



File Code: 1020
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Little Hoover Commission
925 L Street, Suite 805
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Commissioners:

Thank you for convening this important hearing on January 26, 2017, to discuss forest management in California and the efforts to respond to the tree mortality crisis. I appreciate the opportunity to provide written comments for the record.

California's forests are facing many pressures, including drought, rising temperatures, insect and disease infestations, increasing growth in the wildland urban interface as well as increasingly large and costly wildland fires.

A brutal five-year drought, coupled with rising temperatures and elevated bark beetle activity, has killed an estimated 102 million trees on 7.7 million acres in California since 2010; in 2016 alone, 62 million trees died on 4.3 million acres. Without question, this tree mortality epidemic occurring in California is unprecedented in scope and scale. With so many dead trees across the landscape, the threat to public and employee safety as well as major infrastructure that provides electricity and clean water to California's residents has dramatically increased. Tree mortality crosses all jurisdictional boundaries in the state, and has required a collective, collaborative response from all stakeholders.

Tree Mortality Task Force

When Governor Brown declared a state of emergency in 2015, the Office of Emergency Services and CAL FIRE invited the U.S. Forest Service to become a member of the newly established Statewide Tree Mortality Task Force (TMTF). In addition to being an active member of the Task Force, the Forest Service has representatives on all seven working groups within the TMTF.

The TMTF has very successfully pulled together representatives from state and federal agencies, local governments, utilities and other affected organizations. The State's leadership on the TMTF has been key to the successful statewide response to this ongoing crisis. The increased level of dialogue, cooperation and collaboration between all of these organizations has increased efficiencies, solved problems and helped grow creative approaches to this very difficult problem.

National Forest System Lands in California

The Pacific Southwest Region of the US Forest Service manages 18 National Forests on 20 million acres in California, and assists State and private forest landowners in California, Hawaii and the U.S. Affiliated Pacific Islands. National forests supply 50 percent of the water in California and form the watersheds of most major aqueducts and more than 2,400 reservoirs throughout the state.



The tree mortality epidemic is having a profound effect on many of the resources we are entrusted to manage. There are approximately 33 million dead trees on 1.5 million acres in the Sequoia, Sierra, Stanislaus, Eldorado, and Tahoe National Forests and Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit. In March 2016, the Forest Service established a Tree Mortality Response Team to work closely with our affected national forests and the TMTF. The Forest Service has prioritized funding and professional expertise to partner with the State of California and others to mitigate threats posed by dead and dying trees. We continue to make steady progress to mitigate hazards in High Hazard Zones where the greatest risk exists.

Looking Ahead

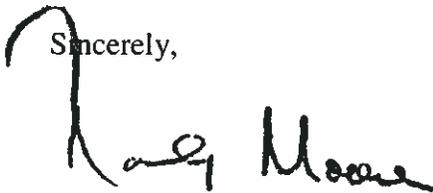
As we move beyond the triage phase of hazard tree removal, the Forest Service shares the State's goal in restoring the ecological resilience of forested lands in California to achieve sustainable ecosystems that provide a broad range of services to humans and other organisms.

This will require an ongoing commitment to the partnerships that have been built and strengthened on the TMTF, so we can focus more effectively on utilizing forest health collaborations we already have in place. This strategy will require active forest management that increases the pace and scale of ecological restoration, including thinning, hazardous fuels reduction, increasing the use of prescribed fire, large landscape restoration, reforestation and other activities that improve forest health.

The Forest Service will continue to seek opportunities to collaborate using the Good Neighbor Authority in the 2014 Farm Bill, such as the joint project with the Eldorado National Forest and the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection that focuses on community wildfire protection. We will continue to increase opportunities to support the State of California through our State and Private Forestry Programs that restore resiliency to California's forests. We will also continue to work with the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service in implementing collaborative landscape projects. Many of these projects directly address large-scale tree mortality and build forest resilience.

In closing, I wish to thank Governor Brown and our partners at CAL FIRE and CAL OES for their leadership of the tree mortality response in California. We have collectively made tremendous efforts to combat this unprecedented event and look forward to continuing these efforts to increase our restoration efforts and build resiliency of California's forests.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Randy Moore". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

RANDY MOORE
Regional Forester Pacific Southwest Region