



Sustainable Forest Action Coalition

542 Main St., Placerville, CA 95667

Organization Representatives

Laurel Brent-Bumb (530) 621 5885 chamber@eldoradocounty.org

Bill Wickman (530) 283 0973 billwickman@sbcglobal.net

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The Honorable Senator Feinstein
The Honorable Senator Barbara Boxer
The Honorable Congressman Wally Herger
The Honorable Congressman Tom McClintock
The Honorable Congressman Dan Lungren
The Honorable Congressman Jeff Denham
The Honorable Congressman Jim Costa
The Honorable Congressman Kevin McCarthy
The Honorable Congressman Devin Nunes
The Honorable Congressman Dennis Cardoza
The Honorable Congressman Mike Thompson

Dear Senator, Representatives and State Representatives:

The Sustainable Forest Action Coalition (SFAC) would like to take this opportunity to discuss the issue of water within the State of California and the role that our rural counties play in this critical issue. The issue is about the supply of water to state and federal water projects that feed many metropolitan and agricultural areas as well as the Delta. SFAC wishes to address the existing and increasing economic impacts associated with the lack of proper vegetative management of our National Forests. Of greatest concern is the issue related to the growing need to thin our forests to assist in the reduction of catastrophic wildfires, and maintenance of our wildlife, watersheds, and recreational values so important to the counties that SFAC represents as well as the whole State of California.

The Sustainable Forest Action Coalition (SFAC) represents rural counties in Central and Northern California. Our members are representatives from Amador, Butte, Calaveras, Colusa, Del Norte, El Dorado, Glenn, Inyo, Lassen, Modoc, Nevada, Placer, Plumas, Sierra, Siskiyou, Shasta, Tehama, Trinity, and Tuolumne Counties that include Supervisors, Chambers of Commerce, Fire Safe

Participating Counties:

Amador • Butte • Calaveras • Colusa • Del Norte • El Dorado • Glenn • Inyo • Lassen • Modoc
Nevada • Placer • Plumas • Tehama • Shasta • Siskiyou • Trinity • Tuolumne • Yuba

Councils, Farm Bureaus, Agricultural Commissions, Forest Products Industry, Bio-energy Industry, Education, individual businesses with a mix of public and private agencies and associations. SFAC covers a geographic area of rural counties where healthy watersheds, forest, recreation and tourism are vital to the State of California. This same geographic area is dominated by public land where management and use is vital to our social and economic benefits and survival.

Many SFAC counties have experienced the same unemployment issues as many of your Districts but from a different agricultural perspective. Many of our agricultural issues center on the proper treatment of our forests and the ecosystems that benefit from that treatment. You are all well aware that the State of California has a large forested land base that is controlled by the Federal Government and managed by the Forest Service. Over the last 10-15 years sound management on these lands has fallen to the wayside. As a result, we have seen an increased loss of our State's valuable watersheds.

The 2006 national fire season broke a 75-year record. Recently the State has endured some of the worst fire seasons in recorded history. The 2003 fire season set a new record in acres burned, which was to be broken only four years later in 2007. In 2007, we saw the Upper Feather River watershed lose approximately 88,000 acres to catastrophic wildfire. During the summer of 2008, while most of Northern California was enveloped in a smoke cloud from mid June to the beginning of August, the Northern Sierras were experiencing the largest fires in their history. Notwithstanding the direct threat to public health and safety, these fires also degrade the watersheds that are the prime source of California's water supply. In addition to watershed impacts, we are losing many thousands of acres of wildlife habitat. As with the loss of jobs in the agricultural sector of your Districts, the loss of these resource values, including recreation and tourism activity, also significantly affects the economic base for many of these counties. In addition, the timber industry and the associated infrastructure are at a critical stage and must be maintained to properly treat the National Forest and their associated agricultural crop, trees.

The majority of the nineteen counties that SFAC represents are in the Sierra Nevada and Cascade Range. According to DWR data (*Progress on Incorporating Climate Change into Planning and Management of California's Water Resources, Technical Memorandum Report, July 2006*) on average, 60 percent of the state's total annual precipitation – in the form of rain and snow – falls in the Sierra Nevada and a portion of the southern Cascades. The increase in acres lost to wildfire, the growing inability of the soils and vegetation to hold back sediment is negatively impacting water quality as well as adding sediment to the many rivers within the SFAC counties. This sediment is impacting fisheries and the hydro-electric facilities of PG&E and others. In addition these impacts are having a dramatic effect on the ability to deliver the water from the Sierra Nevada and Southern Cascade watersheds in amounts and timing beneficial to downstream users.

The impacts of not properly managing the National Forests?

Water Quality – we know the devastating effects of large wildfires on our watersheds. The 138,000 acre Hayman Fire on the Front Range of the Colorado Rockies in the City of Denver's municipal watershed is the perfect example. The City has been doing

debris removal since the Fire occurred and recently has begun dredging its storage reservoirs. They expect they have about 1 million cubic yards of sediment that will have to be dredged at a cost of \$20 million.

Water Yield – we know that our Forests are overly dense. We also know that if the Forest Service was actively managing all the productive forestlands and meeting a fuels objective, there would be a dramatic increase in water yield from the Sierra Nevada Mountains.

A quick back-of-the-envelope calculation using Forest Service mechanical thinning and biomass removal averages shows that about 18% of the biomass is removed on a per ton basis. We know the evapotranspiration rate in the Sierra Nevada's is 54 inches/year. The math indicates we may have the potential of 5 million acre-feet of more water in the form of runoff and ground water recharge annually. That's enough water to nearly fill Lake Oroville and New Melones every year.

