

The Honorable Holly Mitchell
Chairwoman, of the Senate Budget Committee
California State Senate 30th District
Capitol Office Room 5080
Sacramento, CA. 95814

May 25, 2017

The Honorable Phil Ting
Chairman of the Assembly Budget Committee
California State Assembly 19th District
State Capitol
P.O. Box 942849
Sacramento, CA. 94249-0019

Subject: Emergency Drought Response – Impacts on High Hazard Counties

Dear Chairwoman Mitchell and Chairman Ting,

We, the ten high-hazard counties as identified by the Governors Tree Mortality Task Force, are reaching out today in regards to the much needed resources for tree mortality throughout the region. For the past four years California has endured a historic drought which, coupled with the disastrous impacts of the bark beetle, has resulted in over 102 million confirmed dead trees – an increase is anticipated. While the drought may have ended, both the short-term public safety concerns and long-term impacts of tree mortality have the potential to impact the health and happiness of Californians for decades to come.

County government has been at the forefront of this historic event working collaboratively to maximize minimal resources. At the heart of those efforts is access to California Disaster Assistance Act (CDAA) funding which is used in priority areas to complete much needed on-the-ground work. The Governor's May Budget Revision drastically cuts the allocation by more than \$44 million from the 2016-17 allocation in a time where Counties have great needs, few resources, and time sensitive public safety concerns associated with the removal of hazardous materials.

We respectfully request that you consider the following:

1. Include at least an additional \$10 million dollars to specifically be utilized for tree mortality via CDAA to leverage much-needed assistance on the ground. CDAA remains to be one of the only resources available to local government to combat these dire conditions.
2. Support Budget Trailer Bill Language to remove the 25 percent local cost share for CDAA funding in the 10 high-hazard tree mortality counties during these emergency conditions. Counties are on the front line in the response to tree mortality. Much work is needed to maintain access to our communities, provide routes for safe evacuation, and to ensure fire protection breaks are maintained. Counties are limited in their ability to respond by the 25 percent share of cost in the CDAA program.
3. Support additional grant funds from the State Responsibility Area (SRA) Fund and other sources for local assistance. Several competitive SRA grants were provided to communities last year; however, the needs outweigh the funding capability. Adding an additional \$10 million grant funds from the SRA fund, as recommended by the Assembly, would help bridge this gap.

To date, counties have not utilized all the CDAA funds that have been made available however, this is strictly because counties have been completing the ground work necessary to participate in CDAA and have received Board approval to pursue reimbursement claims soon. With the very real possibility that access to tree mortality CDAA funds will be limited at best, Counties will be forced to stop efforts that are already in motion – proving to be counterproductive and further straining limited capacity and financial resources. Counties are relying on the only financial relief available to them at this time, CDAA, to assist with only the most imperative public safety projects; many of which are along key county roads and serve as emergency access routes for communities and tourists alike.

Please consider the following:

- If/when catastrophic wildfire hits the high-hazard counties the impacts will be felt statewide in the form of negative air quality and water quality impacts.
- Much of the hydroelectric power produced in California occurs in the Tree Mortality High Hazard Zone and if/when a catastrophic wildfire hits would threaten the grid statewide.
- Many of the organized camps that provide unique experiences for youth and special need children from throughout California are in the Tree Mortality High Hazard Zones.
- Key watersheds located in the high-hazard counties provide clean drinking water to tens of thousands of Californians including many small communities and agriculture producers in the San Joaquin Valley.
- The central Sierra Nevada is home to tens of thousands of permanent residents. These residents work, support, and provide recreation activities for all Californians. Tree mortality threatens their homes and livelihood.

On behalf of ten high-hazard counties we would like to thank you for your time and consideration on these challenging issues. While we recognize that long-term forest management goals will need to be revisited, how we respond to this event now will determine the forest conditions, and ecosystem services that we obtain from them, for generations to come. If you have any additional questions please do not hesitate to contact Brittany Dyer of Madera County who will get you in touch with the appropriate contact. Brittany.Dyer@madera-county.com, 559-662-6050

Respectfully,

The Governor's Tree Mortality Task Force High Hazard County Representatives

*Please see attached signature page

Signature Page

Amador County Tree Mortality Representative

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Richard M. Forster

Calaveras County Tree Mortality Representative

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Randy Harvett, Supervisor

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CC: Members of the Senate Budget & Fiscal Review Committee
Members of the Assembly Budget Committee
Camille Wagner, Legislative Affairs Secretary, Office of Governor Edmund G. Brown
Michael Cohen, Director, California Department of Finance
California State Association of Counties
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