

BOARD OF FORESTRY AND FIRE PROTECTION

THE NATURAL RESOURCES AGENCY
STATE OF CALIFORNIA

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To Wildfire and Forest Resilience Task Force Director Patrick Wright and Members of the Executive Committee:

As Chair of the California Board of Forestry and Fire Protection, I write to share the Board's position and policy considerations for incorporation into the 2026 update of the California Wildfire & Forest Resilience Task Force Action Plan and for discussions related to biomass and wood utilization.

With this letter, the Board expresses a need for urgency as California considers actions necessary to achieve a more wildfire resilient state. I offer these comments as Chair, and on behalf of the Board's statutory and policy responsibilities.

BACKGROUND & PROGRESS

The Board recognizes that historic investments in the billions have been made in recent years to increase wildfire resiliency, in turn protecting lives and communities, and increasing forest, landscape, and rangeland health.

It is paying off. There are numerous cases where both people and natural resources have been protected from destructive wildfire, and consequently, many states and countries are looking to California as a model for how to convene stakeholders and investments for progress.

However, this is simply the start of a multi-decade and generational shift. As a state, we know that we cannot *fund* our way out of the challenges facing us. Nor can we be satisfied with our recent accomplishments. Progress will require a sustained and ambitious effort, marrying investments, on the ground know-how, and new approaches to streamlining regulatory processes.

We appreciate the collaboration and partnerships past efforts have fostered. The Wildfire and Forest Resilience Task Force has served an important role in bringing once-fragmented groups to the table, sometimes for the first time. It has provided a forum for celebrating progress while steering change and addressing challenges.

We also applaud CAL FIRE and the California Natural Resources Agency for institutionalizing cultural change and implementing new approaches, turning the page on conversations about what won't work, to conversations about what can.

Now, we look ahead at the steps necessary to bring this enormous amount of work into focus for the coming years. Namely, as vegetation treatment work and forest management accelerate, we need to address the reality of what to do with the woody biomass material left behind.

LOOKING AHEAD

More specifically, under Public Resources Code section 740, the Legislature has directed the Board to determine an adequate forest policy for the State of California and to provide general policy guidance to the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection. This State Forest Policy, together with the Board's responsibilities related to the organization of the State's fire protection system and State Responsibility Area planning, presumes that hazardous fuel reduction, vegetation management, and forest health treatments are supported—and driven—by practical, effective, and scalable pathways for removing and using the resulting biomass.

Stemming from the treatment of nearly one million acres, California's wildfire strategy is producing historic volumes of low-value woody material. Based on information regularly presented to and discussed by the Board, insufficient pathways for biomass utilization are increasingly constraining project delivery, increasing costs, and limiting the effectiveness of wildfire prevention investments. This is already in focus and will only become more of a challenge in the years ahead.

Given that the Board's statutory role also extends beyond general policy guidance, through Public Resources Code section 4111, the Board is authorized to make and enforce regulations necessary for the organization, maintenance, and direction of the State's fire protective system for the prevention and suppression of forest fires. A fire protection system that cannot reliably accommodate the removal and disposition of hazardous fuels generated through resilience activities is incomplete and operationally unsound.

The need here is clear from both a policy and statutory perspective: near-term forest biomass utilization is critical for furthering California's wildfire prevention and forest resilience strategy. Bioenergy remains one of the few options capable of processing forest biomass at the scale required in the near-term, while longer-term wood utilization technologies continue to be developed and deployed.

Action Plan recommendations that do not prioritize near-term forest biomass utilization conflict with the State's Forest Policy. Such approaches undermine the effectiveness of wildfire prevention investments and impair the State's ability to meet its statutory fire protection and forest resilience objectives.

Accordingly, and consistent with the Board's statutory responsibilities under Public Resources Code sections 740, 4111, 4130, and 4131, I respectfully recommend that the

Wildfire and Forest Resilience Task Force (Task Force) incorporate the following elements into the 2026 Action Plan Update and its broader strategic conversations going forward:

1. Explicit recognition that **near-term forest biomass utilization is an important component of wildfire prevention**, forest resilience, and post-fire recovery;
2. **Identification of existing bioenergy facilities**, reactivation of idle capacity, and strategically locating new infrastructure are priority needs necessary to support sustained treatment levels;
3. **Alignment of Action Plan implementation** with realistic biomass removal, transport, and utilization goals, particularly for hazardous fuels generated in State Responsibility Areas and shared-stewardship projects; and
4. **A process focused on incremental progress and a clear outline of immediate operational needs** for biomass utilization and longer-term, aspirational wood utilization strategies, while supporting continued development of both.

These considerations align with the Task Force's objective to create a sustainable wood products market and forest sector jobs and reflect the Board's long-standing emphasis on fuel reduction, efficient resource utilization, and protection of forest resource values.

I offer these comments in the spirit of collaboration and shared responsibility and look forward to continuing to serve our leadership role as part of this important conversation. The Board of Forestry and Fire Protection values the contributions of the Task Force and stands ready, consistent with its statutory and leadership role, to continue supporting efforts to strengthen California's wildfire resilience and forest health.

Sincerely,

Chair Terry O'Brien

California Board of Forestry and Fire Protection

cc: Wildfire and Forest Resilience Task Force Executive Committee members