only comply with FOIA, but should work to share information proactively on

25 _____
26 ³ Even if there were scattered instances in which a particular record or records were processed and
27 released in response to individual FOIA requests, it would not necessarily mean those records met
28 all the requirements of 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(2)(D). Nor would it address the defects in plaintiffs’
claim that a mandatory disclosure obligation under that provision applies *categorically*, to all
records previously posted, and to all similar records that are obtained and generated in the future.

1 policies and decisions so that members of the public don't have to use the FOIA to obtain
2 information held by their Government."⁴ Furthermore, even if some agency officials have in the
3 past believed that § 552(a)(2)(D) legally required the agency to post any of these categories of
4 records, *see* Pl. Mot. 6 (pointing to 2009 letter and 2014 FOIA response letter), that *belief* would
5 not change the scope of the agency's *actual legal obligation* under the provision.⁵

6 Perversely, plaintiffs ask the Court to conclude that such proactive disclosure could itself
7 trigger a mandatory obligation under § 552(a)(2)(D). They assert that by posting these records on
8 the website and directing FOIA requesters to them, the agency has in effect "previously released"
9 those records in response to "any relevant FOIA requests." Pl. Mot. 7. But directing FOIA
10 requesters to publicly available records does not somehow convert those already-public records
11 into records that have been "previously released" in response to a FOIA request. Nor does the act
12 of referring requesters to the website constitute a "release" of the already-public records, as
13 plaintiffs' own brief essentially admits. *See id.*

14 Plaintiffs' argument is not only contrary to the plain language of § 552(a)(2)(D), but it
15 would penalize agencies for engaging in proactive disclosures that go beyond what FOIA legally

16 ⁴ *See also* Presidential Memorandum for Heads of Executive Departments and Agencies
17 Concerning Transparency and Open Government, 74 Fed. Reg. 4685 (Jan. 21, 2009); Memorandum
18 of the Attorney General for Heads of Executive Departments and Agencies Concerning the
19 Freedom of Information Act, (March 19, 2009), at 3, available at,
<https://www.justice.gov/sites/default/files/ag/legacy/2009/06/24/foia-memo-march2009.pdf> (last
20 visited Apr. 26, 2017).

21 ⁵ Defendant acknowledges that certain agency officials have, in the past, understood the agency's
22 obligations under § 552(a)(2)(D) to sweep more broadly. For example, the administrative record
23 submitted in the *HSUS* case, discussed above, contains materials suggesting that some agency
24 officials understood § 552(a)(2)(D) to apply to records without regard to whether they were
25 previously released in response to a request. *See HSUS*, 1:05-cv-00197 (DDC), ECF No. 72-2 (Oct.
26 1, 2008). That view of the provision was (and is) inconsistent with the statutory language, as
27 discussed above, and with guidance issued around that time by the Department of Justice's Office
28 of Information Policy ("OIP"), which is responsible for overseeing agency compliance with FOIA.
In 2003, OIP sought to correct misperceptions about the scope of § 552(a)(2)(D) and issued
guidance clarifying that the provision "does not even come into play until an agency processes and
discloses records under the Act in the first place." FOIA Post (2003): FOIA Counselor Q&A:
"Frequently Requested" Records (explaining that if agencies post records before receiving "even a
first FOIA request," then the posting is essentially "discretionary," and cautioning agencies not to
"confuse it with action taken under subsection (a)(2)(D)") [https://www.justice.gov/oip/blog/foia-
post-2003-foia-counselor-qa-frequently-requested-records](https://www.justice.gov/oip/blog/foia-post-2003-foia-counselor-qa-frequently-requested-records) (last visited Apr. 26, 2017).

1 requires. If the mere act of posting records online could trigger a mandatory legal obligation
 2 under FOIA, preventing the agency from ever revisiting the decision, agencies would likely
 3 become more circumspect and reluctant to engage in the proactive disclosures. The argument
 4 would also subvert the explicit will of Congress, which included this threshold requirement to
 5 ensure that the disclosure obligation created under (a)(2)(D) would be no more expansive than the
 6 agency’s pre-existing obligations to respond to specific FOIA requests under (a)(3).⁶

7 ***b. Plaintiffs have not shown that § 552(a)(2)(A) requires disclosure***

8 In the alternative, plaintiffs argue that three categories of disputed records – inspection
 9 reports, official warning letters, and voluntary settlement agreements – are subject to mandatory
 10 disclosure under § 552(a)(2)(A). That provision applies to “*final opinions*, including concurring
 11 and dissenting opinions, as well as orders, *made in the adjudication of cases.*” 5 U.S.C.
 12 § 552(a)(2)(A) (emphasis added). As such, it requires disclosure only of decisions that “result
 13 from an adjudicatory process such that [a court] would consider them ‘*final opinions*’ rendered in
 14 the ‘adjudication of [a] case [].’” *American Immigration Lawyers Ass’n v. EOIR*, 830 F.3d 667,
 15 679 (D.C. Cir. 2016) (“*AILA*”). Further, it applies only to decisions “that ‘constitute the making
 16 of law or policy by an agency’” – *i.e.*, decisions that set some precedent or have some “binding
 17 force on the agency in later decisions” *Id.* (citing *NLRB v. Sears, Roebuck & Co.*, 421 U.S.
 18 132, 153 (1975)). *See also Skelton v. U.S. Postal Serv.*, 678 F.2d 35, 40 (5th Cir. 1982)
 19 (explaining that this FOIA requirement was designed to “help the citizen find agency statements
 20 ‘having precedential significance’ when he becomes involved in ‘a controversy with an agency’”) (quoting legislative history).

