



To: RCRC Board of Directors
From: Staci Heaton, Regulatory Affairs Advocate
Mary-Ann Warmerdam, Senior Legislative Advocate
Justin Caporusso, Vice President External Affairs
Date: March 11, 2019
Re: Forest Management and Wildfire Update

Summary

Several efforts are underway in the Legislature and various state and federal agencies to address California's persistent catastrophic wildfire events. This memo provides an update on many of those activities, as well as RCRC's involvement and advocacy efforts.

Background

California has experienced increased levels of wildfire risk and faster, more intense burning fires each year over the past decade due to years of mismanaged forests combined with escalating impacts from climate change. 2018 eclipsed the 2017 fire season, with the Camp Fire in Butte County now recorded as the most destructive wildfire in California State history, the Mendocino Complex Fire as the largest wildfire in modern history, and the Carr Fire destroying more than 1,000 homes and killing six. The State is undertaking a number of actions designed to respond to California's increased fire activity.

Issue

CAL FIRE Community Wildfire Prevention & Mitigation Report

As required by Executive Order N-05-19, which the Governor issued in early January 2019, the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) released its Community Wildfire Prevention & Mitigation Report (Attachment 1) on March 5, 2019, recommending the most impactful administrative, regulatory, and policy changes the Governor can initiate in order to prevent and mitigate wildfires to the greatest possible extent. CAL FIRE solicited input from a variety of stakeholders, including RCRC and its member counties, and transmitted the report to the Governor's Office on February 22, 2019 before releasing it to the public.

The report contains nine immediate recommendations, including priority fuel reduction projects and suspension of certain regulatory requirements as necessary to facilitate those projects. The report prioritizes the fuel reduction projects and lists a fuel break project on Highway 44 in Shasta County as its top priority, while also including projects in Butte, Placer, and Humboldt Counties, among others. The report also commits to such longer-term tasks as ongoing development of methodologies for assessing communities

which are at-risk, increased use of prescribed fire, and technical support for local governments to enhance fire hazard planning.

Forest Management Task Force

Newly appointed Resources Secretary Wade Crowfoot attended the February 2019 meeting of the Forest Management Task Force (Task Force) and gave a briefing on his observations of the progress of the Task Force since its mid-2018 conversion from the Tree Mortality Task Force. Secretary Crowfoot alluded that there would be some tweaks to the Task Force, and that he would be more personally involved going forward in its management—a commitment he later reiterated to RCRC staff in a subsequent meeting. Subsequently, on March 5, 2019, Placer County Supervisor Jennifer Montgomery was appointed by the Governor as the new leader of the Task Force, effective April 1, 2019. Supervisor Montgomery was active in the Tree Mortality Task Force, most notably in the insurance subgroup and the genesis of 2018's Senate Bill 824 (Lara) which dealt with some of the homeowners insurance nonrenewals and cancelations in high wildfire risk areas. Supervisor Montgomery has also worked with RCRC staff on various forest management issues in recent years, and is actively involved in Placer County's biomass projects. The appointment requires Supervisor Montgomery to step down from her position on the Placer County Board of Supervisors, which she announced the day she was appointed to the Task Force. The next meeting of the Task Force is scheduled for March 11, 2019.

Forest Health Education and Outreach Campaign

Late last year, RCRC was invited to participate in the development of a "Forest Health Education and Outreach" campaign organized by the California Natural Resources Agency. Prior to the first meeting, participating organizations were asked to outline their individual forest health messaging, target audiences, and existing communication efforts. This information was provided at the first meeting, held January 22, 2019 in Sacramento. Attendees included representatives from the California Department of Transportation, the California Department of Insurance, the California Air Resources Board, the Department of Conservation, American Forests, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, the California Forestry Association, UC Cooperative Extension, The Forest Foundation, the Watershed Center, Sierra Pacific Industries, the Sierra Nevada Conservancy, and The Nature Conservancy, among others.

The campaign is in its early stages, and a draft strategic plan has been distributed to the group for review. The goal is to create a campaign that can be used to educate Californians about the threats to our forests, and how healthy forests benefit the state as a whole, and the steps needed to achieve more resilient forests in California. The campaign will communicate with its target audiences using digital and print tools, direct contact, print ads, and collateral materials. RCRC staff encouraged the group to focus their outreach efforts on California's urban areas, designating them as the priority target audience (residents, homeowners, legislators).

RCRC staff will continue to engage with the campaign and provide updates to the RCRC Board of Directors as appropriate.

Legislative Hearings

The Legislature has already held a number of informational hearings to discuss the impacts of wildfire on communities around the state, as well as possible legislative and administrative actions that can be undertaken in the short-term to better safeguard communities, promote healthier, more resilient forest and watersheds, and address the issues of emergency response and disaster management. The next such hearing will take place on Wednesday, March 13, 2019, and will be a joint hearing of the Senate Governance and Finance Committee and the Senate Natural Resources and Water Committee on future development and wildfire.

Staff Recommendation

RCRC will continue to update the RCRC Board of Directors on the State's activities on forest health and wildfire prevention as the Administration and Legislature continue to map out their plans for 2019.

Attachment

- CAL FIRE Community Wildfire Prevention & Mitigation Report