



RURAL COUNTY REPRESENTATIVES
OF CALIFORNIA

February 24, 2022

The Honorable Ash Kalra
California State Assembly
1021 O St, Suite 5130
Sacramento, CA 95814

**RE: Assembly Bill 1717 — OPPOSE
As Introduced January 27, 2022**

Dear Assembly Member Kalra:

On behalf of the Rural County Representatives of California (RCRC), I am writing to express our opposition to Assembly Bill 1717, authored by Assembly Member Cecilia Aguiar-Curry, which would expand the definition of “public works” to include fuel reduction work paid for in part or whole by public funds, thereby, requiring payment of prevailing wage. RCRC is an association of thirty-eight rural California counties, and the RCRC Board of Directors is comprised of elected supervisors from each of those member counties.

Over the past several years, California’s wildfire seasons have grown both longer and more severe each year, as climate change has exacerbated the decades-overdue need for better vegetation management and fuels treatment strategies around communities in the wildland urban interface (WUI). Many of these communities are socioeconomically disadvantaged, with all 26 of California’s economically disadvantaged counties containing lands designated as high or very high fire hazard severity zones, and depend on public funding such as grants from the Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund (GGRF) to implement community fuels treatment and fire mitigation projects to safeguard their communities from wildfires. One of the most impacted counties is Lake County, which suffers from disastrous wildfire events almost annually, yet has precious little resources to dedicate to fire mitigation efforts.

The ability to utilize GGRF and other public dollars through programs like California Climate Investments has afforded rural local governments the ability to undertake such vital projects as clearing dead and dying trees from critical infrastructure and residential properties during California’s recent tree mortality epidemic, as well as completing community wildfire mitigation projects in concert with local fire prevention organizations

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to help safeguard residents from the impacts of devastating wildfires. Even still, many rural counties in socioeconomically disadvantaged areas could benefit from assistance accessing public, competitive grant funding to help initiate fire mitigation projects because they lack the staffing and financial ability to compete with more robustly resourced counties.

As fire-prone counties continue to seek ways to maximize their ability to safeguard their residents from the devastation of wildfires, it seems ill-timed to introduce additional barriers to implementation of fire mitigation projects in communities that desperately need public funds to complete these projects. AB 1717 would increase the cost of crucial fire mitigation projects around communities and critical infrastructure by including these projects in the definition of "public works," thus subjecting them to prevailing wage. RCRC has long advocated for increased training and development of a local forest management and wildfire prevention workforce. AB 1717 would simply drive up costs of the scarce forest workforce currently in place, while shrinking the pace and scale of vegetation treatment projects on the ground, particularly in disadvantaged communities.

For the above reasons, RCRC opposes AB 1717 and respectfully requests your "no" vote. Please do not hesitate to contact me at sheaton@rcrcnet.org to discuss our concerns.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Staci Heaton", with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

STACI HEATON
Senior Policy Advocate

cc: The Honorable Cecilia Aguiar-Curry, Member of the State Assembly
Members of the Assembly Labor and Employment Committee
Megan Lane, Chief Consultant, Assembly Labor and Employment Committee
Lauren Prichard, Consultant, Assembly Republican Caucus