

COUNTY OF EL DORADO

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January 26, 2021

The Honorable Richard Bloom
Chair, Assembly Budget Subcommittee
No. 3 on Resources & Transportation
State Capitol, Room 6026
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Proposed Wildfire and Forest Resilience Expenditure Plan – SUPPORT

Dear Assembly Member Bloom:

On behalf of El Dorado County, we offer our strong support for the Governor's proposed Wildfire and Forest Resilience Expenditure Plan (Expenditure Plan). The Expenditure Plan would allocate \$1 billion in the current budget year and 2021-22 to much-needed wildfire prevention and forest management projects. This funding will compliment El Dorado County's local efforts to prevent wildfire as we adopted a vegetation management ordinance in 2019 that requires property owners to maintain defensible space around habitable structures.

Wildfire risk has become a much greater concern in El Dorado County due to the long-overdue need to manage California's vast, overly dense wildlands and impacts of renewed drought conditions across the state. Wildfires are also a significant source of air pollution and compromise the quality and quantity of much of the State's water supply. The health and resilience of our forests and wildlands impacts the residents of El Dorado County along with every other Californian.

In 2014, the King Fire and Sand Fire destroyed a total of 100,000 acres of forested land and dozens of buildings in El Dorado County. While we were fortunate that no lives were lost in those fires, our residents have since watched our neighboring counties suffer catastrophic losses of lives and homes due to massive wildfires. Several communities in El Dorado County have been called out in news articles as having similar topography and characteristics to make them the next candidate for a devastating wildfire. Many fear that it is only a matter of time before we endure disastrous losses unless major efforts are made to manage our forests to prevent wildfires and perform roadside fuels reduction to maintain evacuation routes. These much needed efforts will only be possible with adequate funding and partnership from the State.

Unfortunately the 2020 wildfire season is a good representation of what the state can expect to see again in 2021, particularly if the state's projected precipitation levels come to pass. The Governor's proposed Expenditure Plan, which includes \$323 million in current budget year expenditures and \$1 billion total, is much more in line with the necessary spending to finally start catching up with our wildfire prevention needs. The Expenditure Plan contains funding that will be used for important programs that will benefit El Dorado County residents such as home hardening retrofits for low-income residents, as well as providing grants to communities for fuels treatment projects and community fire hardening efforts such as fuel breaks. The 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. Finally, the 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.

El Dorado County strongly believes that the Governor's proposed 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 if you have any questions on our support of this item or would like to discuss further.

Sincerely,

Supervisor John Hidahl
Chair, Board of Supervisors

cc: Members of the Assembly Budget Subcommittee No. 3 on Resources &
Transportation
Staci Heaton, Senior Regulatory Affairs Advocate, Rural County Representatives
of California
Wade Crowfoot, Secretary, California Natural Resources Agency
Jared Blumenfeld, Secretary, California Environmental Protection Agency