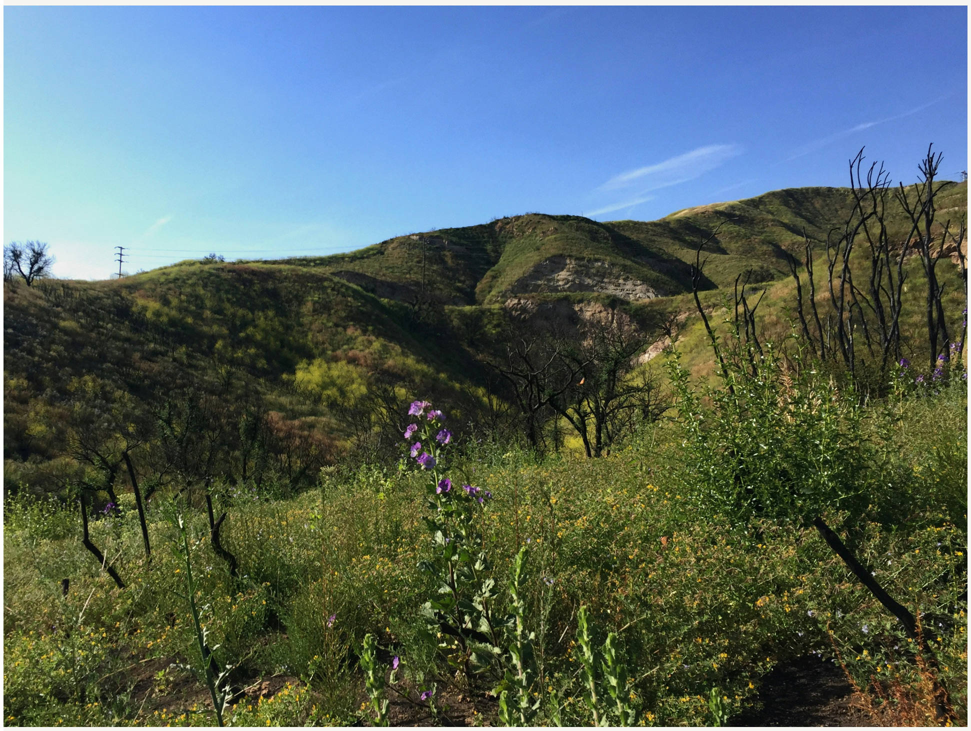
CALIFORNIA THRiVES

WILDFIRE RESILIENCE



Strategic Action Plan for the Next Administration

Improving Preparedness and Resilience Across California

This priority playbook maps a vision and set of recommended actions the state can take to improve preparedness and resilience to minimize damage from wildfire. These recommendations are designed to be tangible and achievable, building on existing programs and partnerships to establish California as a model for adapting to fire.

CAFWD PACIFIC FOREST TRUST Resources Legacy Fund

California's next governor will inherit an urgent wildfire challenge. Climate change is lengthening fire seasons, increasing fuel aridity, and amplifying extreme fire weather. Nearly 14 million Californians live in the Wildland Urban Interface, facing risks from catastrophic wildfire, insurance market instability, and rising disaster costs.

Over the last decade, California has made strides toward proactive fire management. The state has invested billions in fuel reduction treatments, launched the Wildfire and Forest Resilience Task Force to coordinate within and beyond state government, expanded prescribed and cultural fire programs, and begun addressing insurance market instability. However, current wildfire resilience projects remain too slow and scattered to keep pace with growing fire risk and a century of fire suppression, implementation is fragmented, and workforce capacity lags behind need.

This agenda offers a roadmap for how a new administration can transition from an overdependence on suppression and emergency response to a proactive and fire-adapted strategy. The vision is that, by 2030, California will have reduced wildfire risk to communities while supporting fire-adapted landscapes. Building on successes, California will restore healthy, functional landscapes with fire serving as an important ecological process where appropriate. Californians will embrace shared responsibility for wildfire risk, shifting from piecemeal approaches to comprehensive strategies. Achieving this vision requires leaders to address the economic imperative of adapting to coexistence with fire; champion collaboration and transparency across agencies and sectors; deliver sustainable funding and financing for risk-reduction activities; act as a catalyst that mobilizes partners across sectors; and incentivize new markets across California's bioeconomy.

Watershed-Scale Planning and Management

The Challenge

The majority of California's lands are either privately held or controlled by the federal government, with much of our forested landscapes a checkerboard of federal and private ownership. Current wildfire resilience projects are often too slow and scattered to keep pace with growing fire risk and the backlog of over a century of fire suppression. We can achieve better fire resilience outcomes while also improving habitat, advancing biodiversity conservation goals, and protecting our watersheds from degradation if we accelerate cross-boundary, multi-benefit planning and implementation of both mechanical treatments[1] and beneficial fire. Solutions must be informed by the forest conditions as well as knowledge and practices that existed prior to European colonization while also accounting for current and future climate conditions and land use patterns.

