

United States Senate

December 6, 2021

The President
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Biden:

We write to thank you for your efforts to address the increasing threat of wildfire in the Western United States, and to urge you to take additional steps to mitigate the potential for another catastrophic fire season. While not over yet, this year will likely be the second-worst fire season on record for California, behind only 2020. Furthermore, eight of California's largest wildfires on record have occurred in the past five years, burning 10 million acres, causing 183 deaths and destroying more than 32,000 homes. Something has to change.

To that end, we ask that you direct the Administration and forthcoming commission on federal wildfire policy, as established in the *Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act*, to immediately review the federal government's policies on 1) wildfire suppression, and 2) wildland firefighting staffing structures. Based on feedback we have received from experts in California, we believe that such a review is urgently needed ahead of next fire season to ensure federal firefighting agencies—which have primary responsibility for fighting fires on nearly 58% of California's forest land—can keep pace in this new era of erratic, climate-driven mega blazes.

As more wildfires become so large they cross multiple land ownership types – federal, state, tribal and private – we must reassess the way we approach and coordinate suppression. The federal government, especially in the West, is no longer battling fires that just impact federal forest land. Lives, homes and other privately owned property are increasingly at risk. We applaud U.S. Forest Service Chief Randy Moore for understanding the seriousness of the most recent fire season and directing federal firefighters to suppress every ignition as quickly as possible. However, this was a temporary direction, and it indicates that we need a substantive and thorough review and update of federal wildfire suppression policy.

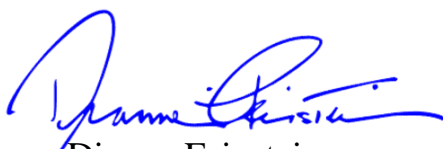
The National Fire Plan (NFP), which was developed in 2000 to provide a framework for responding to wildfires and assessing their impacts to communities,

has not been updated in almost a decade. We ask that the Administration and commission revisit the NFP with an eye toward improving interagency coordination and alignment around wildfire suppression, including decisions about initial attack, fire management and the use of specific firefighting strategies.


Additionally, we ask that the Administration and the commission re-evaluate federal wildland firefighting staffing structures to ensure we have enough crews available to fight fires in high-risk areas like California. It is our understanding that federal wildland firefighting agencies have different work-week schedules than many of their state and local counterparts, including the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, which can result in a shortage of federal crews, especially at night. Having resources to contain fires when they are still small is essential to avoiding massive, landscape-scale fires that are much more difficult, dangerous and expensive to get under control. While a nationwide overhaul of staffing structures is likely unnecessary, we do think it is important to look into solutions, perhaps on a pilot-program basis, in high-need areas throughout California and the West.

We greatly appreciate your continued personal engagement on Western wildfire and remain committed to working with you on this urgent priority.

Sincerely,



Dianne Feinstein
United States Senator



Alex Padilla
United States Senator

Cc: The Honorable Tom Vilsack, Secretary of Agriculture
The Honorable Deb Haaland, Secretary of the Interior
The Honorable Shalanda Young, Acting Director of the Office of Management and Budget