

# COUNTY OF EL DORADO

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June 30, 2009

The Honorable Senator Dianne Feinstein  
United States Senate  
331 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Re: Response to your letter of June 25 regarding Emergency Assistance due to Intensified Risk of Wildfires

Dear Senator Feinstein:

Thank you for your rapid response to our June 8, 2009 letter. We're happy to see: 1) you share our concerns about the condition of California's National Forests and 2) your direction in the 2010 Interior Appropriations subcommittee mark-up that additional funding for timber sales and stewardship contracts be spent in regions where recently closed and at-risk mills could benefit. As you know, California has had mill shutdowns in Camino, Sonora, and Quincy. At least four other California mills, partially dependent on federal wood supply, are teetering on the edge of shutdown.

Additional targeted funding is certainly a step in the right direction. However, we believe the risk to public safety and private property is so great, due to the density of vegetation on the National Forests in California, that an emergency declaration is needed along with the legislative tools to respond to the emergency. There must be a stop put to the ongoing obstructionist litigation or the Forest Service cannot perform. Collaboration is not working and time is running out for the remaining infrastructure. The condition of our Forests demands a dramatic ramp-up of mechanical fuels reduction. We believe all three parts that we recommend, 1) declare an emergency, 2) provide legislative tools to respond to the emergency, and 3) a \$35 million increase in the California Region's funding for mechanical thinning, are crucial to achieve a dramatic turnaround in forest health and reduction in devastating wildfires.

Every region of the country has experienced mill closures and has additional mills at-risk. Every Forest Service Region will be competing for the increases you provided in the mark-up. The California Region might expect about 15 percent of the total \$45 million increase the Subcommittee has included; that's only \$6 million. The California National Forests have a total of 9.8 million acres of productive forestland that are outside of reserves. The Forest Service has stated they will have to reenter stands every 20 years to maintain healthy conditions that are resistant to insects, disease and wildfire. The Regional Forester has stated he wants the mechanical thinning program to increase from the current 100,000 acres/year to at least 300,000 acres per year to get on top of this problem. The Forest Service's own researchers predict that there would be at least a 50-60 percent reduction in large wildfire if the Forests were thinned and

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underbrush removed. Jerry Franklin and Norm Johnson agree that at least 2/3 of the landscape needs to be treated; hence the Regional Forester's goal to get to a 300,000 acre program quickly.

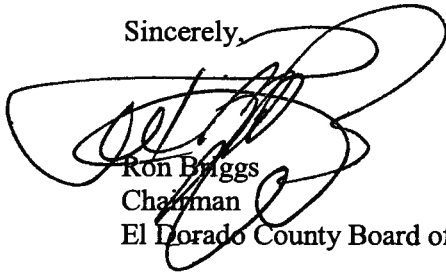
The California Region annually needs an additional: 1) \$5 million for the 4 Northwest Forest Plan Forests (Six Rivers, Klamath, Mendocino, and Shasta-Trinity), 2) \$22 million for full funding of the Quincy Library Group (Plumas, Lassen and Sierraville Ranger District of the Tahoe) 3) \$1.0 million each for the Modoc and Tahoe National Forests, and \$1.5 million each for the Eldorado, Stanislaus, Sierra, and Sequoia National Forests to begin rapidly ramping-up the mechanical fuels reduction program.

An earmark for \$35 million for the California Region, along with an emergency declaration and legislative tools are what's needed. This would allow the California Region to increase the wood supply by about 280 million board feet annually and accomplish a minimum of an additional 70,000 acres of mechanical fuels reduction. This level of wood supply would be enough to restart the Quincy, Sonora, and Camino sawmills, greatly reduce the risk of any further mill closures, and would increase the Regions' mechanical fuels reduction accomplishments by at least 70 percent. The accomplishments would likely be substantially greater should an emergency be declared and legislative tools to address the emergency are provided. This would move the Region rapidly toward a 300,000 acre/year accomplishment level.

As we pointed out in our June 8, 2009 letter to you, an aggressive fuels reduction plan has at least a 3:1 return on investment and would be a dramatic stimulus to our severely depressed local rural communities while leading to healthy forests and dramatically reduced risk of wildfire.

We request a meeting with you at your earliest convenience, preferably on-the-ground to view the vegetation density situation on the National Forest, and to discuss our recommended solutions. We will also work with Leah Russin on our suggested solution and invite her on a field tour.

Sincerely,



Ron Briggs  
Chairman  
El Dorado County Board of Supervisors

cc: Congressman Tom McClintock