22 None of the three categories of records Plaintiffs identify reflect decisions of this sort, as
 23 their own description of the records makes clear. *See, e.g.*, Compl. ¶¶ 33-35. Inspection reports,
 24

25 ⁶ *See, e.g.*, S. Rep. No. 104-272, at 13 (1996) (stating that “once released in response to a specific
 26 request under the FOIA, complying with the new requirement of making the previously released
 27 material, even in a redacted form, available for public inspection and copying should not be a
 28 burdensome undertaking”); H.R. Rep. No. 104-795, at 21 (1996), reprinted in 1996 U.S.C.C.A.N.
 3448, 3464 (stating that the provision will “help to reduce the number of multiple FOIA requests
 for the *same records* requiring separate agency responses”) (emphasis added).

1 official warning letters, and voluntary settlement agreements are not the product of an
2 adjudicatory process at all, let alone records that could be deemed “final opinions” made after such a
3 process. Inspection reports document findings of APHIS inspectors who periodically inspect
4 regulated facilities. The content of such reports may later form the evidentiary basis of a
5 violation *alleged* in an official warning letter, voluntary settlement agreement, or administrative
6 complaint, but they do not constitute a determination that a violation occurred. Similarly, official
7 warning letters and voluntary settlement agreements are based on *alleged* violations and reflect
8 pre-adjudicatory actions that serve as *alternatives* to the initiation of a formal adjudicative
9 proceeding. Shea Decl. ¶¶ 4, 9-13; *see also* Compl. ¶ 35. As they are not part of an adjudicatory
10 process, they are not subject to affirmative disclosure under § 552(a)(2)(a).

11 Nor do inspection reports, official warning letters and voluntary settlement agreements
12 reflect the sorts of agency action that “constitute the making of law or policy by an agency.”
13 *AILA*, 830 F.3d at 679. They have no binding or precedential effect on the agency, nor any effect
14 on regulated entities other than the one involved. For that reason as well, they are not subject to
15 mandatory disclosure under § 552(a)(2)(A). Plaintiffs’ reliance on *Willamette Industries, Inc. v.*
16 *U.S.*, 689 F.2d 865 (9th Cir. 1982), is misplaced, because, *inter alia*, the Ninth Circuit explicitly
17 did not reach the issue of whether § 552(a)(2) applied to the records at issue. *Id.* at 869 n. 3
18 (because the court ordered production, not publication, “it is irrelevant whether the requested
19 documents are final opinions required to be disclosed under 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(2)”).

20 **3. Plaintiffs Have Not Shown That They Properly Exhausted Their** 21 **Administrative Remedies Under FOIA**

22 Plaintiffs also cannot establish jurisdiction because they do not claim to have exhausted
23 their administrative remedies for a properly submitted FOIA request seeking the records in
24 dispute. *See In re Steele*, 799 F.2d at 466. Contrary to plaintiffs’ apparent assumption, even a
25 plaintiff seeking judicial enforcement of affirmative-disclosure provisions must submit a proper
26 FOIA request and exhaust available administrative remedies under the statute prior to bringing
27 suit. *See id.* (“The complainant must request specific information in accordance with published
28 administrative procedures, *see* 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(1), (2) & (3), and have the request improperly

1 refused before that party can bring a court action under the FOIA.”). Indeed, the statute’s plain
2 language contemplates submission of requests under all three of FOIA’s access provisions –
3 including the reading room provision, § 552(a)(2) – and establishes procedures for exhausting
4 administrative remedies with respect to each such request. *See* 5 USC § 552(a)(6)(A) (setting
5 forth time limits applicable to any “request for records made under” § 552(a)(1), (2) or (3)).⁷

6 Plaintiffs do not allege, much less demonstrate, that they complied with these
7 jurisdictional prerequisites. *See, e.g., Benhoff v. DOJ*, 2016 WL 6962859, at *4 (S.D. Cal. 2016).
8 Although the complaint alleges that plaintiffs submitted some requests for different types of
9 removed records at unspecified times, it does not tie the relief sought in this case to any of those
10 requests, nor does it suggest that any of those requests were exhausted prior to bringing this suit.
11 Compl. ¶ 48. Indeed, it appears impossible that plaintiffs *could* have exhausted their remedies in
12 the 20 calendar days between the time records were removed from the website on February 3 and
13 the time this suit was filed on February 23. *See* 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(6)(A)(i) & (ii), (C)(i).

14 Plaintiffs assert that exhaustion of remedies is too time-consuming, but Congress
15 anticipated and addressed such problems in the statute, allowing requesters to file suit
16 immediately if their requests are left unaddressed for more than 20 working days. *Id.* Congress
17 even went further, allowing requesters to seek expedited processing if there are sufficiently
18 compelling reasons why their particular requests should be prioritized over the requests of others.
19 *See id.* § 552(a)(6)(E). If plaintiffs feel they qualify for such prioritized treatment, they should

21 ⁷ *See also Irons v. Schuyler*, 465 F.2d 608, 614 (D.C. Cir. 1972) (rejecting claim for records under
22 § 552(a)(2) because plaintiff had not submitted a FOIA request for identifiable records under either
23 § 552(a)(2) or 552(a)(3)); *CREW v. DOJ*, 164 F. Supp. 3d 145, 154 (D.D.C., 2016) (explaining that
24 § 552(a)(2) can be enforced by submitting a request under either § 552(a)(3) or “directly under
25 Section 552(a)(2), so long as the request, like those made under Section 552(a)(3), is for
26 ‘identifiable’ records”), *aff’d*, 846 F.3d 1235 (D.C. Cir. 2017) (citation omitted); *CREW*, 846 F.3d
27 at 1240–41 (quoting with approval *Irons*’ statement that categories of records “referred to in Section
28 552(a)(2), *when properly requested*, are required to be made available, and . . . such requirement is
judicially enforceable without further identification under Section 552(a)(3), even though the
agency has failed to make them available as required by Section 552(a)(2)”) (emphasis added);
Prisology, Inc. v. Federal Bureau of Prisons, 852 F.3d 1114, at *2 (D.C. Cir. 2017) (stating that in
all cases involving enforcement of § 552(a)(2), “the plaintiff made a request and the agency denied
the request”).

