



United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-0504

<http://feinstein.senate.gov>

September 7, 2016

The Honorable Thomas J. Vilsack
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Tom,

I ask that you reprogram \$38 million in previously-appropriated funding in order to execute 19 high-priority tree removal projects, for which environmental clearances have already been granted, that cover 38,000 acres of federal land in the three national forests most affected by California's tree mortality crisis.

After five years of historic drought, which has led to the death of an estimated 66 million trees in California alone, my state and its people face a heightened and potentially catastrophic risk of wildfire this year and for years to come. California has already weathered several devastating wildfires this year, despite the fact that our traditional fire season has not yet even begun. Addressing the unprecedented tree mortality crisis in California is an urgent public safety issue that must be met with the most aggressive action possible.

The California Governor's Tree Mortality Task Force, which includes federal, state, local, and private interests, has identified 19 shovel-ready tree removal projects on federal lands that are simply awaiting the necessary federal funding. The projects are located on 38,000 acres of Tier 1 High Hazard Zones in the Stanislaus, Sierra, and Sequoia National Forests that present the most severe threats to human life. The 19 projects have already received all necessary environmental clearances, including NEPA. I have attached a July 15, 2016 letter to you from Chief Ken Pimlott of the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection describing the 19 projects in greater detail.

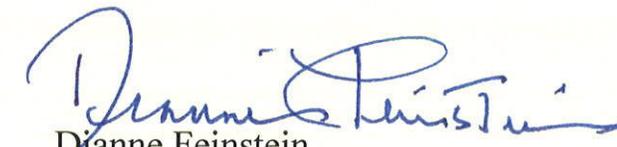
I recognize that the Forest Service budget faces significant pressure from the current rules governing how Congress appropriates money for wildfire

suppression, as you pointed out in your August 5, 2016 letter to me, and I want you to know that I am doing everything I can to get a budget fix passed. I have cosponsored the standalone legislation introduced by Senators Ron Wyden and Mike Crapo; I have joined with Senator Murkowski to include the budget fix in the Fiscal Year 2017 Senate Interior Appropriations bill; I have sent a letter to House Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy urging him to move the budget fix through the House; and I have written letters urging the inclusion of the budget fix in the Energy bill conference report as well as in forestry reform legislation being drafted by the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee.

However, I want to remind you that Congress specifically appropriated an extra \$600 million for wildfire suppression above the 10-year average in last year's Omnibus and \$823 million more than your Fiscal Year 2016 Budget requested for wildfire suppression. Therefore, there should be no need for fire borrowing this year or for holding back funding for critical fire prevention activities like the 19 NEPA-ready projects mentioned above. These 19 projects are the top priority for the State-Federal Tree Mortality Task Force, and I ask that you reprogram \$38 million in previously-appropriated funds in order to execute the projects as quickly as possible.

Thank you for your consideration of this request. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me or have your staff contact Josh Esquivel in my office at Joshua_Esquivel@feinstein.senate.gov.

Sincerely,


Dianne Feinstein
United States Senator

Enclosure

DF/je



DEPARTMENT OF FORESTRY AND FIRE PROTECTION

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July 15, 2016

Honorable Tom Vilsack, Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack,

As you know, California leaders strongly support resolving the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) budgeting and fire borrowing issue. We agree that this budgetary reform is urgently needed to enable the USFS to complete the priority fuels treatment work that is needed to reduce the risk of catastrophic fires. Along with the Governor, the State Legislature, and many State and local officials, I have worked hard to support this reform over the past three years and will continue to weigh in on this critical issue in any way possible. While we collectively work to solve this national problem, we believe the imminent risk of tree mortality on federal lands cannot be ignored.

Hundreds of communities in California are in imminent peril today as a result of over 66 million dead trees. Huge portions of the Sierra Nevada Mountains are extremely vulnerable to large fires right now this fire season due to this tree mortality. Within the last several weeks, two potentially devastating fires were stopped at the edge of the tree mortality areas only through the heroic efforts of firefighters. It is only a matter of time before one of these fires escapes our aggressive fire suppression efforts and becomes a disaster, destroying communities and taking lives.

The State of California, local communities, and utility companies have invested over \$250 million to date for on-the-ground life safety protection efforts in high hazard areas on state, local and private property. Funding that has been reprioritized from within the USFS Region 5 budget to enable initial tree removal projects on federal lands have been helpful, but is inadequate to address the most threatening life safety risks on federal lands. We will not be able to meaningfully reduce risks to lives and property in many affected communities without a significant increase in federal effort.

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While we will continue our efforts for a comprehensive fix for Federal Fire funding, I urge you to enable funding for shovel-ready tree removal projects on federal lands that can quickly reduce fire risks from California's current tree mortality crisis. There are 19 projects located on 38,000 acres of Tier 1 High Hazard Zones identified by our state Tree Mortality Task Force that encompass areas of tree mortality with the most severe life safety threats. The cost of these projects is estimated to be \$38 million on the three most severely impacted National Forests (Stanislaus National Forest, Sierra National Forest, and Sequoia National Forest). I have attached a list of the projects for your information.

I appreciate your efforts to fix funding for federal fire fighting. California will continue to support this effort in any way possible.



KEN PIMLOTT
Director

Attachment: Tier 1 High Hazard Zones Projects to Address Life Safety Threats

cc: Tom Tidwell, Chief U.S. Forest Service
Secretary John Laird, California Department of Natural Resources
Katie Wheeler-Matthews, Director, Office of Edmund G. Brown

July 15, 2016
 Attachment

Tier 1 High Hazard Zones Projects to Address Life Safety Threats

Project	Estimated Acres	Estimated Cost
<u>Stanislaus National Forest</u>	6,000	6,000,000
Smith-Dogtown Hazard Tree Project		
Mount Lewis Hazard Tree Project		
Mount Knight Hazard Tree Project		
Summit Level Hazard Tree Project		
<u>Sierra National Forest</u>	9,000	9,000,000
Bass Lake Recreation Hazard Phase II		
Soaproot Roads in Soaproot Biomass		
Sonny Meadows in Soaproot Biomass		
Mormon Jimmy Project		
Cow Stewardship – full package		
Acorn GNA – Option to High Sierra Thinning and Piling		
High Sierra Thinning and Piling		
Shaver/Blue Cyn Insect Mortality		
Prescribed Fire Mortality Slash Support		
<u>Sequoia National Forest</u>	23,000	23,000,000
Hume 2016 Roadside Hazard		
Frog Roadside Hazard		
North Road		
Vista Fire Restoration		
Sirretta Road Blowdown		
McNally Roadside Hazard		
Total	38,000	38,000,000