Progress to Date

California has made significant strides in proactive landscape management. The Wildfire and Forest Resilience Task Force has coordinated efforts across agencies, the state has invested in fuel reduction treatments, and there is growing acceptance of prescribed and cultural fire. However, implementation remains fragmented across ownership boundaries, and the pace and scale of treatment lag far behind what is needed to fundamentally shift landscape conditions.

Vision of Success

California's fire risk reduction activities are managed at watershed scale through coordinated regional planning frameworks that bring together federal, state, and tribal governments, utilities, landowners, and communities. Fire is used as a beneficial ecological process where appropriate, while human-caused ignitions are reduced in fire-adapted ecosystems seeing excessive fire. Strategic Fire Zones allow fire to burn under safe conditions, and tribal co-management guides planning and implementation.

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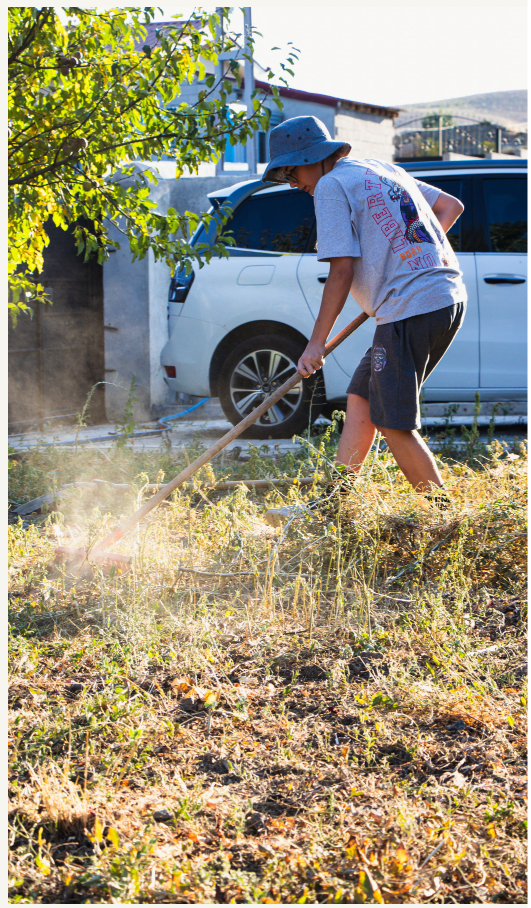
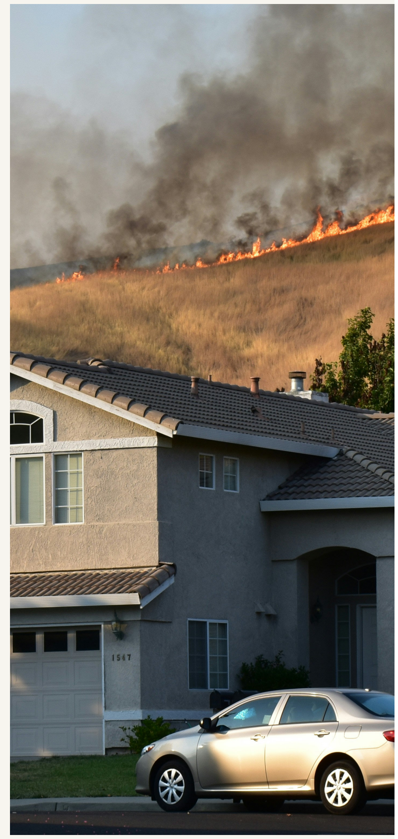
Goals and Strategic Actions for the Next Administration

