



WATER RESOURCES TEAM

Team Leaders: Robert Dugan, Placer County Water Authority , rdugan@calcima.org
Jim Peifer, Regional Water Authority, jpeifer@rwah2o.org

Issue Experts: Robert Dugan, Placer County Water Authority rdugan@calcima.org
Jim Peifer, Regional Water Authority, jpeifer@rwah2o.org

FOREST HEALTH

Business Nexus

Sustainable water supplies rely upon healthy watersheds safe from the disruption of reservoir operations and ecological impacts that occur with megafires. These water supplies are critical to the business future of the Greater Sacramento Region. The ability to manage our forests responsibly have the economic benefits of preventing the severe air quality impacts of continued megafires that threaten quality of life and public health.

Requested Action

Federal support and funding to increase the pace and scale of collaborative, ecological, landscape-scale forest health efforts, including mechanical thinning and prescribed burning.

Brief Background

California's forests provide a multitude of benefits including water supply and quality, ecosystem health, and carbon sequestration. However, historical management practices have contributed to thick stands of forests that are explosive tinder in the event of a wildfire. Not only are our state's headwaters and communities increasingly threatened by wildfires, threats of drought and insect infestation are also present. In August of 2020, Governor Newsom (California) and the United States Forest Service signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to cooperatively manage one million acres of forest and rangelands in California annually.

This MOU establishes a joint framework to enhance science-based forest and rangeland stewardship in California. The U.S. Forest Service and the State of California commit to maintain and restore healthy forests and rangelands to reduce public safety risks, protect natural and built infrastructure, and enhance ecological habitat and biological diversity.

Principles for Successful Implementation

The MOU represents a positive and aspirational step towards managing catastrophic wildfire threats to communities and watersheds throughout the state. We desire to help the State and Federal government successfully implement the MOU in the coming years by focusing resources efficiently. We believe the following three principals can be cornerstones of successful implementation:

- Mitigate wildfires through pre-fire work reducing the long-term cost of catastrophic fire to the ecosystem, communities, and watersheds.
- In partnership with local government entities in California, identify the most pressing pre-fire treatment needs to protect communities and watersheds.
- Implement pre-fire stewardship projects at the local level that establish an efficient model for success throughout California.

Innovative Approaches

Several water agencies and counties have taken proactive steps to establish partnerships with a variety of stakeholders and implement innovative projects designed to improve the health of our forests and upper watersheds as well as protect local communities from catastrophic wildfire. This includes the Yuba Water Agency's North Yuba Forest Partnership and Placer County Water Agency's and Placer County's French Meadows Project. These local agency-led projects are a model for expanding the pace and scale of forest management on state, federal and private lands.

It is imperative to utilize county-level government as a conduit of state and federal funds to on-the-ground projects led by local fire departments, municipalities or other special districts. In the Yuba and Placer forest management pilot projects, county level government acts as the accumulator of funds from local, state, and federal sources, lead agency for state environmental processes, holder of master stewardship agreements for federal lands, as well as contracting agent for all local, private sector contractors performing on-the-ground safety and watershed management work. These projects have developed efficient funding, contract management and reporting models that can easily be replicated elsewhere given adequate funding for internal capacity building.