We know that it is critical to continue to provide full capacity in our reservoirs. It is also critical to reduce sediment delivery to these reservoirs and the best way this can happen is to reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfires and the known loss of sediment after such events. Proper forest management on our National Forests is the only way this can occur. The type of forest management that we are prescribing is the thinning of overstocked stands. This treatment does not threaten the old growth, streams or wildlife, but increases the opportunity to protect and improve all of these valuable assets. This work can not be done by using the smaller diameter limits that were recently defeated in the Judge England decision for re-instatement of the 2004 Sierra Nevada Framework. We only mention this because of the newly introduced Wyden Bill for Eastern Oregon where the proposal is to set a 20 inch diameter limit. To propose such limits greatly reduces our ability to do the ecosystem restoration and fire protection that is needed. In addition, such an arbitrary limit greatly reduces the potential for doing the necessary watershed restoration treatments economically.

Within the SFAC area, there is a tremendous amount of research showing positive ecological, social and economic benefits that have come out of the Herger-Feinstein Quincy Library Group (HFQLG) pilot project that Congress authorized over 10 years ago. From a forest, watershed and fire perspective, the recently released USDA, R5-TP-031, December 2010, *A Summary of Fuel Treatment Effectiveness in the Herger-Feinstein Quincy Library Group Pilot Project Area* contains valuable information that can be applied across the whole State. Key points from the summary are captured in the following quotes;

“This report documents the effectiveness of fuel treatments that interacted with wildfires. All wildfires (20) that interacted with one or more fuel treatments within the HFQLG Forest Recovery Act Pilot Project area from 1999 to 2010 were examined.”

Fuel treatments were effective in modifying fire behavior, resulting in a reduction in final fire size and reduced suppression costs.

Thinning and prescribed fire, used in combination, modified wildfire behavior more effectively than thinning alone and with less tree mortality than lop and scatter and mastication treatments. Treated areas had the least vegetation mortality and resulted in retaining a forest after wildfire, maintaining ecological and social benefits of a forest such as wildlife habitat, recreational enjoyment, and numerous other benefits.

Untreated areas experienced the most severe fire effects and vegetative mortality.

Treated areas increased fire suppression options and enhanced opportunities for safe, low-severity burnout operations with reduced potential for spotting and torching.

Smoke volume was reduced significantly when fire reached treated areas.

It is now controversial to salvage and replant to reforest after wildfires on public lands. Over the last 10 or so years, litigation and resulting change in public land management after fire has and will continue to impact the water issues previously discussed. When salvage is not allowed or is held up by appeal and litigation, by the time it clears the courts, the once economical material no longer has value because of deterioration. The resulting impacts are;

The loss of revenue from salvage operations reduces the funds available to replant substantial acres. Even if acres are planted amongst the burnt timber not removed, there are extreme impacts; Snags from a few inches to several feet in diameter eventually will fall over and jack straw across the landscape.

This landscape prohibits the normal movements of larger mammals such as deer, elk and bear. As a result of large woody material, these extreme fuel conditions as a result of large woody material are highly susceptible to reburn in subsequent lightening or man caused fires.

This fuel type is impossible to suppress and burns with such intensity that the soils that are underneath this large untreated landscape will be sterilized and most often become hydrophobic (will not allow water to penetrate).

This soil condition then is the extreme for adverse effects on watersheds and our state's water quality.

Most acres on public lands are now left to recover on their own. This recovery occurs over many more decades before these burned areas have returned into a natural forested state. This situation is detrimental to water production. The paper *Mediterranean Climate Effects. I. Conifer Water Use Across A Sierra Nevada Ecoton*, by **E. B. Royce and M. G. Barbour** has shown that shrubs use far more soil moisture than do conifers and hardwoods. If all of our state's burnt acres on public lands are left to their own means of recovery, we will see, and are seeing, an extended period when these lands are dominated by shrubs. We are losing thousands of acre feet of water per year by not managing our burnt landscapes in a more economic and watershed friendly manner.

Currently, Forest Service Region 5 Regional Forester, Randy Moore, has stated that the Forest Service in California must increase their annual treatment of their forested lands to have any effectiveness. In Fiscal Year 2009, Region 5 treated approximately 100,000 acres through mechanical thinning and 100,000 acres by prescribed fire. Mr. Moore has stated that the pace and scale of fuels treatment must be increased to 500,000 acres annually. SFAC supports this concept and hopes that, in order to help meet the State's water needs, there is support through adequate appropriations to meet this increase in forest management. The anticipated end result will be an increase in a much needed water supply.

SFAC, and all the other forested counties in the Sierras and Northern California, can play a key role in the supply of water and the benefits that it brings to this debate. In addition, the recognition and acceptance of the role that our forests play in the overall agricultural discussion in relation to jobs and benefits is vital to our economic well being and survival as rural counties. This can only occur through proper management of the forests and an increase in the supply of logs and biomass from the National Forests.

In addition, it is never too early to face the reality that the Secure Rural Schools Act extension will be sun setting in a year. At that time, if Congress does not approve reauthorization of the Secure Rural Schools Act, then it is imperative for our National Forest to make a significant contribution to local economies that support the survival of our rural counties and schools. This can only be realized with the renewal of the 25% receipts that are associated with proper forest management.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Bill Wickman". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the typed name.

Bill Wickman, Spokesperson SFAC