



CALIFORNIA
NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY



Sierra Forest Legacy
Protecting Sierra Nevada Forests and Communities



March 27, 2017

Senator Bob Wieckowski, Chair
Budget Subcommittee 2 on Resources,
Environmental Protection, Energy and
Transportation
State Capitol, Room 5019
Sacramento, CA 95814

Assemblyman Richard Bloom, Chair
Budget Subcommittee 3 on Resources and
Transportation
State Capitol, Room 6026
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Expanding Fuel Reduction Efforts Through Increased Support for Prescribed Fire Programs

Dear Senator Wieckowski and Assemblyman Bloom:

We write to urge your subcommittees to augment the Governor's budget proposal to increase the use of prescribed and managed fire to address our current forest health challenge. The careful use of fire to proactively reduce fuel loads is an essential tool in reducing the risk of more intense and damaging fires later.

At the February 27th joint informational hearing on *Tree Mortality, Forest Health, and Prescribed Fire*,ⁱ speakers universally highlighted the fact that California is predominantly a fire-adapted ecosystem and that decades of aggressive fire suppression has led to unnaturally high fuel loads in our forests and other lands. We need to dramatically increase the use of prescribed and managed fire to reduce dangerous fuel loads, restore ecological function, reduce the risk of stand-destroying high severity fires, and lessen the impacts of smoke on public health because of greater control over the timing and intensity of burns.ⁱⁱ

The ongoing tree mortality event in the central and southern Sierra presents a particularly visible example of this, but these issues are affecting the state overall. There are large areas with millions of dead trees which are inaccessible to mechanical fuel reduction efforts, but where prescribed fire could

reduce the heavy loads of surface and ladder fuels that are the primary drivers of extreme fire behavior. There is a short window of time – a few years – where we can use fire to cleanse these areas and reduce fuel loads before the millions of dead trees start to fall down.

Now, with this wet winter and the dead trees still standing, is a critical window of opportunity for low-severity prescribed burns. We urge the budget committee to augment CAL FIRE’s prescribed fire program and explore opportunities to facilitate greater use of prescribed fire through the budget trailer bill language.

There are several ways the budget committee could augment the funding available for prescribed fire:

- Direct some of the \$91 million (FY 2017-18) and \$90 million (FY 2016-17 augmentation) proposed in the Governor’s January budget for addressing tree mortality and drought impact to expand the use of prescribed fire;
- The State Responsibility Area Fee has a substantial balance in that account, and using prescribed fire to reduce risk to homes in the SRA would be an appropriate use of that funding;
- The Timber Regulation and Restoration Fund (AB 1492 lumber assessment revenue) could be used for some of these forest restoration purposes regardless of proximity to SRA;
- General funds could be used to proactively reduce fire risk in these areas, which is likely to save general fund costs on fire suppression.

We look forward to a thoughtful discussion with CAL FIRE and the committee at the upcoming hearing, and working with you to take advantage of this time-sensitive opportunity to reduce risk and increase resilience in our forests.

Sincerely,

Paul Mason
Pacific Forest Trust

Greg Suba
California Native Plant
Society

Tom Wheeler
Environmental Protection
Information Center

Juan Altamirano
Audubon California

Elizabeth Forsburg
The Nature Conservancy

Craig Thomas
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Pamela Flick
Defenders of Wildlife

Ryan Henson
California Wilderness
Coalition

Patricia Puterbaugh
Lassen Forest Preservation
Group

Stan Van Velsor
The Wilderness Society

cc: Senate Budget Subcommittee 2 on Resources, Environmental Protection, Energy and
Transportation
Assembly Budget Subcommittee 3 on Resources and Transportation
Senate Natural Resources and Water Committee
Assembly Natural Resources Committee
California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CalFIRE)

ⁱ <http://antr.assembly.ca.gov/content/2017-hearings>

ⁱⁱ Long, J.W., Tarnay, L.W., North, M.P., 2017. Aligning Smoke Management with Ecological and Public Health Goals. Journal of Forestry 115.