



January 14, 2021

The Honorable Bob Wieckowski
Chair, Senate Budget Subcommittee
No. 2 on Resources, Environmental Protection,
Energy & Transportation
State Capitol, Room 5019
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Proposed Wildfire and Forest Resilience Expenditure Plan - SUPPORT

Dear Senator Wieckowski:

On behalf of the Rural County Representatives of California (RCRC), I write to offer RCRC's strong support for the Governor's proposed Wildfire and Forest Resilience Expenditure Plan. RCRC is an association of thirty-seven rural California counties, and the RCRC Board of Directors is comprised of an elected supervisor from each member county.

RCRC member counties contain much of California's forested lands, including more than 70 percent of the State's national forest lands. While rural communities have historically borne the majority of destruction caused by high severity wildfires, wildfire risk has now become a statewide public safety concern as the wildland urban interface spreads over larger areas of the State due to climate change and impacts of renewed drought conditions in California. Wildfires are also a significant source of greenhouse gas emissions and compromise the quality and quantity of much of the State's water supply. The health and resilience of our forests and wildlands impacts every Californian.

California's Fourth Climate Change Assessment, released in 2018, estimated a 78 percent increase in acreage burned in California by wildfire by the end of the century.¹ However, the state's record-breaking 2020 wildfire season already produced that level of increase over the course of a few years. Recent fires also resulted in some of the worst air quality in the world for Northern California residents, with studies showing that up to half of all small-particle air pollution in the Western U.S. resulting from wildfire smoke in recent years.²

¹ Governor's Office of Planning and Research, et al. (2018) California's Fourth Climate Change Assessment. Retrieved from https://www.energy.ca.gov/sites/default/files/2019-11/Statewide_Reports-SUM-CCCA4-2018-013_Statewide_Summary_Report_ADA.pdf

² M. Burke, et al. "The changing risk and burden of wildfire in the United States." Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, January 12, 2021.

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Sadly, the 2020 wildfire season is indicative of what the state can expect to see again in 2021, particularly if projected dry precipitation levels come to fruition. While RCRC supports and strongly urges the Legislature to continue seeking long-term, sustainable, equitable funding solutions to maintain California's forest health and wildfire prevention measures, we must first acknowledge that the recent one-time annual allocations to our state's wildland management goals have been woefully insufficient. We continue to find ourselves struggling to fund necessary efforts to get ahead of wildfires such as large-scale forest and vegetation management, fuels treatment, watershed restoration, emergency response and evacuation staging, and measures to help low income residents harden their homes and maintain their defensible space. We also currently lack the necessary workforce to achieve many of our wildfire prevention and forest management goals, and have repeatedly seen well-intentioned legislation to address the workforce fail to cross the goalposts.

The Governor's proposed Wildfire and Forest Resilience Expenditure Plan, which includes \$323 million in current budget year expenditures and \$1 billion total, is much more in line with the capitol outlay that must be made to finally start catching up with our wildfire prevention needs. The Wildfire and Forest Resilience Expenditure Plan contains much needed funding to implement the Forest Management Task Force's newly released Action Plan, a roadmap for projects and programs across the spectrum of California's wildland management needs. The funds will be used for important programs such as funding home hardening retrofits for low-income residents in fire prone areas, as well as providing grants to communities for fuels treatment projects and community fire hardening efforts such as fuel breaks. The Wildfire and Forest Resilience Expenditure Plan will also jumpstart a move toward establishing an innovative wood products industry in California, which is vital to the maintenance of wildland fuels treatment in the future. Finally, the Wildfire and Forest Resilience Expenditure Plan will allow the state's forest health agencies to continue working with federal land managers to minimize the threat of wildfire on national forest lands and other federally managed lands through the recently signed Stewardship Agreement between California and the USDA Forest Service.

RCRC strongly believes that the Governor's proposed Wildfire and Forest Resilience Expenditure Plan provides the appropriate level of funding to finally jumpstart California's forest health and wildfire prevention goals toward a longer-term solution. Please do not hesitate to contact me at sheaton@rcrcnet.org if you have any questions on our support of this item. or would like to discuss further.

Sincerely,



STACI HEATON
Senior Regulatory Affairs Advocate

cc: Members of Senate Budget Subcommittee No. 2 on Resources, Environmental

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Protection, Energy & Transportation
Wade Crowfoot, Secretary, California Natural Resources Agency
Jared Blumenfeld, Secretary, California Environmental Protection Agency