



January 3, 2023

The Honorable Gavin Newsom
Governor, State of California
1021 O Street, Suite 9000
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: 2023-24 Wildfire and Forest Resilience State Budget Allocations

Dear Governor Newsom,

On behalf of the California Forest Watershed Alliance (CAFWA), we are writing to offer our recommendations for 2023-24 State Budget allocations to the wildfire and forest resilience sector. CAFWA applauds your leadership over the last several years, particularly for championing a new \$1.3 billion investment over two years in extremely vital programs to improve the health of California's forests and watersheds while preventing future wildfires. We acknowledge the economic challenges ahead for the state and the difficulty of balancing fiscal responsibility with maintaining crucial programs such as forest resilience. However, it is urgent that the state maintain its investments in wildfire and forest resilience programs.

CAFWA is a unique coalition of diverse interests including organizations that represent water, environmental, local government, timber, and agricultural interests all dedicated to finding solutions to California's every-growing forest health and wildfire problem. The members of CAFWA are the Association of California Water Agencies (ACWA), California Farm Bureau Federation, California Forestry Association (Calforests), The Nature Conservancy, and Rural County Representatives of California (RCRC). Since its founding in 2014, CAFWA members have been working together to seek new ways to promote proactive, science-based, and ecologically sound forest management practices that will reduce the risk of destructive megafires. Our goal is to protect our forests, our natural resources, and our local economies and communities by accelerating the pace and scale of forest restoration.

The year 2022 was a relatively mild year for high-severity wildfires compared to previous years, particularly considering the acres burned versus 2020 and 2021. However, California's forest and wildlands are still far from the optimum healthy, resilient condition needed to prevent catastrophic fires, effectively sequester carbon, and provide the necessary quality and quantity of



The California Forest Watershed Alliance (CAFWA) is an urban-rural coalition representing water interests, local governments, the conservation community, agriculture, and the forestry sector, created to promote the restoration and improvement of California's forested watersheds. For more information, visit www.caforestsandwatersheds.org.

water for the state's residents. The California Air Resources Board has set a goal of 2.3 million acres treated annually in its recently adopted "2022 Scoping Plan for Achieving Carbon Neutrality" to achieve the necessary greenhouse gas emissions reduction and carbon sequestration from the natural and working lands sector, a goal that will be impossible to achieve without significant, long-term investments in forest and wildland management.

As you consider your initial January 2023 State Budget proposal, the members of CAFWA urge you to consider the following:

Protecting Existing Forest Resilience Allocations

California has set records as it relates to the largest, most destructive fires on a near-annual basis for the last several years. These wildfire events produce some of the worst national air quality, impacting the health and quality of life of all Californians, while costing the state billions annually to support suppression efforts. While 2022 has given us some respite, it is unwise to assume future wildfire seasons will be as mild given the condition of California's forests and wildlands. As such, it is imperative that the state protect existing allocations to forest resilience programs, even with projected downturns in revenues.

CAFWA strongly supports full allocation of the \$600 million appropriated to 2023-24 forest resilience and wildfire mitigation programs in the 2022-23 State Budget Package. We also strongly support protecting the \$200 million annual investment from the Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund (GGRF). These funds are crucial to maintaining the gains California has achieved in forest and watershed resilience programs, as well as continuing to safeguard the state's forested communities from the impacts of wildfires. These programs are vital to the quality and quantity of the entire state's water supply and reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from wildfire smoke statewide.

Long-Term Funding Mechanisms

While the members of CAFWA appreciate the annual allocations of funding to forest resilience programs, our forests and watersheds are critical state infrastructure worthy of long-term, annual investment. Forested watersheds provide the state's water supply, wildlife habitat, and with proper investment, have the potential to significantly contribute to California's GHG emissions reduction goals through carbon sequestration and reduced wildfire incidents. Our forests impact every California resident, whether it be through their drinking water, the air they breathe or their ability to recreate safely in a forested environment. CAFWA believes the state should seek a mechanism to support these programs annually and would be pleased to engage in an effort to develop a sustained, long-term funding solution to ensure that California's forests are managed and maintained to the most resilient benefit for all Californians.

Comprehensive Workforce Training

California must commit to addressing workforce shortages in forest health and resilience, including prescribed fire, fire suppression, and professional and vocational-based forest workers. Funding and training an adequate workforce helps ensure that projects will be successfully completed on the ground and that future funds allocated to forest resilience programs will be fully utilized. Furthermore, many forested communities have necessarily built their economic structures around the forests, largely through the recreation and tourism industry. Building a strong, vital

forest resilience workforce in these communities will not only help safeguard residents from the impacts of wildfire, but will also support the economic vitality of many communities that will benefit from the creation of jobs and opportunity in this sector.

Investment in Infrastructure

While there are several pressures contributing to the wildfire issues in forested environments, the consistent and ever-expanding accumulation of woody material represents a key hazard that will require a greater and more diversified investment than the state has previously approved. While the increase in the pace and scale of prescribed fire is vital to wildfire resilience, mechanical removal of small diameter and dead or dying trees from the landscape is also an important treatment method and is often required as a pretreatment prior to the reintroduction of fire into forested landscapes. California is also currently experiencing an uptick in tree mortality commensurate with the 2015 bark beetle epidemic due to the last several years of drought conditions, making it even more imperative that the state invest in a panoply of options to utilize woody byproducts from the management of the state's forested lands.


California has not committed enough funding or support to infrastructure that would help utilize woody byproducts from forest management projects, which has resulted in increased piling and burning, or materials simply being left on the landscape to deteriorate. Neither option is optimal for reducing GHG emissions or promoting carbon sequestration, and leaving excessive materials on the landscape can actually pose an additional fire hazard. Biomass, cross-laminated timber, and even simply sequestering carbon by utilizing wood for building materials can not only help mitigate wildfire risk on the landscape, but can also provide beneficial end uses for the byproducts and encourage carbon sequestration. CAFWA strongly encourages a clear commitment to investments in infrastructure to utilize woody byproducts from forest management projects for their highest and best use.

The members of CAFWA appreciate your consideration of our recommendations and are happy to discuss further as the 2023-24 State Budget takes shape.

Sincerely,


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