1 seek it through the proper channels, and should do so *before* bringing suit. Instead, they ask the
2 Court to let them bypass the prescribed process altogether and jump to the front of the line –
3 ahead of all other FOIA requesters who (unlike Plaintiffs) have undertaken to exhaust their
4 administrative remedies. *See* 7 C.F.R. § 1.8(d) (stating that requests are processed on a “first-in,
5 first-out” basis); *Morales v. Secretary, U.S. Dep’t of State*, No. 16-cv-1333, 2016 WL 6304654, at
6 *4 (D.D.C. Oct. 27, 2016) (stating that relief “would harm others waiting for their FOIA requests
7 to be processed, and would erode the proper functioning of the FOIA system”). This request is
8 especially improper given that the agency is already engaged in a review process designed to
9 ensure records will be reposted to the extent possible, and that process has already resulted in
10 many thousands of the records being reposted. *See* Shea Decl. ¶¶ 28-31.

11 **4. Plaintiffs’ FOIA Claim Is Not Ripe**

12 For similar reasons, Plaintiffs’ FOIA claim is not ripe. Determining ripeness “requir[es]
13 [a court] to evaluate both the fitness of the issues for judicial decision and the hardship to the
14 parties of withholding court consideration.” *Abbott Labs. v. Gardner*, 387 U.S. 136, 149 (1967).
15 “A controversy is ripe when a plaintiff is challenging a final agency action, the issue poses purely
16 legal questions and plaintiff has demonstrated hardship absent review.” *Long v. Bureau of*
17 *Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms*, 964 F. Supp. 494, 498 (D.D.C. 1997) (finding the issue of
18 plaintiffs’ requester status with regard to future requests not ripe absent pending FOIA fee waiver
19 request). Plaintiffs’ FOIA claim meets none of these prerequisites.

20 First, the decision challenged does not reflect the agency’s final decision about what
21 records should be made available on the website, and it is thus clearly not fit for judicial review.
22 In “cases involving administrative agencies,” the ripeness doctrine “recognize[s] that judicial
23 action should be restrained when other political branches have acted or will act.” *Principal Life*
24 *Ins. Co. v. Robinson*, 394 F.3d 665, 670 (9th Cir. 2004). And “the interest in postponing review
25 is strong if the agency position whose validity is in issue is not in fact the agency’s final
26 position.” *Gulf Oil Corp. v. Brock*, 778 F.2d 834, 841 (D.C. Cir. 1985). This is especially true
27 where, as here, the agency is in the midst of an ongoing review process that judicial review would
28

1 only serve to disrupt. Other ripeness factors only reinforce the conclusion that Plaintiffs' claim is
2 not fit for judicial review: For one, it does not involve "purely legal" issues. The applicability of
3 § 552(a)(2) turns on factual questions about whether particular records have been "released" to a
4 person in response to a specific FOIA request under § 552(a)(3), and whether those same released
5 records have been or likely will be requested three or more times. And even if § 552(a)(2)
6 applied to some records, the scope of any such obligation would still require litigation of factual
7 bases for any exemption claims by the agency.

8 Any attempt to resolve those factual issues on this complaint would be judicially
9 unmanageable, and would clearly "benefit from a more concrete setting." *Am. Petrol. Inst. v.*
10 *EPA*, 683 F.3d 382, 387 (D.C. Cir. 2012). The universe of records at issue is ill-defined and
11 ever-changing, because the ongoing review process means that records may move at any time
12 from the "removed" to the "reposted" category, and because plaintiffs seek prospective relief with
13 respect to future records not yet obtained or created. At the very least, judicial review of such
14 issues would be on "much surer footing in the context of a specific" FOIA request, as courts have
15 "routinely" recognized. *Gulf Oil Corp.*, 778 F.2d at 842.

16 Finally, plaintiffs would suffer no cognizable hardship from delayed review. The agency
17 has already reposted many records as a result of its ongoing review process, and has stated that it
18 will continue to do so consistent with the need to address privacy concerns. Plaintiffs are also
19 free to file a FOIA request and seek judicial review if they are dissatisfied with the response.

20 **5. Plaintiffs Are Unlikely to Prevail on the Merits of Their FOIA Claim**

21 Finally, even if the Court were inclined to allow plaintiffs' jurisdictionally defective FOIA
22 claims to proceed, plaintiffs could not show they will likely prevail on the merits of that claim
23 such that they would be entitled to the relief sought here. That claim rests on the unspoken
24 assumption that plaintiffs are not only entitled to the records they seek, but that they are
25 *immediately* entitled to *all* such records. Nothing in § 552(a)(2) suggests that any legal
26 obligations arising from the provision are so rigid and inflexible. The agency has determined that
27 the records should be reviewed offline to ensure adequate protection of information that may not
28

1 be appropriate for public disclosure. Shea Decl. ¶¶ 20-26. Even if the agency had previously
2 released these records in response to FOIA requests, as § 552(a)(2)(D) requires, that provision
3 does not prohibit an agency from ever revising the information disclosed in those records and
4 making corrections where appropriate. Of course, FOIA does contain certain statutory timelines,
5 but they are triggered by submission of a FOIA request, and plaintiffs here do not tie the relief
6 sought to such a request. And even if they did, the failure to meet statutory timelines simply
7 means that a plaintiff may file suit, not that the agency must immediately turn over all requested
8 records. *See CREW v. FEC*, 711 F.3d 180, 188-89 (D.C. Cir. 2013). Indeed, even where a
9 plaintiff is granted expedited processing, FOIA contemplates that an agency will be allowed
10 adequate time to review and process records, as necessary. *See, e.g., Daily Caller*, 152 F.Supp.3d
11 at 3. In short, plaintiffs have failed to show that the facts and law “clearly favor” their claim of an
12 immediately enforceable entitlement to all previously posted records.

