



November 18, 2020

The Honorable Gavin Newsom  
 Governor, State of California  
 1303 10th Street, Suite 1173  
 Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: Request for Additional Urgent Funding for Wildfire Resilience

Dear Governor Newsom:

We are writing to request that, upon the return of the Legislature in January, you seek a supplemental appropriation for landscape health, wildfire risk reduction, and other critical community wildfire preparedness activities for the current fiscal year. A \$500 million appropriation in January would provide the state with critical funding to act immediately to reduce risk of wildfire in California. This immediate infusion of funds would be additional to what your administration would request for the next fiscal year (2021-22), and would provide money sooner to local and state agencies, tribes and other parties currently working to prepare for and prevent worsening fire events.

Over the last four years of fires, California has seen more than 134 direct fatalities, and more than 44 thousand structures, including many homes, destroyed or damaged. Fire behavior in our forests and other natural landscapes is having undesirable effects and we are losing important wildlife and watershed values. Further, the extreme fire behavior is causing long periods of unhealthy air affecting millions of people and causing serious health impacts, including elevated mortality. The

“new normal” of California’s fire season is a source of persistent stress, disruption, and deteriorated quality of life for Californians.

We appreciate the investment and efforts made by your administration this year in fighting the disastrous wildfires amid a pandemic. This has been one of the most difficult years faced by our state. Unfortunately, during the 2020 legislative session, the pandemic and associated recession contributed to the appropriation of insufficient funding for proactive forest health and wildfire risk reduction activities. In particular, CAL FIRE did not receive an allocation to make grants through programs for forest health or fire prevention activities. Given the condition of our fire-prone landscapes, the scale of the problem currently facing our state, and that climate change is exacerbating this problem, we need to significantly increase our efforts to prepare for and reduce the risk of high-severity wildfire, in addition to fire suppression.

An effective approach to reducing fire impacts requires a three-pronged approach. First, we must counter the effects of past fire suppression and return our forests and landscapes to a more natural, fire-resilient condition. For fire-adapted forests an important goal is to increase the safe and beneficial use of fire. Second, we must make individual structures less vulnerable to wildfire through home retrofits and defensible space and improve land use planning. Third, we must support community-scale actions for emergency planning and notification, community resilience, and coordination of local efforts. This approach allows us to apply proven solutions across California’s varied habitats and conditions. Not every wildfire or habitat is the same, which is why we emphasize a mix of solutions to meet the needs of both forests and non-forested communities for both fuel-driven and wind-driven wildfire.

Therefore, we urge that you propose an additional \$500 million in emergency funding for this fiscal year to be expended as detailed below.

- \$150 million for landscape-scale strategies for returning to a more natural, fire-resilient condition with investments in established programs for fuel reduction, thinning, and protection against loss of intact forests. This would include funding to CAL FIRE for three programs: (1) the Forest Health grant program to address the legacy of fire suppression and past management, and restore structural complexity and resilience to forests and other impacted landscapes, including the Forest Legacy grant program that secures permanent commitments to climate-smart forest management; (2) the Fire and Resource Assessment Program (FRAP) to improve monitoring and implementation of treatments that combine thinning and prescribed burning; and (3) the California Forest Improvement Program for grants to small landowners for forest health improvements. This would also include funding for the Sierra Nevada Conservancy for the Sierra Nevada Watershed Improvement Program for investments in watershed and forest health restoration.
- \$50 million to expand the use of prescribed fire to be much more proactive about burning under conditions of our choosing, rather than wildfires burning largely on the hottest, driest, and windiest days of the year. This funding should be distributed to the following programs: (1) CAL FIRE’s prescribed burning program for grants to support partners, including funding to qualified nonprofits to assist in the assessment of biodiversity considerations in accelerating project delivery; (2) the UC Fire Science Consortium for regional and local prescribed fire partnerships to increase cross-jurisdictional burning; (3) the UC Cooperative Extension for additional fire advisors to increase prescribed fire planning, technical support, and landowner education; and (4) \$10 million to the California Natural Resources Agency

for a collaborative tribal burning program that respects tribal sovereignty. After generations of suppressing indigenous cultural burning, it is long past time to partner with and learn from the tribes' life experience and knowledge.

- \$150 million for fire prevention efforts to reduce the risk of wildfire to homes and communities and to increase workforce capacity. Vital programs include CAL FIRE's Fire Prevention grant program to reduce the risk of wildfires to structures and communities through activities such as hazardous fuels reduction, public education, and wildfire prevention planning investments; the California and Local Conservation Corps, to increase the workforce for all forms of risk reduction activities; the California Community Colleges for workforce training in forest restoration; and the Department of Conservation for the Regional Forest and Fire Capacity Program, including to support a prescribed fire training center.
- \$150 million to make communities in fire-prone regions more resilient and to safeguard vulnerable populations. This would include investments from the California Office of Emergency Services' Prehazard Mitigation Grant Program for community protection efforts, including home hardening, defensible spaces, emergency shelters and alert systems. It would also include funding for community resilience and safeguarding vulnerable populations, including community infrastructure, risk reduction buffers, and urban greening and urban forestry to reduce heat islands.

In addition to the above requested action in January, we request that you include \$1.5 billion in your proposed 2021-22 state budget proposal. Funding should be included for a variety of fire prevention and preparedness actions across the landscape, at community scale, and to make individual structures less flammable. We also urge you to support a statewide bond proposal to finance vital fire prevention activities to help ensure a more resilient California. While this letter is specifically focused on an urgent \$500 million supplemental appropriation, we look forward to continuing discussions with your administration and the Legislature about the fiscal year 2021-22 state budget investments and improved intra-agency coordination.

We thank you for your ongoing efforts to keep California safe and thriving.

Sincerely,

Barbara Sattler  
Board Member  
Alliance of Nurses for Healthy Environments

Lisa Hunt  
California River Restoration Science  
American Rivers

Kirk Wilbur  
Vice President Government Affairs  
California Cattlemen's Association

Micah Weinberg  
Executive Director  
California Forward

Nick Jensen  
Lead Conservation Scientists  
California Native Plant Society

Catherine Freeman  
Legislative Representative  
California State Association of Counties

Chris Morrill  
Executive Director  
California Wilderness Coalition

Torri Estrada  
Executive Director  
Carbon Cycle Institute

Daniel O'Connell  
Executive Director  
Central Valley Partnership

Pamela Flick  
California Program Director  
Defenders of Wildlife

Laurie Wayburn  
President  
Pacific Forest Trust

Matt Baker  
Policy Director  
Planning and Conservation League

Cam Tredennick  
Executive Director  
Sequoia Riverlands Trust

Steve Frisch  
President  
Sierra Business Council

Sue Britting  
Executive Director  
Sierra Forest Legacy

Jenny Hatch  
Executive Director  
Sierra Nevada Alliance

Melinda Booth  
Executive Director  
South Yuba River Citizens League

Craig Thomas  
Director  
The Fire Restoration Group

Elizabeth Forsburg  
Associate Director, Policy  
The Nature Conservancy

Nick Goulette  
Executive Director  
Watershed Research and Training Center

cc: Wade Crowfoot, Secretary, California Natural Resources Agency  
Thom Porter, Director, CAL FIRE  
Senator Toni Atkins, Senate President Pro Tempore  
Assemblymember Anthony Rendon, Speaker