

Caltrans Tree Mortality Talking Points for Little Hoover Commission

Thank you, Chair and Commission Members for the invitation to speak today. I am Malcolm Dougherty, Director of Caltrans.

As early as 2013, Caltrans crews began identifying and removing trees that had died from drought-related and subsequent pest or disease impairment and that posed a direct threat to our transportation infrastructure.

By fall of 2015, we realized that Caltrans tree crews would not be able to keep up with the number of trees requiring removal. Initial reviews identified 25,000 dead trees as potential threats; that number now has increased past 72,000 dead trees. Following the Governor's emergency proclamation on tree mortality from October 2015, Caltrans initiated emergency contracts for tree removal.

Caltrans currently has 26 emergency tree removal projects statewide, with additional projects being considered throughout the State. To date, Caltrans has allocated \$78.8 million to tree removal contracts, with an additional \$18.4 million in staff resources to aid these efforts. With these efforts, we have so far removed more than 49,000 dead trees. Once we remove the dead trees, we seek to get the highest and best use for the wood with the highest quality going to the sawmills for lumber and the remaining trees chipped for fuel at bioenergy plants or for use as mulch within the State's right of way.

The scope of work in these contracts includes:

- removing all dead tree that could directly impact the roadway and the motoring public;
- removal of all dead material within 100 feet of the roadway centerline to reduce fuels for wildfires;
- assessment and marking of trees by a certified arborist;
- felling, removal, and disposal of the trees by the contractor; and
- restoration of the removal area, including chipping.

Caltrans is providing environmental clearance and right of way authorization for any required permits and approvals to enter land from adjoining property owners. Our contractors may be required to provide additional biological consultants for migratory bird nesting reviews and archeologists for cultural reviews.

As directed by the Governor's Tree Mortality Emergency Proclamation, Caltrans requested federal emergency response funds for tree mortality from the Federal Highway Administration, which was denied on April 19, 2016. The Federal Highway Administration views this process as preventive work in anticipation of a disaster and a

State responsibility under federal law. Caltrans continues to engage the Federal Highway Administration on this issue.

While we have done substantial work already, Caltrans expects tree mortality to continue within the southern Sierra region and to continue to move northward into Northern California. We are an important player in helping to address this issue.

In response, Caltrans is continuing to monitor tree mortality and is planning additional tree removal projects throughout the state and along affected routes in the Sierras. We expect to allocate an additional \$150 to \$200 million of funds from our State Highway Operations and Protection Program (SHOPP) over the next 2-3 years.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide information about Caltrans' efforts regarding tree mortality. I am available for any questions the Commission may have.