- **Establish and strengthen regional joint planning frameworks** bringing together federal government, state government, tribal nations, electric utilities, insurers, key private landowners or associations, local NGOs, and water agencies to plan, prioritize, permit, finance, and implement multi-benefit (fire, water, wildlife, public health, and community safety) fire risk reduction activities throughout California.
    - Continue efforts to avoid unintended human-caused ignitions in areas seeing fire too frequently (especially Southern California chaparral).
    - Continue efforts to increase beneficial fire in areas that have seen too much human-caused suppression (especially Northern California forests).
    - Design plans to concurrently achieve aligned state goals around climate, water, and wildlife.[2]
- **Designate Strategic Fire Zones** in areas away from communities where fire can be allowed to burn when weather and forecasts meet pre-identified conditions. These zones would be coordinated with the joint planning frameworks to strategically apply ecologically-informed mechanical thinning and development of fuel breaks to prepare areas for fire. This effort will build on the network of Potential Operational Delineations (PODs) currently being developed by CAL FIRE.
- **Clarify that CAL FIRE's mission** to protect life and property goes beyond fire suppression to include landscape resilience efforts, including increasing the use of fire to restore and maintain healthy landscapes and reduce the risk of extreme fire events.
- **Support and prioritize tribal co-management agreements** for planning and implementation of landscape projects, with full recognition of tribal sovereignty.
- **Utilize Master Stewardship Agreements, Good Neighbor Agreements, or other similar agreements** to facilitate planning and implementation of multi-benefit watershed-scale projects on federal land, with decades-long commitments from federal agencies and multi-year maintenance agreements that incentivise restoration effectiveness.
- **Identify joint operations centers** in each region for coordinated prescribed fire scheduling, resource sharing, and cross-ownership implementation.
- **Establish robust accountability** mechanisms for relevant state agencies and regional leads to support and motivate necessary levels of action.
- **Partner with private landowners** on working forest conservation easements (WFCE) that guide forest management to develop and maintain mature, fire resilient forest conditions.
- **Engage water agencies** (where relevant) in planning and implementation to connect upstream and downstream stakeholders. Explore beneficiary-pays financing opportunities where downstream users invest in upstream watershed health.
- **Ensure post-fire restoration builds future resilience** by having salvage logging retain diverse forest structure, and having reforestation efforts that avoid re-creating the overly dense conditions driving our current wildfire crisis by planting for patchiness and the lower density of a natural, fire-adapted forest.



[1] Including ecological thinning in forests, fuel breaks, and mastication.
[2] Relevant state plans for coordination include but are not limited to the Wildfire and Forest Resilience Task force Action Plan 30 x 30 California, Natural & Working Lands Climate Smart Strategy, Nature-Based Solution Climate Targets, CA Adaptation Strategy, and the Water Resilience Portfolio.

Safe and Resilient Communities



The Challenge

Nearly 14 million Californians, one in three residents, live within the state's Wildland Urban Interface (WUI), which cuts across all 58 counties in California. While there was significant increase in development in the WUI between 1990 and 2020, approximately 90 percent of homes in the WUI today were built before modern codes were enacted to reduce fire risk in new construction—which means the majority of community wildfire risk is concentrated in our older, existing communities. Home hardening and defensible space compliance remain far from universal, and community infrastructure resilience — evacuation routes, water systems, and building codes — continues to lag in many high-risk jurisdictions.

Progress to Date

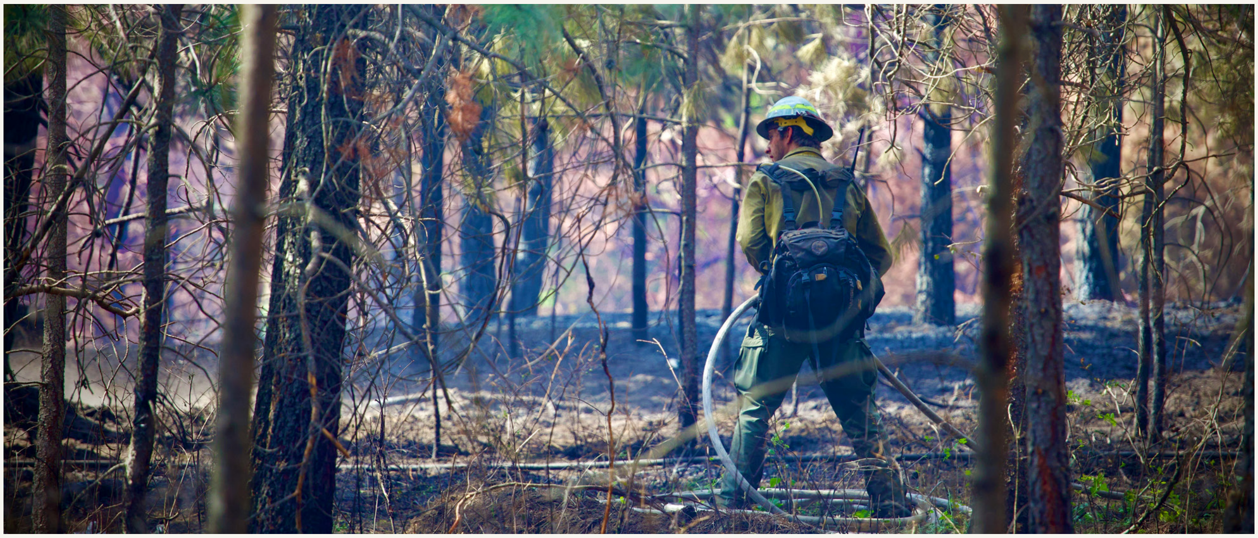
California recognizes the scale of need around home hardening and defensible space programs, has piloted grant funding for community wildfire protection planning, and begun addressing insurance market instability through the Sustainable Insurance Strategy. Local Fire Safe Councils and Resource Conservation Districts have mobilized community action. However, funding and financing remain insufficient for the scale of need, enforcement is inconsistent, and state-level governance structures for community risk reduction remain fragmented.