13 **B. Plaintiffs’ APA Claims are Not Likely to Succeed**

14 Unwilling to abide by the statutory constraints Congress set forth in FOIA, plaintiffs
15 assert two claims under the APA, as alternative grounds for the same relief. Count Two asserts
16 an APA claim for allegedly unlawful “failure to act,” namely, to make available categories of
17 records that in plaintiffs’ view are required to be posted on the website. Compl. ¶ 59. Count
18 Three asserts that the agency’s “removal of enforcement records” and “databases” from the
19 website is as arbitrary and capricious. *Id.* ¶¶ 72-73. Regardless of how they frame the APA
20 claims, however, plaintiffs cannot prevail on the merits.

21 **1. Judicial Review Is Unavailable Under the APA Because FOIA**
22 **Provides an Adequate Remedy For Plaintiffs’ Alleged Injuries**

23 Congress did not intend the APA to “duplicate existing procedures for review of agency
24 action” or “provide additional judicial remedies in situations where . . . Congress has provided
25 special and adequate review procedures.” *Bowen v. Massachusetts*, 487 U.S. 879, 903 (1988)
26 (citation omitted). Thus, the APA provides judicial review of “final agency action *for which*
27 *there is no other adequate remedy in a court . . .*” 5 U.S.C. § 704 (emphasis added). *See also*
28 *City of Oakland v. Lynch*, 798 F.3d 1159, 1166-67 (9th Cir. 2015). To be deemed “adequate,” an

1 alternative remedy need not provide relief identical to relief under the APA, so long as it offers
2 relief of the “same genre.” *See Garcia v. McCarthy*, 2014 WL 187386, at *13 (N.D. Cal. 2014)
3 (Orrick, J.) (citing *Garcia v. Vilsack*, 563 F.3d 519, 522 (D.C. Cir. 2009)). For example, a
4 remedy will be deemed adequate “where a statute affords an opportunity for de novo district-
5 court review” of the agency action being challenged. *El Rio Santa Cruz Neighborhood Health*
6 *Ctr. v. HHS*, 396 F.3d 1265, 1270 (D.C. Cir. 2005). Relief also will be adequate “where there is a
7 private cause of action against a third party otherwise subject to agency regulation.” *Id.* at 1271.

8 In this case, FOIA clearly provides an “adequate” remedy that precludes APA review.
9 Plaintiffs seek access to records purportedly subject to FOIA’s affirmative disclosure provisions.
10 Regardless of whether they characterize the cause of their injury as the agency’s failure to
11 “affirmative[ly]” make records publicly available, or its “wholesale removal” of databases
12 containing those records, *see* Pl. Mot. 9, plaintiffs’ claimed injury is essentially the same – *viz.*, an
13 inability to access the records they seek. FOIA clearly provides an adequate remedy for that
14 claimed injury. It is undisputed that plaintiffs could submit a request for those records and, if
15 dissatisfied with the agency’s response, seek *de novo* review under FOIA in district court. *See* 5
16 U.S.C. § 552(a)(4)(B). Thus, FOIA provides plaintiffs with a private right of action and an
17 opportunity for de novo review in district court, amply demonstrating Congress’s intent to create
18 an adequate remedy that bars APA review. *See Garcia*, 563 F.3d at 523.

19 Indeed, the D.C. Circuit recently reached precisely that conclusion, explaining that it had
20 “little doubt that FOIA offers an ‘adequate remedy’” for violations of § 552(a)(2). *CREW*, 846
21 F.3d at 1245 (citing 5 U.S.C. § 704). Considering the statute as a whole, the FOIA offers plaintiff
22 “precisely the kind of ‘special and adequate review procedure[]’ that Congress immunized from
23 ‘duplic [ative]’ APA review.” *Id.* at 1246 (citing *Bowen*, 487 U.S. at 903 (alterations in
24 original)). The D.C. Circuit also squarely rejected the suggestion – advanced by plaintiffs here –
25 that FOIA is “inadequate” because it only authorizes courts to require production to a particular
26 complainant, and does not authorize them to order agencies to make records publicly available on
27 its website or in a database. *Id.* at 1246. So too here, remedies “may be more arduous, and less
28

1 effective in providing systemic relief,” but “situation-specific litigation affords an adequate, even
2 if imperfect, remedy.” *Garcia*, 2014 WL 187386, at *11 (citation omitted).

3 **2. Plaintiffs Do Not Challenge Any Final Agency Action Subject to**
4 **Judicial Review Under the APA**

5 The APA limits judicial review to final agency action. *See* 5 U.S.C. § 704. Finality “is a
6 jurisdictional requirement to obtaining judicial review under the APA” *Fairbanks N. Star*
7 *Borough v. U.S. Army Corps of Eng’s*, 543 F.3d 586, 591 (9th Cir. 2008). To be “final,” the
8 action must “mark the consummation of the agency’s decisionmaking process” and “must be one
9 by which rights or obligations have been determined, or from which legal consequences will
10 flow.” *Bennett v. Spear*, 520 U.S. 154, 177-78 (1997) (citations and internal quotations omitted).

