



## United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-0504

<http://feinstein.senate.gov>

November 29, 2016

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

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

In light of the Forest Service's recent aerial survey estimating an alarming 102 million dead trees in California, this letter is to follow up on my September request and ask that you immediately reprogram \$27 million to complete the nine remaining high-priority hazardous fuels removal projects identified by the California Governor's Tree Mortality Task Force.

According to the Forest Service's aerial survey, the number of dead trees has nearly doubled from 2015. Since the last aerial survey in May, an additional 36 million trees have died. This dramatically increased speed and scale of tree die-off in California calls for heightened urgency at the federal level in making funds available to mitigate this deadly public safety threat.

The \$11 million you provided in October for 10 of the fuels removal projects outlined in my initial request is greatly appreciated. However, funding all 19 projects identified by the Forest Service and the California's Tree Mortality Task Force in Tier 1 High Hazard Zones needs to be an immediate priority. The projects are located on 38,000 acres in California's most impacted national forests: the Stanislaus, the Sierra and Sequoia. These projects have completed all environmental reviews, including NEPA, and simply await federal funding.

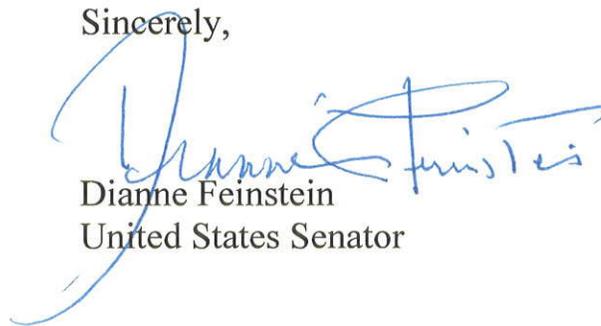
The situation in California's forests is dire. We have suffered yet another devastating wildfire year that resulted in seven fatalities, burned over 500,000 acres, and destroyed more than 1,270 homes and other structures. As this historic drought continues, the impacts on forests will only increase, as tree mortality numbers since 2010 have shown.

As we have discussed before, the challenges the Forest Service faces due to this current budget structure and the limited funding flexibility under the current continuing resolution are very difficult. I continue to do all I can to get a Forest Service budget fix passed this Congress. However, now is the time for swift and urgent action to remove dead trees in high hazard areas, or we risk even more fatalities and catastrophic wildfire conditions in the months to come.

With this increasingly dangerous situation, people's lives are at risk across the state of California. I sincerely hope that my repeated requests for additional federal funding to protect public safety do not go unmet.

Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me, or have your staff contact Alexis Segal on my staff at 202-224-5416. Thank you for your continued attention to this issue and I look forward to working together.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Dianne Feinstein", is written over the typed name and title. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "D" and a long, sweeping underline.

Dianne Feinstein  
United States Senator

DF/as/tc