Vision of Success

California communities in high-risk areas have substantially reduced their wildfire exposure through home hardening, defensible space compliance, and strategic land use planning. State investments target areas of greatest need, especially under-resourced vulnerable households and communities. Clear governance structures and funding mechanisms support local implementation.

Goals and Strategic Actions for the Next Administration

- **Strengthen state-level governance on community wildfire management** by setting clear targets and goals for community risk reduction and improving leadership and coordination.
- **Deploy limited state funding in ways that target public investments in areas of greatest risk and need—**including for vulnerable under-resourced households and communities of color who face barriers to accessing capital—and scale market-based solutions for home hardening, including the launch, pilot and growth of a state-supported loan loss reserve to support homeowners in financing necessary risk-reduction retrofits.
- **Implement and enforce clear Zone Zero and defensible space requirements** around structures with effective inspections, education, and other necessary supports.
- **Support development of state, regional, county, and local-level strategies** for funding and financing the necessary risk-reduction activities at the community, neighborhood and household scale.
- **Provide county-level block grants** to streamline funding for planning and implementation of priority risk-reduction projects as identified by local leaders, with focus on highest risk and most vulnerable communities.
- **Establish clear guidance that helps local jurisdictions meet housing production goals without increasing wildfire risk**, distinguishing between high-risk areas where development should be limited and lower-risk areas where housing growth can proceed with appropriate resilience standards.
- **Launch public communication strategies, campaigns, and gatherings** that translate complex wildfire risk information into clear, actionable guidance relevant to and trusted by diverse communities across the state.
- **Support a unified voluntary home hardening standard** in the building code to address misalignment and confusion among existing standards.
- **Leverage key decision times**, including home purchase or major renovations, to encourage homeowner action on risk-reduction.



Workforce, Contracting, and Permitting

The Challenge

There are not enough people trained and ready to do the scale of work necessary across either landscapes or communities. Growing the workforce, while maintaining quality and integrity, will be both a core challenge and an economic opportunity. These investments should build and sustain local workforces. Procedures for contracting and permitting should be streamlined where possible to maximize the amount of work being efficiently accomplished in a timely way, while ensuring safeguards for human and environmental health.

Progress to Date

California has made progress in workforce development through conservation corps programs, incarcerated firefighter pathways, and training initiatives for prescribed fire practitioners. However, workforce capacity remains insufficient, and permitting challenges persist in limiting the scale of beneficial fire.

Vision of Success

California has a robust, diverse workforce trained in prescribed and cultural fire, defensible space, ecological thinning, home hardening, and related disciplines. Clear career pathways exist, and contractors are credentialed and rewarded for relevant expertise. Permitting processes support rather than hinder the pace and scale of implementation.

Goals and Strategic Actions for the Next Administration

- **Expand career pathways in fire resilience**, including training and information-sharing opportunities for prescribed and cultural fire, defensible space, and home hardening, building on existing best practices.
- **Create contractor credentialing programs** in partnership with community colleges, high schools and other partners that develop and recognize relevant expertise, fire safety knowledge, and long-term maintenance capacity.
- **Facilitate improvements to air quality permitting** challenges to expand use of beneficial fire.
- **Improve communication and training on recent permitting process improvements** to key stakeholders while continuing to address ongoing regulatory barriers to project implementation.
- **Prioritize local, Women and Minority Owned Businesses, and tribal contractors** when awarding state contracts for risk reduction.

Data, Monitoring, and Innovation

The Challenge

The availability of technology and analytical tools to help address the wildfire challenge has exploded in recent years, bringing opportunities to better target actions but also creating a blizzard of options, not all of which are well suited to the challenge or to use in the public domain. Progress at scale requires establishing consistent shared data standards and storage, risk-based modeling and decision-support tools, and improving accessibility.

Progress to Date

California has invested in data infrastructure through efforts like the Treatment Tracker, NASA and CARB/CNRA's WERK program providing statewide LiDAR-derived ecosystem data, and California's Climate Change Assessments. However, these efforts remain siloed, and comprehensive data integration and accessibility remain limited.

