



Carbon Cycle Institute

December 16, 2020

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

Re: Budget Request for \$1.5 Billion for FY 2021-22 for Wildfire Resilience

Dear Governor Newsom:

We are writing to request that you include \$1.5 billion in your proposed 2021-22 state budget for landscape health, wildfire risk reduction, and other critical community wildfire preparedness activities. State support for these activities must be stable, sustainable, and represent an increased and ongoing level of state support so we can build the structure and workforce necessary to carry out these fire prevention activities. This funding is essential to continue and build upon the ongoing critical partnerships with local partners, federal, local, and state agencies, tribes, and other parties to prepare for and prevent worsening fire events.

Extensive fire suppression and exclusion, development in high fire hazard severity zones, and the spread of non-native vegetation from human activities has left California's landscapes prone to large, intense fires. Given the degraded condition of many 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, accelerate, and sustain efforts to prepare for and reduce the risk of high-severity wildfire, in addition to ongoing fire suppression activities.

If designed and implemented well, these investments can also provide benefits to wildlife, water quality and security, and climate mitigation and resilience. Ensuring that landscape restoration projects are designed to advance these compatible goals will be critical to meeting the state's commitments to protect and enhance natural and working lands and the biodiversity that depend on healthy ecosystems. You set forth important conservation goals in your October Executive Order (N-82-20) to protect 30 percent of California's lands and waters by 2030 as essential to ensuring climate resiliency, carbon sequestration, and biodiversity protection, and to develop a Climate Smart Strategy for the state's natural and working lands. The scale of landscape restoration necessary to address California's fire challenge presents an enormous opportunity to advance our biodiversity and climate mitigation and adaptation strategies.

Therefore, we urge that you propose \$1.5 billion, as detailed below, in your proposed 2021-22 state budget for a variety of fire prevention and preparedness actions across the landscape, at community scale, and to make individual structures less flammable.

- \$600 million for landscape-scale strategies for returning to a more natural, fire-resilient condition with investments in established programs for fuel reduction, forest thinning, and protection against loss of intact forests. This would include funding to CAL FIRE for the Forest Health grant program, Forest Legacy Program, Fire and Resource Assessment Program, and California Forest Improvement Program. It is important that a portion of this funding include work in oak woodlands to prevent the devastating fires California has seen in agricultural areas in recent years and to support vital biodiversity values. Additionally, we urge a sizable investment in the expansion of the use of prescribed fire to support partners and increase capacity, including funding for a collaborative tribal burning program that respects tribal sovereignty. After generations of suppressing cultural burning, it is long past time to partner with and learn from the tribes' life experience and knowledge.
- \$900 million for fire prevention efforts to reduce the risk of wildfire to homes, commercial structures, and communities, increase workforce capacity for risk reduction activities in both the built environment and the forest, planning and actions to make communities in fire-prone regions more resilient, and mitigations to safeguard vulnerable populations. This would include investments in CAL FIRE's Fire Prevention grant program, California and Local Conservation Corps, California Community Colleges, and Department of Conservation for the Regional Forest and Fire Capacity Program, as well as funding for hardening of structures, defensible spaces, emergency shelters and alert systems. It would also include funding for community resilience including community infrastructure, risk reduction buffers, and protections for human health such as air filters and power backup. These measures are especially important for non-forested, high risk areas, where prescribed fire and other landscape intervention may not be viable options.

As part of this request, we believe that there should be a discussion with the Legislature about how to improve coordination of the many fire prevention programs created or expanded in recent years, which span across multiple agencies and departments, to improve efficiencies and avoid redundancies. Finally, we continue to urge you to support a statewide bond proposal to finance vital

climate preparedness efforts, including fire preparedness and landscape conservation and restoration activities, to help ensure a more resilient California.

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

Sincerely,

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California River Restoration Science  
American Rivers

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Vice President Government Affairs  
California Cattlemen's Association

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cc: Wade Crowfoot, Secretary, California Natural Resources Agency  
Thom Porter, Director, CAL FIRE

Senator Toni Atkins, Senate President Pro Tempore  
Assemblymember Anthony Rendon, Speaker  
Senator Nancy Skinner, Chair, Senate Budget Committee  
Assemblymember Phil Ting, Chair, Assembly Budget Committee