11 The challenged action here meets neither requirement. First, removal of access to the
12 records, whether by removing the searchable database or removing records from the website, does
13 not reflect the consummation of any decision-making process about whether and how records
14 should be made available on the website. The agency made clear the decisions were part of an
15 “ongoing review process,” and that “adjustments may be made” because “access decisions were
16 not final.” *See* Shea Decl. ¶¶ 25-26. These are not merely “labels,” they are accurate descriptions
17 of what the agency has *actually* been doing. *See id.* ¶¶ 23-31. The agency has devoted thousands
18 of hours to this ongoing review, and has now reposted many thousands of the records that were
19 removed. *See id.* ¶¶ 28-31. APHIS is also making programming modifications to the public
20 search tool to ensure privacy concerns are reliably addressed. *Id.* ¶ 24.

21 Second, the temporary removal of records from the website does not determine any rights
22 or obligations or result in legal consequences. If it did, every modification to the website could
23 be said to have this effect. While the removal may mean that plaintiffs cannot (at least not at this
24 moment) access all the records previously available on the website, that is a “practical effect” of
25 what the agency did, not a “legal consequence.”⁸ *Fairbanks N. Star*, 543 at 596.

26 _____
27 ⁸ Plaintiffs’ reliance on *Navajo Nation v. U.S. Dep’t of Interior*, 819 F.3d 1084, 1091 (9th Cir.
28 2016), is misplaced. There the court found the challenged decision was final not because it delayed
the Navajo Nation’s access to certain items by a period of months, as plaintiffs assert, but because

3. Plaintiffs' APA Claims Fail for Numerous Other Reasons

Plaintiffs also assert that they are entitled to APA review (under the “arbitrary and capricious” standard) even if § 552(a)(2) does not require disclosure. Pl. Mot. 11. To the contrary, the absence of a disclosure obligation under FOIA means that plaintiffs would lack Article III standing to bring an APA claim at all. An “informational injury” can give rise to standing only if plaintiffs have been deprived of information to which they are statutorily entitled. *See, e.g., Wilderness Soc’y, Inc. v. Rey*, 622 F.3d 1251, 1258-59 (9th Cir. 2010). Further, the absence of a disclosure obligation under FOIA also means there is “no law to apply” under the APA, and it is thus “committed to agency discretion” rather than subject to judicial review. *State of Cal.*, 968 F.2d at 976 (reversing preliminary injunction compelling disclosure because, absent a disclosure obligation under FOIA or other law, decision not to release information is committed to agency discretion and unreviewable under APA). Finally, even if APA review of the decision to temporarily remove the records were possible, plaintiffs could not obtain the relief sought here, namely, an order requiring the agency to make the removed records public and to continue “updat[ing]” the website and/or database with new records. When agency action is set aside as arbitrary and capricious, the only proper course is to remand the matter to the agency for further review. *See San Luis & Delta-Mendota Water Auth. v. Jewell*, 747 F.3d 581, 602 (9th Cir. 2014). That, of course, is precisely what the agency is already doing in the ongoing review process.

III. Plaintiffs Have Not Established That Irreparable Harm, Let Alone Extreme or Very Serious Damage, Will Result Absent the Mandatory Preliminary Injunction

Since plaintiffs’ have not shown a likelihood of success on the merits of their claims, and certainly not that the facts and law “clearly favor” their position, there is no need to consider the remaining factors under *Winter*. *See, e.g., Google, Inc.*, 786 F.3d at 740. In any event, those factors likewise support denial of the preliminary injunction.

Plaintiffs have not demonstrated irreparable harm, let alone shown that “extreme or very serious damage will result” unless the Court grants their request for a broad, and highly

it constituted a “legal determination” of the Navajo Nation’s “property interests” in those items. *Id.* at 1091-92. The records removal here does not give rise to any such legal consequences.

1 disfavored, mandatory preliminary injunction. *AFDI*, 796 F.3d at 1173 (citation omitted)); *see*
2 *also Daily Caller*, 152 F. Supp. 3d at 6 (noting, in denying preliminary injunction, that request for
3 accelerated FOIA production was “striking both in its mandatory nature and in the scope of
4 preliminary relief the plaintiff requests”). Certainly, they do not carry their burden of persuasion
5 “by a clear showing,” as they are required to do. *Lopez*, 680 F.3d at 1072.

6 Plaintiffs spill much ink claiming that access to records from the website is essential to
7 their advocacy work, *see* Pl. Mot. 14-18, but they never acknowledge the many thousands of
8 records that APHIS has already reposted on the agency’s website as a result of its ongoing review
9 process. Indeed, before plaintiffs filed their preliminary injunction motion, the agency had
10 already restored access to over 20,000 records, including approximately 10,000 inspection reports
11 from the last three years, as well as all previously-posted research facility annual reports. Shea
12 Decl. ¶ 28. Plaintiffs do not explain why the thousands of records that have been restored to the
13 agency website are of no real use to them, but those that remain currently unavailable are
14 somehow “critical to [their] mission.” Pl. Mot. 13. Nor do plaintiffs attempt to differentiate
15 between the categories of records that were previously posted in attempting to explain their
16 alleged injuries. They instead ask the Court to infer, from only a few specific examples of
17 records that were taken offline, that they will sustain injury if every single category of records is
18 not immediately reposted. Moreover, the notion that plaintiffs will suffer immediate irreparable
19 harm is substantially undermined by the fact that these categories of records have not always been
20 available on the agency’s website, evidently without any serious consequence for plaintiffs. For
21 example, official warning letters and pre-litigation settlement agreements have been posted only
22 since 2010, *see* Shea Decl. ¶ 16, and yet plaintiffs do not claim that they were unable to advance
23 their missions before then.