Vision of Success

California maintains a long-term public data hub where state and other users can aggregate and integrate wildfire-relevant datasets. Common data-sharing agreements exist across federal, state, tribal, and local agencies, with protocols that uphold tribal data sovereignty. Practitioners can easily access publicly available, state-backed tools and data and are trained in how to use them.

Goals and Strategic Actions for the Next Administration

- **Establish a long-term, stable data hub** where the state and other users can aggregate and integrate wildfire-relevant datasets.
    - Create common data sharing agreements across federal, state, tribal, and local agencies.
    - Acknowledge and uphold tribal data sovereignty which governs the collection, ownership, and application of indigenous data.
        - Develop agreements for reporting relevant built-environment metrics like defensible space inspections, home hardening needs and accomplishments, as well as landscape condition metrics such as those described in the forthcoming Wildfire and Forest Resilience Task Force Action Plan update.
    - Leverage NASA and CARB/CNRA's WERK (Wildfire, Ecosystem Resilience, & Risk Assessment) program, providing statewide LiDAR-derived ecosystem and structure data.
    - Incorporate recent state efforts such as the fuel reduction Treatment Tracker.
    - Ensure practitioners can easily access all publicly-available, state-backed tools and data and have training on how to use them.
- **Invest in wildfire conflagration modeling capabilities**, including better modeling how fire spreads structure-to-structure, to complement existing wildfire hazard maps (which don't capture how fires spread through neighborhoods) to equip decision-makers with risk-based tools.
- **Improve state processes for data standardization** and procuring and deploying new technology to advance wildfire resilience.
- **Continue investing in the state's Climate Change Assessments** to ensure access to California-relevant climate modeling and data.

Funding, Finance, and Insurance

The Challenge

The cost of addressing fire risk is immense. The cost of inaction is greater. California was fortunate to invest billions of dollars in wildfire risk reduction over the last decade. But in our constrained fiscal environment—pressure on the General Fund, Cap and Invest, short-term Climate Bond funding, and Federal funding contractions—continued progress depends on maintaining current funding and unlocking additional public and private investments that are tied to outcomes achieved. Importantly, insurance-related actions need to support real mitigation and help households transition back into the mainstream market, not just transfer risk to the state and local governments. In the near term, attention should focus on making mitigation more financeable, targeted, and accessible. Long-term action requires identifying new revenue streams that support the scale of mitigation needed over the next 10 years.

Progress to Date

California has established dedicated funding sources including the Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund allocation for wildfire resilience and has passed significant bond measures supporting landscape and community risk reduction. The Sustainable Insurance Strategy (SIS) has begun to address insurance market instability. However, these volatile funding sources are not yet sufficient or stable enough to meet near or long-term needs, and the SIS will take time to work its way through the market.

Vision of Success

California has sustained, predictable funding for wildfire risk mitigation across landscapes and communities, including ongoing maintenance. Private capital and financing complement public dollars, and insurance market stability is rebuilt in tandem with meaningful risk reduction. Local jurisdictions have the resources and technical assistance they need to generate funding for and implement community protection projects.

Goals and Strategic Actions for the Next Administration

- **Restore the state's $200 million annual commitment to wildfire risk reduction by returning it to a "Tier 1" priority for the Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund**, as it was prior to 2025, preserving the only ongoing funding for wildfire resilience.
- **Design an investment strategy to leverage private capital and financing** alongside public dollars. Grants remain critical for lower-income households, but rate buy-downs, rebates, or tax incentives can make financed mitigation more affordable for broader segments of homeowners, including fire survivors, without putting additional pressure on limited state funding.
- **Support ongoing implementation and refinement of the Sustainable Insurance Strategy** to continue rebuilding insurance market stabilization in tandem with investment in physical risk reduction.
- **Incentivize local jurisdictions to generate funding for community protection and mitigation projects including by scaling technical assistance** to local governments and regional entities to enable financing districts, assessments, tax increment tools, and other local revenue mechanisms for wildfire risk reduction.
- **Maintain fire-resilient building codes and standards** to enable access to funding and financing needed to rebuild to higher resilience standards following a disaster.
- **Aggregate landscape resilience projects that protect critical source watersheds** into a plan that can be financed alongside manmade water infrastructure.
- **Reform utility liability**, including inverse condemnation, to address current constraints on how utilities invest in wildfire risk reduction, balancing safety and accountability with opportunities to redirect private capital toward more targeted, better-directed mitigation actions.
- **Improve alignment between state plans and investments and electric utility Wildfire Mitigation Plans** to achieve reduced risk beyond the right of ways.