



March 29, 2022

Governor Gavin Newsom
The Honorable Toni Atkins, Senate Leader Pro Tempore
The Honorable Nancy Skinner, Chair Senate Budget Committee
The Honorable Bob Wieckowski, Chair Senate Budget Subcommittee 2 on Resources,
Environmental Protection and Energy
The Honorable Anthony Rendon, Speaker of the Assembly
The Honorable Phil Ting, Chair Assembly Budget Committee
The Honorable Richard Bloom, Chair Assembly Budget 3 on Climate Crisis, Resources, Energy
and Transportation

Re: Wildfire Resiliency 2022-23 State Budget Action Recommendations

Dear Governor and Legislative Leaders,

The undersigned groups represent tribal, environmental justice, climate justice, local government, public health, and environmental and economic sustainability organizations throughout California. Together, we are dedicated to realizing solutions that prevent and mitigate the human and ecological impacts of California's wildfires.

Wildfire presents a myriad of challenges. Our diverse working group is focused on restoring resilient landscapes where “good fire” can play its natural role of maintaining healthy conditions; supporting wildfire-resilient communities, and; managing and minimizing the health impacts of smoke, which are unavoidable in our fire-dependent ecosystems but can be addressed.

We write to provide recommendations on the budget within specific areas of wildfire resiliency that are expressed priorities of the administration, including tribal sovereignty, environmental justice, climate justice, and community resilience.

We continue to advocate for the Wildfire and Forest Resilience package (Wildfire Package) to maintain at least \$1 billion of investments per year for the next five years so we can build the policy and implementation momentum necessary to address the scale of the challenge. The state must also pursue actions outside the Wildfire Package to meet and mitigate impacts from our fire and climate challenges.

As the state implements funds, we further advocate for opportunities to improve program delivery and accessibility to funding pathways by scaling up funding opportunities at local and regional levels. To achieve this, the state should consider a two-pronged approach that builds internal capacity of the state and enhances capacity in partner organizations.

Below are budget actions that will help advance these intertwined health and resilience issues. We look forward to future engagement opportunities with the administration and legislature to advocate and demonstrate the need for these measures.

I. ADVANCE GOOD FIRE ON THE LANDSCAPE

Expand support for continuing education and training in the proactive use of fire, partnering with indigenous burners and other experts to build capacity and skills, and maintain unfragmented forests where good fire is feasible

California evolved with fire, and there is no scenario where it does not burn. A century of fire suppression has created massive increases in fuels, and when fires burn under extreme (hot, dry, windy) circumstances we are seeing catastrophic impacts. We need a much larger portion of our fires to be intentionally set and monitored during weather conditions of our choosing to achieve desirable outcomes for more resilient landscapes - and fewer damaging and unhealthy ‘megafires.’

We must move aggressively to implement *California’s Strategic Plan for Prescribed Fire, Cultural Burning, and Prescribed Natural Fire*. To achieve this the state needs to support prescribed and cultural burn practitioners, both within CAL FIRE and in the private sector. Further, the state must accelerate efforts to develop facilities and training to deepen skills around the use of good fire, including sharing of traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) around wildfire management - in settings where tribal partners are willing to share knowledge with state and federal fire services, and other burning practitioners.

1. Make an initial one-time investment of \$50 million to establish a network of Prescribed and Cultural Fire Training Centers

A top recommendation in the Action Plan is to increase workforce capacity through the creation of a network of Prescribed and Cultural Fire Training Centers. These should be located in representative fire-adapted ecosystems, and associated with local Tribes where feasible. These facilities can leverage local education institutions to catalyze workforce development and ecosystem restoration, while providing essential live-fire training opportunities. They can also fortify opportunities to work with regional tribes to integrate Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) with western science and fire service approaches. For example the proposed Klamath Fire Center, associated with both the Karuk Tribe and Cal Poly Humboldt, would provide an opportunity to share knowledge and experiences and deepen understanding of the use of prescribed and cultural fire.

These skills and improved relationships will be essential for California to achieve the necessary scale of landscape restoration and resilience. We encourage \$50 million in the Wildfire Package to develop a network of training centers in different fuel types around the state, including \$15 million for a Klamath Fire Center.

2. Commit a one-time investment of \$20 million towards the Prescribed Fire Liability Pilot Program

The FY 21-22 state budget allocated \$20 million to develop a Prescribed Fire Liability Pilot Program. Additional funding of \$20 million towards this program will allow the fund to provide supplemental liability coverage to more burns simultaneously. A conservative estimate is that \$20 million would be able to simultaneously cover about eight burns, and when we have good weather for burning we need to be pursuing far more than eight private burns around the state.

