

April 20, 2106

El-Dorado County Board of Supervisors
330 Fair Lane, Building A
Placerville, CA 95661



The Amador-El Dorado Forest Forum was established in 1942 by a group of forestry professionals, forestry educators, and others interested in forestry practices and issues. We meet once a month and award scholarships to local college students majoring in Forestry and sponsors the California Forestry Challenge. Everyone is welcome to join our group. We have dinner meetings, an annual Blanket Party, and participate in El Dorado County Farm Day. For complete details on upcoming Forest Forum meetings or contact information, you can find us on the web at: www.aeforestforum.org

Re: March 28, 2016. Special Meeting: Resolution 053-2016 State of Emergency, Tree mortality.

As President of the Amador El-Dorado Forest Forum, I spoke to you about several issues to consider as you move forward with a plan after approving the final decision to consider El-Dorado County in a State of Emergency as a result of unprecedented tree mortality from bark beetles and drought conditions.

The lack of forest management across the State combined with successive years of drought and increasing insect activity in over-stocked forest stands across California have caused tree-mortality rates to rise unchecked to epidemic levels. For our county, the problem is further compounded by recent large wildfire events, as partially burned trees are easy targets for even faster spread rates of insects and disease.

A short term solution by cutting down dead trees in high hazard areas is obvious, but a long term plan to reduce stand density, and create wood processing infrastructure has to be considered for broader area of the county. State and Federal funding sources are a great benefit to the immediate needs of the county, but again a long-term plan has to include a way for the trees to "pay their way off the land."

The members of the Amador El-Dorado Forest Forum present five critical actions for the Board to consider. Some of these were discussed during public comment on March 28, 2016:

1. **Assemble a working group to engage the Drought Mortality Task Force entities already in place.**

Focus on the regulatory and product development sections of the Taskforce. Utilize experts in the field. The Amador El-Dorado Forest Forum is just one of many

sources to seek those experts as our group is made up of individuals that have varied backgrounds in forestry and resource management. The Task Force is a “one-stop shop” to find local participants who are already part of this group.

2. Promote a regulatory environment at the county level to encourage the re-establishment of wood processing sawmills and forest energy biomass facilities.

During the meeting, I reminded the Board that our county used to be served by four sawmills, and now we are down to one that is barely feasible due to hauling distance. I encourage the Board to engage Federal and State regulators to make needed changes and adjust the regulatory burdens that exist. Some ideas to consider at the county and state level are to approach State regulators and the Drought Mortality Task Force participants with such topics as “green energy” certification for forest biomass, exempting State timber yield tax for salvage timber (both fire and insects), taking advantage of recent adjustments to the state forest regulations for harvesting salvage timber, and engaging the State Air Quality Resources Board and Public Utilities Commission to increase the permitting of forest bio-mass facilities for energy production. Consider bringing forward concepts like exempting the 1% sales tax on California lumber products certified to come from insect salvage and drought mortality sources; or blending commercial timber harvesting with already established fuel reduction projects that are managed by local fire safe councils, the El-Dorado RCD and CALFIRE. The need to address the regulatory environment in order to re-build the industrial infrastructure is the most important part of dealing with this problem.

3. Engage in a public education campaign addressing the benefits of long-term forest management to the local economy and our quality of life.

The main message should be how prudent forest management is required to critically support the following public assets: public safety, domestic water supply and storage, transportation, utilities, developed non-forest agricultural products, tourism, and local property tax receipts. The public is a powerful force that is swayed by environmental concerns not always presented in a favorable light towards timber harvesting. The Board obviously understands the power of images and messaging which has been used very effectively by various environmental groups since the early 1970's. A public information campaign has to be part of an effective forest health plan.

4. **Consider the position of a “County Forester” or a consulting Registered Professional Forester to service the thousands landowners who own small forested parcels with a way for the trees to pay their way off of the land.**

This position would work under the local agricultural department to create and support an immediate and long-term direction towards a county “master-plan” for forest health. This individual would work with the local RCD and State government agencies for input to the plan. The plan has to be simple and completed quickly with the flexibility to add long term components later. The centerpiece of a “master-plan” would be to service the thousands landowners who own small forested parcels with a way for the trees to pay their way off of the land from the value of the commercial timber products they contain. Organization and coordination in treating large areas that contain hundreds of parcels is a daunting task that requires administrative management from the county level. This cannot be done by the private sector, but it would use the current assets the private sector offers. (Foresters, Timber Operators, and Professional tree services.)

5. **Consider how to best use any services and funding from State and Federal sources.** Think outside the box when considering how to best utilize government funding. (See #3 and #4 above) Consider the existing private local businesses that are already in place and have the equipment before purchasing items like chippers, portable saw-mills, masticators, and other capital equipment. Equipment purchases for use by fire-departments and related government departments like county D.O.T’s has to be balanced with the available capacity private businesses can provide. Be mindful when using fire-department crew resources. State fire-camp crews are a great resource and a great deal for the money spent, but consider the private businesses they indirectly compete with, and will they be there in the summer months when fire season ramps up?

Again the Forest Forum membership can be a great resource for your Board to tap into for guidance and advice as you move forward.

Thank-you for your attention to this matter.

Robert Little, President. *Representing members of the Amador El-Dorado Forest Forum*