

Forest Health and Tree Mortality

Background

Several consecutive years of drought in California triggered a large outbreak of insects that attacked and killed great swaths of conifer and hardwood trees in the central and southern Sierra Nevada Mountains and along the coastal range in both northern and southern California. The U.S. Forest Service estimates that over 22 million trees are dead as a result and that tens of millions more are likely to die by the end of this year.

The die-off is of such scale that it worsens wildfire risk across whole regions of the state and presents life safety risks from falling trees in many forested communities.

In October 2015, the Governor proclaimed a state of emergency and articulated the need to protect life and property by mitigating the risk from falling trees and increased fire hazard by removing trees near critical infrastructure. In addition, Governor Brown is requesting assistance from the federal

government and U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack to help California address “the worst epidemic of tree mortality in modern history.”

The Administration subsequently established a task force to mitigate health and safety impacts from dead and dying trees, coordinate emergency protective actions, and monitor ongoing events. He appointed representatives from local governments—including CSAC and RCRC—the relevant state and federal agencies, utilities, and environmental stakeholders.

In addition, the Governor has proposed \$150 million of spending from cap and trade revenues to support forest health programs that reduce greenhouse gas emissions through fuel reduction, reforestation projects, pest and diseased tree removal, and long-term protection of forested lands.

Talking Points

- We urge the Legislature to **approve the Governor’s proposed \$150 million allocation** of cap and trade revenues for forest health and tree mortality.
- We urge the state to **continue to compel the federal government to declare a state of emergency** in California.
- The California Public Utilities Commission should use their authority to **extend contracts on existing forestry bioenergy facilities** receiving feedstock from high hazard zones.

