



July 15, 2021

The Honorable Anthony Portantino
Chair, Senate Appropriations Committee
State Capitol, Room 5050
Sacramento, CA 95814

**RE: Assembly Bill 1431 (Frazier) – SPONSOR
As Amended July 14, 2021**

Dear Senator Portantino:

On behalf of the Rural County Representatives of California (RCRC), I am writing to express our support for Assembly Bill 1431, authored by Assembly Member Jim Frazier, which would codify various state forest carbon and resilience goals and require the California Natural Resources Agency (CNRA) and California Environmental Protection Agency (CalEPA) to report annually to the Legislature on the progress of meeting those goals. RCRC is an association of thirty-seven rural California counties, and the RCRC Board of Directors is comprised of elected supervisors 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-

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

half of all small-particle air pollution in the Western U.S. resulting from wildfire smoke in recent years.² The 2021 wildfire season has already begun, as the Lava Fire currently burns in Siskiyou County at more than 17,000 but only 19 percent containment.

In 2018, a broad representation of local, state, and federal agencies that comprised the Forest Climate Action Team finalized the Plan to set goals for the treatment of California's forests to prevent and reduce greenhouse gas emissions from high severity wildfires while promoting carbon sequestration in forests and wildlands. The Plan is the result of several years of careful collaboration and includes vegetation management and fuels treatment strategies such as prescribed fire, mechanical thinning, and woody biomass utilization, all of which have been widely scientifically recognized to reduce greenhouse gas emissions associated with high severity wildfires. RCRC was a proud participant in the Forest Climate Action Team and believes that the goals, targets, and strategies set forth in the Plan are vital to the future of the resilience of California's forests and wildlands.

RCRC has subsequently continued supporting California's forest management and wildfire prevention goals contained in the Plan by engaging in the development of the Wildfire and Forest Resilience Action Plan (Action Plan), released in January 2021 by the California Wildfire and Forest Resilience Task Force. The Action Plan carried forward many of the same forest resilience, wildfire prevention and carbon emissions reduction goals outlined in the original Forest Carbon Plan.

It has also become abundantly clear in recent weeks that there must be a higher level of accountability to the Legislature and the public at large for the agencies tasked with meeting these goals. RCRC is truly concerned that we will never make real progress as long as the state's forest carbon and resilience targets are allowed to simply exist as guidelines rather than statutory requirements with real accountability.

By codifying various targets for forest management, biomass utilization, forest restoration, home hardening and wildfire prevention, AB 1431 lends accountability to the state's wildfire and forest resilience goals that currently does not exist. AB 1431 also requires CNRA and CalEPA to report annually on the progress of those goals to further the transparency of the state's fuels treatment activities to both the Legislature and the public that relies on these measures being undertaken for the safety of their communities, which would represent a small fiscal burden to the state for a vast increase in transparency.

For these reasons, RCRC respectfully requests your 'Aye' vote when this measure is heard before your Committee. If you should have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me at (916) 447-4806.

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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Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Staci Heaton", written in a cursive style.

STACI HEATON
Senior Regulatory Affairs Advocate

cc: The Honorable Jim Frazier, Member of the State Assembly
Members of the Senate Appropriations Committee
Consultant, Senate Appropriations Committee