



April 25, 2017

The Honorable Bob Wieckowski  
Chair, Senate Budget Subcommittee  
No. 2 on Resources, Environmental  
Protection, Energy & Transportation  
State Capitol, Room 4085  
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Richard Bloom  
Chair, Assembly Budget Subcommittee  
No. 3 on Resources & Transportation  
State Capitol, Room 2003  
Sacramento, CA 95814

**RE: CAL FIRE Emergency Drought Response Funds**

Dear Senator Wieckowski and Assembly Member Bloom:

On behalf of the California Forest Watershed Alliance (CAFWA), we are writing to offer our recommendations regarding the Emergency Drought Response funds included in the Governor's proposed State Budget. CFWA is a unique coalition of disparate interests including organizations that represent water, environment, local government, timber, and agricultural interests all dedicated to finding a solution to California's ever-growing forest health and fire risk issues. The members of CFWA, the Association of California Water Agencies, California Farm Bureau Federation, California Forestry Association, The Nature Conservancy California Chapter, and Rural County Representatives of California, are working together to seek new ways to promote proactive, science-based, and ecologically sound forest management practices that will reduce the risk of destructive megafires. Our goal is to protect our forests, our natural resources, and our local economies and communities by accelerating the pace and scale of forest restoration.

The Department of Finance (DOF) has suggested that the Emergency Drought Response Funds currently proposed for the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) be shifted elsewhere due to the decreased need for drought response in the forests. However, as described below, we believe there remains a compelling need to invest in forest restoration and fuels reduction to reduce the risk of high-severity wildfire, reduce the likelihood that the current insect and disease epidemic



The Honorable Bob Wieckowski  
The Honorable Richard Bloom  
CAL FIRE - Emergency Drought Response Funds  
April 25, 2017  
Page 2

will spread, and promote healthier, more resilient forests. Therefore, we urge that the emergency drought funds continue to be allocated to CAL FIRE for these purposes.

Decades of fire suppression and past forest management have left much of the State with overly dense forest stands that are particularly susceptible to wildfire. Wildfires are a significant source of greenhouse gas emissions and contribute to more than half of California's annual black carbon emissions. Large-scale wildfires also diminish the State's total carbon sequestration capacity. The State's forested lands provide the vital co-benefit of protecting the quality and quantity of our State's water supply, which largely originates in forested watersheds. Investing in forest health today is crucial as we face uncertain precipitation conditions from year to year due to our changing climate.

The latest California drought included the driest four-year statewide precipitation on record, as well as the smallest Sierra-Cascades snowpack on record in 2015. During these years, the Central and Southern Sierras were also stricken with a pervasive bark beetle infestation which has resulted in the unprecedented die-off of 102 million trees since 2010. The tree mortality emergency has exacerbated conditions in the forests, which were already in dire need of more thoughtful management for better health and resilience, leaving large swathes of dead trees throughout the Sierras, threatening public health and safety and degrading all the values that healthy forest provide for people and nature.

While Governor Brown recently ended the drought state of emergency in California, his October 2015 Tree Mortality Emergency Proclamation remains in full effect as the profound impacts from the drought will linger in California's forests for years to come. Drought-stressed trees can take up to four years to recover, and both CAL FIRE and the USDA Forest Service believe that the mortality will continue to spread for many more months, and possibly years, before the epidemic runs its course. Even when the mortality curtails, the State will still need to mitigate the lasting, statewide forest and watershed health impacts that remain from such a large-scale epidemic, including increased wildfire suppression efforts and the need for a long-term, comprehensive strategy to restore the forests to a healthier, more resilient condition.

The members of CAFWA strongly believe that investments in the health of California's forests must become a higher priority for the State in order to preserve the myriad benefits our forests provide to all Californians. We respectfully urge that if the Emergency Drought Response funds are redirected, they be targeted at improving forest health, reducing the risk of high-severity wildfires and insect and disease epidemics, and fostering more resilient forest conditions. Our organizations look forward to continued engagement on this issue.

The Honorable Bob Wieckowski  
The Honorable Richard Bloom  
CAL FIRE - Emergency Drought Response Funds  
April 24, 2017  
Page 3

Sincerely,



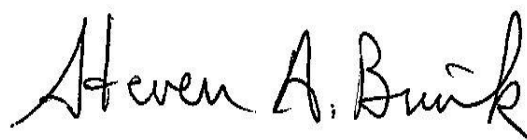
**Tim Quinn, Executive Director**  
Association of California Water Agencies



**Justin Caporusso, Vice President,  
External Affairs**  
Rural County Representatives of  
California



**Noelle G. Cremers, Director,  
Natural Resources & Commodities**  
California Farm Bureau Federation



**Steve Brink, Public Resources Vice  
President**  
California Forestry Association



**David Edelson, Sierra Nevada Project Director**  
The Nature Conservancy, California Chapter

cc: Members of Senate Budget Subcommittee No. 2 on Resources, Environmental  
Protection, Energy & Transportation  
Members of Assembly Budget Subcommittee No. 3 on Resources &  
Transportation  
Michael Cohen, Director, California Department of Finance  
Camille Wagner, Legislative Secretary, Office of Governor Edmund G. Brown