3. Include \$215 million to conserve unfragmented landscapes and secure future commitments to fire-smart forest management so good fire can be used to maintain safe conditions

The state is investing substantially to thin unnaturally dense forests to restore more ecologically appropriate conditions: generally fewer, well-spaced, larger trees. While thinning reduces the density of trees, absent a permanent conservation commitment to improved management the forests are likely to be logged again in a way that negates the fire-resilience investments. Conservation actions that maintain large landscapes of well-managed forests and other vegetation create the conditions where we can use good fire to maintain lower fuel loads in the future. Absent these efforts we will continue to see our landscapes fragmented and managed in ways that make the proactive use of fire increasingly difficult.

We suggest augmenting the Wildfire and Forest Resilience Package with \$215 million for the conservation and improved management of forests, administered by the Wildlife Conservation Board's Forest Program, to achieve and secure the desired future landscape conditions.

For more information on these recommendations, please contact Paul Mason (pmason@pacificforest.org).

II. PROTECT HUMAN HEALTH AND SAFETY DURING WILDFIRES

Defend outdoor workers and environmental justice communities impacted by smoke and extreme heat.

Recent summers have largely been defined by extreme smoke events in many parts of the state. The health impacts of wildfire smoke, especially on vulnerable populations, are substantial, leading to increased mortality and illness. Exposure to wildfire smoke is a growing threat to outdoor workers such as farmworkers, who often have limited access to adequate PPE and additionally experience extreme heat, yet continue to work in smoky conditions because they cannot afford to miss a day of work.¹ While the direct impact of wildfire pollution exposure on outdoor workers is being researched and is still unknown, many studies support the conclusion that inhaling fine particles found in wildfire smoke are the greatest public health risk of wildfires.^{2,3} Wildfire smoke exposure of five to seven days can damage the lungs, blood and heart, and cause strokes. Similar exposure to children can cause a two-fold increase in the rate of asthma.⁴ The state can and should do more to defend workers and residents who are most exposed to and impacted by wildfire pollution.

1. Dedicate \$17.1 million annually towards wildfire and smoke impact warning programs statewide

The FY 22-23 Budget allocates \$17.1 million to support education and outreach, operations, and research and development of the California Earthquake Early Warning Program. The Budget should replicate this effort to allocate \$17.1 million towards wildfire and smoke impact warning programs statewide. This funding will allow the state and NGO and community based organization partners to advance a culturally-responsive effort that improves wildfire and smoke impact safety for underserved communities including environmental justice communities and outdoor workers.

2. Dedicate \$30 million to strengthen the enforcement of existing worker safety regulations through Cal/OSHA, ensure adequate distribution of PPE, establish emergency relief aid, and expand education and outreach to support outdoor workers

¹ Gross, Liza. Fires Fuel New Risks to California Farmworkers. Inside Climate News (2021). <https://insideclimatenews.org/news/21092021/wildfires-california-farmworkers-smoke-health/>

² Aguilera, R., Corringham, T., Gershunov, A. et al. Wildfire smoke impacts respiratory health more than fine particles from other sources: observational evidence from Southern California. Nat Commun 12, 1493 (2021). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41467-021-21708-0>

³ Schwarz, Lara, et al. Smoke and COVID-19 case fatality ratios during California wildfires. Environmental Research Letters 17, 014054 (2022). <https://iopscience.iop.org/article/10.1088/1748-9326/ac4538>

⁴ Ryan, Devon. Health Impacts of Wildfire Smoke. Stanford Woods Institute for the Environment (2020). <https://woods.stanford.edu/stanford-wildfire-research/news/health-impacts-wildfire-smoke>

The Budget should commit investments that improve the safety of workforces impacted by climate-induced events such as wildfire. At minimum, the state should seek a one-time, \$30 million dedicated to strengthen the enforcement of existing worker safety regulations through Cal/OSHA, ensure adequate distribution of PPE, establish emergency relief aid, and expand education and outreach to support outdoor workers. The state's present investments in immigrant workforces are limited to workforce development and should establish parameters to improve immigrant worker protections.

Additionally, we advocate for the state to ensure agricultural and rural regions with significant numbers of outdoor workers also benefit from any pollution monitoring commitments within disadvantaged communities

3. Expand the Budget to sustain \$100 million over two years for community hardening

The state's proposed investment of \$44 million for community hardening will not support the expansive need experienced by communities across the state for defensible space and retrofits to protect them from wildfire ignitions. Furthermore, commitments to explore grant opportunities for home hardening with the federal government are not guaranteed. The State is starting to pilot community hardening programs in two counties with the \$25 million provided last year; an additional funding commitment of \$100 million over two years would enable the pilot to be scaled up into at least four more counties or regions and to inform a program that can be scaled up statewide soon thereafter. The pilot projects should test how to best support underserved and under-resourced communities including immigrant communities, especially within areas of very high fire risk, who experience significant barriers to accessing insurance claims for damage.

