



September 7, 2021

The Honorable Gavin Newsom
Governor, State of California
State Capitol, First Floor
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Senate Bill 456 (Laird) – REQUEST FOR SIGNATURE

Dear Governor Newsom:

On behalf of the Rural County Representatives of California (RCRC I respectfully request your signature on Senate Bill 456. SB 456, authored by Senator John Laird, would require the Governor’s Forest Management Task Force (Task Force) to (1) develop an implementation strategy for the “Wildfire and Forest Resilience Action Plan” (Plan) released in January 2021; and (2) to report annually on the state’s progress in achieving the goals set forth in the Plan. SB 456 would also rename the Task Force as the Wildfire and Forest Resilience Task Force. 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

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half of all small-particle air pollution in the Western U.S. resulting from wildfire smoke in recent years.²

In January 2021, the Task Force released the Plan to set goals for the treatment of California's forests to prevent high severity wildfires, restore forest resilience, improve watershed health, and restore forests and wildlands already damaged by the numerous catastrophic wildfire events that have occurred in the past decade. 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 an active participant in the activities to develop the Plan and believes that the goals, targets, and strategies are vital to the future of the resilience of California's forests and wildlands. However, without a statutorily mandated implementation strategy, the Plan could easily become another meaningless document whose goals are never fully realized much like the California Forest Carbon Plan, and others.

By requiring the Task Force to develop and annually report on an implementation strategy for the Plan, SB 456 lends accountability to the Plan that would not otherwise exist. This accountability could mean the difference between a fully realized implementation of the Plan and another strategy document that is simply never carried out.

Again, RCRC respectfully requests your signature on SB 456.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in purple ink that reads "Mary-Ann Warmerdam". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

MARY-ANN WARMERDAM
Senior Vice President Governmental Affairs

cc: The Honorable John Laird, Member of the State Senate

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.