

Fire Conference Committee Talking Points – August 14, 2018

- Thank you for the opportunity to testify before your committee today.
- This section of your agenda is titled “Funding for Fire Prevention and Health Forests”, and I want to begin by providing an overview of efforts on that topic. Director Pimlott will provide more detail on their fire prevention work and latest round of forest health grants. Jim Branham, the executive director of the Sierra Nevada Conservancy, will provide specific examples of their regional fuels reduction programs that we see as a model to export statewide.
- The administration has been concerned about this from the first days of our time here. Our efforts have been guided by what we faced when we walked in the door – 200 years of choices to exclude fire from the landscape and allow wildfire fuel to accumulate.
- Fire in this state is non-negotiable. It is part of the ecosystem and either we manage our forests for low intensity fire, or we experience larger and larger fires.
- Wildfire threat is a combination of three factors, fuel, temperature, and ignition. As our climate warms, the fuel conditions on the ground and increasing warm spells create opportunity for fire. As our state’s population grows, ignition opportunities grow. On average 95% of fires in California are caused by some form of human activity.
- We see evidence of these changing factors in the length of our fire season. Over the past generation, our fire season has grown at the front end by roughly thirty days, and has extended roughly thirty days at the back end. We recommended to the legislature and the legislature approved last year – a change in our fire budgeting that recognizes this change. A funding situation that recognizes this “new normal”, rather than base budgeting that was based on what *used* to be our fire season.
- At the press conference the Governor had on our current fire situation the week before last – Director Pimlott stated that his department used to experience a big fire of 90,000 acres once a year. We have had five such fires thus far this year, including the biggest fire in California history, and we are but halfway through the fire season.
- These fires lead to devastating impacts to life, property, and ecosystems. It has larger impacts to those of us that might not live immediately in a fire area, such as smoke in the air we all breath and economic impacts such as

wiping out weeks of peak season tourism in the Yosemite Park this year, and the Napa Valley and Big Sur Coast in recent years.

In May, the Governor took major steps to increase our response to fire prevention – by issuing an executive order with fire prevention actions, approving a forest carbon plan as a roadmap, increasing budget allocations for fire grants and fire prevention, and appointing a Governor’s office point person to lead on these issues. The legislature followed suit by approving these budget recommendations in June. I’ll talk about them in a minute.

- But I first want to acknowledge that there were actions taken in preceding years.
- The first year, the Governor, legislature, and stakeholders negotiated the successful legislation AB 1492 to finally get sustainable funding for timber regulation.
- Over the last 3 years, we faced record tree mortality in the state that led to work across state, federal, and local governments to put forth a plan of action in the Forest Carbon Plan, Tree Mortality Task force, and the new Forest Management Task Force that met yesterday.
- We worked with you in the legislature to successfully fund those priorities over multiple years. When the Administration started, we faced a \$26 million budget deficit. Many partners helped us get through that period. Then the federal government experienced budget sequestration just as California’s budget was coming back. Federal firefighting costs ate up many federal dollars that could have gone to forest health. Congress finally addressed this issue, but it will not take effect until September 2019. The state has entered into “Good Neighbor” agreements, that allow for federal, state, and local agencies to work across jurisdictional lines to deal with various forest and fire issues.
- We are also leading the nation in fire and temperature forecasting science through the 4th Climate Change Assessment – which will be released later this month, science that will be leading globally in this field.
- Two initiatives that I will highlight today to set the path to getting there are the Forest Carbon Plan and the recent Executive Order on Forest Health. Chief Pimlott will then speak to specific work that has been done to assist with forest health and fire prevention projects and the grant programs that are in place to fund this.

Forest Carbon Plan

- The Forest Carbon Plan is the product of state and federal agency work on forestry. Agencies who don't always see eye to eye, coming together around consensus recommendations for what needs to happen to stabilize and improve the health of our forests.
- The plan covers all forested regions of the state and emphasizes the need to take regional and watershed based action to improve forest health
- Simply put, the plan provides a consensus statement on what we see now on the ground in all forests, what science tells us we should expect, and what needs to be done to increase forest health and resiliency. This includes:
 - Significantly increasing fuels reduction to prevent high intensity fire
 - Increasing prescribed fire
 - Centering strategies around regions, watershed and ecosystems
 - Protecting forestland and guaranteeing lower intensity forestry practices through easements, acquisitions, and land use planning.
 - Building new and modern economies around wood products so that we can use removed small trees and other fuels productively rather than pile burning them.
- The recently enacted budget has roughly \$320 million related to the implementation of the Forest Carbon Plan including:
 - \$160 M for Forest Health grants and \$63 M for fuels reduction in the wild land-urban interface.
 - \$30 M for forest treatments in the Sierra Nevada Conservancy
 - \$29 M in permanent funding for 6 prescribed burning and fuels reduction crews
 - \$22M to support local agencies and non-profits leading work at the local level
 - \$15M for protecting forests at our State Parks
 - \$2.2 M for wood product market innovation and acceleration building on the recommendations of our SB 859 Wood Products Working Group.
- From this funding, grants to locals are going out annually. \$63 million in Fuel reduction grants to the state responsibility area go out annually and CAL FIRE recently announced their latest round of grants that Director Pimlott will provide more detail on.

Executive Order

- On May 10th, the Governor issued an Executive Order to Protect Communities from Wildfire, Climate Impacts.
- The order is based on the recommendations of the Forest Carbon Plan. It calls for treating 500,000 acres per year – a doubling of current work of 250,000 acres in the forest each year.
- It also calls for:
 - Improving the regulatory process
 - Reducing liability for prescribed fire
 - Increased wood product market manufacturing and innovative biomass utilization
 - Workforce development in rural areas where this work is done.
- To make sure the goals of the order are met, the Governor directed the formation of the Forest Management Task Force led by the Governor's Office, the Natural Resources Agency, the Environmental Protection Agency and the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection. This task force has begun its work.
- The task force has the participation of state, federal and local agencies, tribes, as well as forestry scientists and researchers, relevant industries and other non-governmental stakeholders.
- The task force will:
 - Develop regionalized strategies to increase forest health that encourages broad participation by stakeholders and beneficiaries;
 - Improve planning and coordination between state, federal and local agencies, California Native American Tribes, private stakeholders and other organizations to implement fuels reduction projects statewide;
 - Develop actionable plans for rebuilding forest infrastructure and workforce capacity in areas of the state where such infrastructure or capacity is inadequate to support forest management activities;
 - Coordinate resources wherever possible to maximize forest management activities;
 - Promote ongoing public awareness of forest-related scientific findings;
 - Ensure efforts associated with the implementation of the Executive Order are coordinated and guided by science as outlined in the Forest Carbon Plan and Strategic Fire Plan;

- State agencies within the Forest Management Task Force will monitor and report to the task force on project level activities for fuels reduction, changes in vegetation and fuels conditions, wildfire activity and related information to support the task force's goals and activities.

I will now turn it over to Chief Ken Pimlott . . .