24 **A. Plaintiffs’ Claimed Economic Injuries Do Not Constitute Irreparable Harm**

25 Plaintiffs wrongly claim they are irreparably injured by the need to divert resources to
26 filing FOIA requests, and that sovereign immunity makes those losses irretrievable. Plaintiffs cite
27 *Havens Realty* to suggest that diversion of resources is an injury, but that case addressed Article
28

1 III standing, and plaintiffs cite nothing to show that their own resource allocation decisions could
2 constitute the sort of injury that justifies a preliminary injunction. Pl. Mot. 13. *See Associated*
3 *Gen. Contractors of Cal., Inc. v. Coal. for Econ. Equity*, 950 F.2d 1401, 1410 (9th Cir. 1991) (to
4 show irreparable harm “[a] plaintiff must do more than merely allege . . . harm sufficient to
5 establish standing” (citation omitted)). Irreparable harm cannot be based on the mere need to
6 avail oneself of an established administrative process, such as the filing of FOIA requests
7 pursuant to 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(3). These are “normal incidents of participation in the agency
8 process,” and clearly do not constitute irreparable harm, “however substantial and
9 nonrecoverable.” *See California ex rel. Christensen v. FTC*, 549 F.2d 1321, 1323 (9th Cir. 1977).
10 Indeed, this is true even where the process requires the plaintiff to pursue further administrative
11 proceedings and litigation. *See id.*

12 In any event, even if economic losses are irretrievable due to sovereign immunity,
13 plaintiffs must show that any unrecoverable losses are “considerable” in order to establish
14 irreparable harm. *Ariz. Hosp. & Healthcare Ass’n v. Betlach*, 865 F. Supp. 2d 984, 998-1000
15 (concluding that loss of \$800,000 was not “considerable,” because it was less than one percent of
16 the plaintiffs’ annual revenues).⁹ Plaintiffs have not shown that any diversion of resources here is
17 “considerable.” While they estimate that each FOIA request takes an hour of staff time to file and
18 more to track, none of the organizations hazards a guess as to the percentage of total staff work
19 hours such diversion constitutes. ALDF asserts without explanation that it will have to file one
20 request per week for records that were previously available online, *see* Pl. Mot. 14, which means
21 one hour of staff time per week. Other plaintiffs do not attempt to calculate how many additional
22 staff hours will be required. Their bare assertion that FOIA requests require manpower is clearly
23 inadequate to demonstrate “considerable” harm. In fact, it is unlikely that the diverted staff time
24 could possibly constitute a “considerable” share of these organizations’ total staff workhours or a
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26 ⁹ Other circuits have likewise rejected the view that economic loss whose recovery is barred
27 by sovereign immunity are irreparable *per se* and instead “require that the economic harm be
28 significant, even where it is irretrievable because a defendant has sovereign immunity.” *Air Transp.*
Ass’n of Am., Inc. v. Export-Import Bank of U.S., 840 F. Supp. 2d 327, 335 (D.D.C. 2012).

1 “considerable” budget expenditure, because the information sought under FOIA, as plaintiffs
2 themselves acknowledge, is used to *aid* in their primary mission-supporting endeavors: advocacy,
3 litigation, public awareness campaigns, and the like. In the case of ALDF, one hour per week is
4 likely a mere fraction of the workload of a few staff persons within a large and multifaceted
5 organization with 170,000 members. Nothing Plaintiffs submit suggests otherwise. ALDF’s
6 estimate, moreover, assumes that the records will *remain* unavailable online, ignoring APHIS’s
7 ongoing efforts to repost them after appropriate review. *See* Shea Decl. ¶¶ 26-31.

8 **B. Plaintiffs’ Non-economic, Informational Injuries Are Not Irreparable**

9 Similarly unavailing is plaintiffs’ claim that their missions will be frustrated by lack of
10 *immediate* access to all information about regulated entities’ AWA compliance. CAPS and
11 ALDF point to their ongoing advocacy efforts and litigation about the Barkworks pet store chain,
12 which they believe will be rendered more difficult absent immediate access to inspection reports.
13 But courts have long held that “a movant’s general interest in being able to engage in an ongoing
14 public debate using information that it has requested under FOIA is not sufficient to establish that
15 irreparable harm will occur unless the movant receives immediate access to that information.”
16 *Elec. Privacy Info. Ctr. v. Dep’t of Justice*, 15 F. Supp. 3d 32, 46-47 (D.D.C. 2014) (“*EPIC*”); *see*
17 *also Judicial Watch, Inc. v. Dep’t of Homeland Sec.*, 514 F. Supp. 2d 7 (D.D.C. 2007) (rejecting
18 claim that delayed access to records irreparably harms advocacy group’s ability to inform the
19 public).