For more information on these recommendations, please contact Lucas Zucker (lucas@causenow.org).

III. SUPPORT CAPACITY BUILDING

Build capacity for resource-constrained non-governmental partners to engage in and support implementation of California's ambitious goals for wildfire mitigation, as well as climate resilience projects and 30x30.

1. Adopt the administration's recent proposal to dedicate \$100 million to support tribal-led initiatives that advance shared climate and conservation goals

We strongly support the administration's recently announced budget proposal to establish a \$100 million funding opportunity to strengthen partnerships with California Native American tribes, including research, development and implementation of traditional knowledge; workforce training, capacity building and technical support; and tribal nature-based climate conservation programs, among others. We note that this \$100 million should be additional to the climate resilience and nature-based solutions allocations agreed to in September 2021.

2. Commit a one-time fund of \$50 million to support capacity of RCDs, land trusts and NGOs

The state should dedicate additional funds to build capacity at the partner organizations that help implement the wildfire and climate resilience activities in the Budget. Many of our partners, including tribes, community-based organizations, and local jurisdictions have experienced difficulty accessing funding opportunities due to the state's limited support. We suggest \$50 million in one-time funding: \$10 million to RCDs over 2 years and \$25 million over 3 years to land trusts, and \$15 million to community-based organizations and other NGOs.

For more information on these recommendations, please contact Paul Mason (pmason@pacificforest.org).

IV. CLARIFY AND INCREASE PREVIOUS COMMITMENTS TO CLIMATE RESILIENCE AND NATURE-BASED SOLUTIONS

Enhance funding of existing commitments to expand benefits of state programs

1. Augment funds for SGC Community Resilience Program to \$1 billion over two years

The FY 21-22 budget climate resilience package committed \$200 million (FY 22-24) to develop community resilience centers across California. We support the recommendation across many coalitions for a one-time, \$1 billion investment over two years to fund the SGC Community Resilience Program. With this allocation, the program could advance a workforce dedicated to constructing and rehabilitating neighborhood-based community facilities to serve as community resilience centers that address the growing needs of vulnerable residents experiencing wildfires and other climate events.

2. Advance low-income weatherization and resilient, healthy homes as a co-benefit of multiple programs

California has existing and proposed programs to advance home weatherization, de-carbonization and energy efficiency, and fire-safe retrofits. Sealing homes against wildfire smoke and promoting effective air purification systems can reduce the health impacts of persistent smoke, and can be incorporated into other programs focused on upgrading buildings in various ways. We encourage the Legislature to incorporate low-cost smoke mitigation measures as an additional component of any program making significant retrofits to existing structures.

3. Dedicate \$500 million to integrate actions for fire, water, climate, and biodiversity in California's key upper watersheds

California has committed substantial funds to address the intertwined issues of landscape resilience to fire, drought and water security, nature-based solutions to climate change, and protecting California's threatened biodiversity. The solution to all these challenges is to restore more natural, resilient forest and landscape conditions so plants and wildlife can survive the

increasing stresses of climate change and fire, and watersheds can continue to function. Unfortunately, landscape restoration is scattered across numerous programs, and siloed in various departments.

We suggest piloting a coordinated regional approach for the 7-million-acre region that supplies the Oroville, Shasta, and Trinity reservoirs. This area is the backbone of the state's water supply and a biodiversity hotspot which also has enormous potential to improve carbon storage. It has also seen extreme fire impacts: more than half of this region has burned since 2018.

We recommend \$500 million, which could include portions of existing commitments for fire, water, climate, and biodiversity - augmented with budget surplus. Project selection by an interagency committee composed of the director or their designee from Sierra Nevada Conservancy, Wildlife Conservation Board, CAL FIRE, state Water Resources Control Board, and the Department of Water Resources would ensure inter-departmental coordination. Program administration and grantmaking could be handled by SNC and WCB.

For more information on these recommendations, please contact Shayda Azamian (sazamian@leadershipcounsel.org) and Paul Mason (pmason@pacificforest.org).

CONCLUSION

Coping with our wildfire challenge - both restoring our landscapes and protecting people from smoke impacts - is the challenge of our lifetime. The robust budget condition provides a rare opportunity to make transformational investments to meet the cultural, social, ecological and public health needs statewide. The commitments and investments outlined above will support a wildfire resilient California by prioritizing approaches that increase good fire, prevent loss of life and property, mitigate the unavoidable impacts of fire and smoke, and establish permanent conservation actions to maintain safely burnable landscapes. To truly embody resiliency in the scope of wildfire, these diverse efforts require thoughtful investments seeded in tribal sovereignty, environmental justice, climate justice, and community resilience.

We respectfully ask for your support of this budget request.

Sincerely,

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