

# Shasta County supervisors push for more fire prevention work on federal lands

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REDDING, California - Shasta County supervisors voted unanimously to pass a measure Tuesday they hope will help stub out or slow the spread of future wildfires in the North State.

The resolution calls on state representatives to take an active role in lobbying federal Forest Service officials to do more fire prevention work in area forests.

County Chief Executive Officer Larry Lees said that, in his opinion, there was a direct correlation between catastrophic wildfires and the inability for state or local jurisdictions to reduce fuel loads on public lands through forest thinning or other programs.

The report noted that nearly 250 square miles in Shasta County had burned over the past five years. With 40 percent of the county's overall land area under federal control, the impacts of its management were significant.

Most recently the Eiler and Bald fires burned a total of about 112 square miles of mostly Lassen National Forest land in eastern Shasta County, costing about \$36.7 million to suppress.

With the passage of the resolution on Tuesday, Shasta County became the second in the state to join a growing push by rural counties to reshape the way public lands are managed in the state.

“We want to show the governor that there is a wide-spread concern of fire-related practices on federal land, and we want to do something about it,” said Justin Caporusso, a spokesman with the Rural County Representatives of California, an organization with members representing 34 rural counties in the state.

The argument is that prevention work could help slow a fire’s growth and potentially cut costs of suppression efforts, possibly saving lives and property in the process. The report stated that suppression costs for the Forest Service have topped 50 percent of its budget in recent years, compared with 13 percent in 1991.

Forest Service officials said extreme drought conditions and heavy fuel loads played a key role in the early hours of the Eiler Fire, which sparked in the Thousand Lakes wilderness area before growing in strength and rippling through the small community of Hat Creek.

Under such conditions, the Forest Service will work to put the fires out rather than let them burn, forest officials have said. District Ranger Kit Mullen said smoke jumpers and hand crews were involved in suppression efforts as soon as the fire was reported on July 31.

Elsewhere on the agenda, the Board of Supervisors voted to send a letter to North State lawmakers asking them to take action on behalf of dozens of businesses near Lake Shasta feeling the impact of plans that could raise Shasta Dam as much as 18.5 feet. That decision came after a presentation by Matthew Doyle of the Shasta Lake Business Owners Association last week detailing concerns and asking the board to stand up for the business community.

County Public Works Director Pat Minturn also told supervisors that while eight service areas receiving water from the county were in good shape, it would be appropriate to implement outdoor watering restrictions and fees for excessive water use in line with new state conservation standards.

“The community service areas are in strong positions, but we are all Californians,” Minturn told the board. “The state manages water use holistically, so everyone needs to work together in an effort to save water.”

He said the easiest way to curtail water use was by limiting outdoor irrigation, restricted by the measure passed.

Minturn also noted that on average the service areas lost about 20 percent of their water through leaks, theft, fire suppression efforts and other means, but the county was working to address many of those issues and has implemented some fixes in its largest district.

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