20 Plaintiffs do not identify any impending deadline or other time-sensitive reason why the
21 Court should compel immediate disclosure to all disputed records. Where courts have found
22 irreparable harm from FOIA delays it is because “Congress is considering legislation” related to
23 the requested records, and “delayed disclosure of the requested materials may cause irreparable
24 harm to a vested constitutional interest” of public participation in the congressional process.
25 *Elec. Frontier Found. v. Office of the Dir. of Nat’l. Intelligence*, 542 F. Supp. 2d 1181, 1187
26 (N.D. Cal. 2008); *Elec. Frontier Found. v. Office of Dir. of Nat. Intelligence*, 2007 WL 4208311,
27 at *7 (N.D. Cal. Nov. 27, 2007) (explaining that “irreparable harm can exist in FOIA cases”
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1 where the requested records concern “issues of vital national importance [that] cannot be restarted
2 or wound back” (citation omitted)); *cf. Sai v. Transportation Sec. Admin.*, 54 F. Supp. 3d 5, 10-11
3 (D.D.C. 2014) (rejecting claim that FOIA delay would irreparably harm FOIA requester because
4 he “provide[d] conclusory allegations . . . but no evidence that” the specific records requested
5 would be “vital” for any ongoing public proceeding, such as a “congressional or agency decision-
6 making process requiring public input” (citation omitted)). Plaintiffs here do not contend that the
7 information they seek will be rendered irrelevant if not released “immediately.” That the
8 information is potentially of public value, and that Plaintiffs would like – even for reasons arising
9 out of their core missions – to access it immediately is not enough to establish irreparable harm.

10 Indeed, “under FOIA, it is difficult for a plaintiff to demonstrate ‘irreparable harm’ that is
11 in fact ‘beyond remediation’ because he is entitled to obtain all responsive and non-exempt
12 documents at the conclusion of the litigation.” *Sai*, 54 F. Supp. 3d at 10 (citation omitted). The
13 claim that a FOIA requester “will be irreparably harmed unless [he] receives the requested
14 records quickly so that the public can participate fully in the ongoing debate is . . . fundamentally
15 flawed because it ignores the well-established statutory FOIA process, which permits government
16 agencies to withhold certain requested documents and to engage in subsequent litigation over
17 them, without regard to the resulting production delay.” *EPIC*, 15 F. Supp. 3d at 46; *see also*
18 *Morales*, 2016 WL 6304654, at *3 (explaining that “being denied immediate access” to FOIA-
19 requested “records is not an *irreparable* harm” because of the remedies available under the
20 statutory scheme); *Daily Caller*, 152 F. Supp. 3d at 13-14 (no irreparable harm where injunction
21 would allow them to access materials “only marginally sooner than the agency has indicated it
22 intends to complete its processing of the plaintiff’s request without such compulsion,” and where
23 “some records requested by the plaintiff . . . are available on the State Department’s website”).

24 Finally, even if plaintiffs’ agreements with regulated entities rely on access to online
25 information, any resulting injuries are self-inflicted and therefore not irreparable. *See* 11A
26 Wright & Miller, Fed. Prac. & Proc. Civ. § 2948.1 (3d ed.). For instance, plaintiffs note that the
27 Furry Babies pet store may now need to file FOIA requests to comply with its settlement with
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1 ALDF instead of accessing inspection reports online. *See* Pl. Mot. 15-16. But any harm caused
2 by this change is indirect, resulting from ALDF’s “entering a freely negotiated contractual
3 arrangement” rather than from any government action. *Fish v. Kobach*, 840 F.3d 710, 753 (10th
4 Cir. 2016).

5 **C. Injury to Plaintiffs’ Goodwill Is Too Speculative To Constitute Irreparable**
6 **Harm**

7 Plaintiffs claim they will suffer injury to their member and donor goodwill because they
8 will “be[] unable to provide up-to-date information regarding animal cruelty.” Pl. Mot. 17. As a
9 general matter, a loss of goodwill or reputation *may* support a finding of irreparable harm, so long
10 as it is not too speculative. *See Rent–A–Center, Inc. v. Canyon Television & Appliance Rental,*
11 *Inc.*, 944 F.2d 597, 603 (9th Cir. 1991). However, loss of goodwill or reputation “ha[s] typically
12 supported findings of irreparable harm only where evidence clearly supports such damage.” *See*
13 *Battelle Energy Alliance, LLC v. Southfork Sec. Inc.*, 980 F. Supp. 2d 1211, 1221 (D. Id. 2013)
14 (citation omitted). *See also Goldie’s Bookstore v. Superior Court*, 739 F.2d 466, 472 (9th Cir.
15 1984) (claimed loss of “untold” customers too speculative to justify preliminary injunction).

16 Here, plaintiffs have failed to provide any relevant evidence, beyond simply asserting that
17 they will “lose their relevance” and suffer “diminished charitable donations” without access to the
18 databases, and that such harms will be irreparable because the public “will no longer trust
19 the[m].” Pl. Mot. 18. Yet the speculation subsumed in this assertion is two-fold: First, plaintiffs
20 speculate that they will lose goodwill or charitable donations but provide no indication that either
21 a single donor or member has been lost in the more than two months since the databases were
22 removed. *Bird-B-Gone, Inc. v. Bird Barrier Am., Inc.*, 2013 WL 11730662, at *5 (C.D. Cal. Mar.
23 20, 2013) (“The wide scope of Plaintiff’s assertions of irreparable harm starkly contrasts with the
24 lack of evidence presented to support those assertions. Plaintiff does not provide any *evidence*
25 that it lost customers due to Defendant[] Not a *single* lost sale . . . has been shown.”).
26 Second, Plaintiffs assume that any such losses will be permanent, notwithstanding the ongoing
27 review and reposting of records.

1 Moreover, irreparable loss of goodwill typically occurs when patrons are driven to
2 competitor businesses or organizations. *See, e.g., id.* at *2 (“A loss of business through potential
3 lost sales alone cannot be irreparable harm Loss of goodwill may include a change in the
4 marketplace resulting from customers establishing relationships with” competitors). But
5 plaintiffs could not plausibly contend that their members or donors will be driven to other animal
6 advocacy organizations, to whom the databases are equally inaccessible. Thus, plaintiffs’ proffer
7 of “only high-level assertions, not specific evidence” that the challenged action “has actually *hurt*
8 [plaintiffs’] reputation” is an insufficient demonstration that they “stand[] to suffer immediate,
9 irreparable harm either to [their] reputation or goodwill.” *Finjan, Inc. v. Blue Coat Sys., LLC*,
10 2016 WL 6873541, at *6 (N.D. Cal. Nov. 22, 2016).

