

April 15, 2019

Governor's Office of Planning and Research  
Commission on Catastrophic Wildfire Cost and Recovery  
PO Box 3044  
Sacramento, CA 95812-3044

Dear Commissioners,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify April 3, 2019 on the important topic of wildfire cost and recovery. While the topics were largely surrounding insurance, financing options for utilities, and community needs around wildfire damages, I would like to direct your attention to keeping wildfire from entering WUI areas. Certainly, if we can manage forests for greater fire resiliency while keeping fires smaller with less intensity, the result will be reduced loss of lives, structures, and other infrastructure.

Historically, the state's forests averaged 50 trees per acre but due to fire exclusion over the last 70 years they now contain 300+ trees per acre. These historic forests were thinned by lightning fires with only the larger trees surviving, leaving a more open forest than what we are used to seeing today. The overstocked forests of today create the megafires that have become all too common. Through proper forest management, these forests can be thinned to mimic the lightning fires and return the state's forests to a fire resilient condition. A good example of this type of forest management is found in Lassen County where a forestland owner thinned the forest prior to a wildfire that occurred 10 years later. The thinned forest is found in the red circle below. In this area the wildfire left the tree tops and stayed on the ground until it reached the unthinned portion of the forest where it returned to the tree tops.



This is important to this commission because wildfires that stay on the ground can be controlled much faster than crown fires. Firefighting agencies will have a much better chance at keeping wildfires out of WUI and urban landscapes if we get to work returning our forests back to natural conditions.

However there are barriers to managing forests in California. We have the strictest Forest Practice Rules of anywhere in the nation and likely the world. The state's Timber Harvest Plan process is a three to five month process costing the landowner at least \$40,000. There are existing exemptions to preparing a Timber Harvest Plan

that should be improved upon to increase the pace and scale of forest treatments. One example is the Forest Fire Prevention Exemption. This exemption is limited to 300 acres. If we want any chance of reaching the goal of treating 500,000 acres for fire resiliency, this acreage limitation should be increased significantly or deleted. We respectfully request this commission to recommend improvements to this exemption to meet the state's treatment goals while also reducing the risk to communities.



Forest Fire Prevention Exemption after treatment on Mendocino Redwood Company lands. Thick forest in the background is the boundary of the treatment.

Many of the proposed treatments funded through grants and other programs thin only non-merchantable material such as small trees and brush. This material can be used to create baseload renewable energy in biomass plants but additional capacity is needed in the state. The existing biomass facilities also need support in renewing contracts that are soon coming to the end of their terms. Transportation subsidies are also needed so these facilities can reach areas that are currently outside of the range they can economically source material from over stocked forests. We respectfully ask this commission to recommend support for biomass facilities to further the goals of the state for fire resiliency in our forests.

Sincerely,



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