11 **IV. The Balance of Hardships and Public Interest Favor the Agency**

12 In assessing the balance of hardships, courts should weigh the impact “on each party of
13 the granting or withholding of the requested relief . . . [and] pay particular regard for the public
14 consequences.” *Winter*, 555 U.S. at 24. Plaintiffs, however, refuse to consider the privacy
15 concerns that motivated APHIS’s temporary removal of the information. They inaccurately assert
16 that the agency’s prior posting of records online was “without consequence.” Pl. Mot. 19. *See*
17 *Shea Decl.* ¶¶ 20-24 (explaining that personal information in online records may allow
18 individuals to be improperly identified by the public, necessitating agency review of the records);
19 *see also Nelson v. Nat’l Aeronautics & Space Admin.*, 506 F.3d 713, 715 (9th Cir. 2007) (balance
20 of hardships tipped in favor of privacy concerns where, “[b]ecause of the nature of the
21 information[,] . . . serious privacy concerns ar[o]se. This court has recognized the right to
22 informational privacy.”). Plaintiffs suggest that if no serious harm has been caused by revealing
23 personal information in the databases, ongoing access to it cannot be a hardship. In other words,
24 if no Tom has Peeped in an open window, why close it? Such an absurd notion of privacy has no
25 grounding in the law. *Cf. American Farm Bureau Federation v. EPA*, 836 F.3d 963, 970-972
26 (8th Cir. 2016) (rejecting in a reverse FOIA action the notion that mere public availability of
27 records about a Concentrated Animal Feeding Operation (CAFO) eliminated any substantial
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1 privacy interest of individuals where the CAFOs were located on the homestead, their
2 information was published in an easily searchable online database, and there was evidence in the
3 record that such individuals had experienced harassment or could have security concerns by the
4 agency’s own admission). Furthermore, the agency *is* aware of serious harm caused by public
5 access to unproven allegations of animal abuse. *See* Declaration of E. John Pollak (describing
6 death threats and harassment directed at employees of research facility – including at their own
7 homes – after publication of later-discredited allegations of animal abuse).

8 In describing their own hardships, plaintiffs incorrectly assert that persons “concerned
9 about animal welfare[] cannot take steps to protect animals,” but in fact any member of the public
10 is free to file a FOIA request for records relevant to “public oversight” efforts. Pl. Mot. 19.
11 Plaintiffs cannot plausibly contend that such efforts will be foreclosed unless all previously
12 available records are posted immediately. This leaves only the economic harm claimed by
13 plaintiffs – time spent filing FOIA requests – which is not irreparable harm at all, and is easily
14 outweighed by the real danger that persons whose identities and addresses are improperly
15 revealed may face, and the public interest in the protection of privacy. *See Golden Gate Rest.*
16 *Ass’n v. City & Cty. of San Francisco*, 512 F.3d 1112, 1126 (9th Cir. 2008) (“Faced with . . . a
17 conflict between financial concerns and preventable human suffering, we have little difficulty
18 concluding that the balance of hardships tips decidedly” in favor of the latter.) (citation omitted).

19 Furthermore, the public interest analysis for the issuance of a preliminary injunction
20 requires us to consider whether there exists some critical public interest that would be injured by
21 the grant of such an injunction. *See Winter*, 555 U.S. at 24. In this case, that critical public
22 interest is the protection of the privacy and safety of individuals whose privacy concerns may be
23 implicated by records posted on online – precisely the sort of public interest about which courts
24 are most concerned in the context of preliminary relief. *See Bernhardt v. Los Angeles County*,
25 339 F.3d 920, 931 (9th Cir. 2003) (“The public interest inquiry primarily addresses impact on
26 non-parties rather than parties.” (citation omitted)); *see also Daily Caller*, 152 F. Supp. 3d at 14
27 (public interest did not favor preliminary injunction where “[m]any of the documents responsive
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1 to the plaintiff's [FOIA] requests likely include individuals' personal information [and r]equiring
2 the agency to process and produce these materials under an abbreviated deadline raises a
3 significant risk of inadvertent disclosure of records properly subject to exemption under FOIA").

4 Preliminary injunctive relief in this case would not advance the public interests behind the
5 FOIA, "to ensure an informed citizenry, vital to the functioning of a democratic society." *John*
6 *Doe Agency v. John Doe Corp.*, 493 U.S. 146 (1989). Because all of the records previously
7 posted online remain available via FOIA request, and thousands are now available online again,
8 there is no danger of an uninformed citizenry. Moreover, rather than requesting the reposting of
9 only those records that are directly relevant to their work, plaintiffs request the restoration of *all*
10 records – including those that are outdated or irrelevant to their advocacy. Such relief sweeps far
11 more broadly than the specific injuries identified, and the countervailing privacy concerns are
12 equally broad. *See Bernhardt*, 339 F.3d at 932 (public interest militated against broader
13 injunction but narrower injunction was permissible). The public interest is not served by an
14 injunction of immodest scope, especially when preliminary remedies are "particularly
15 disfavored." *Am. Freedom Def. Initiative*, 796 F.3d at 1173.

16 CONCLUSION

17 Accordingly, plaintiff's motion for preliminary injunction should be denied.
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Respectfully submitted,
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