

April 7, 2014

The Honorable Tom Vilsack
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

Pursuant to the 2014 Farm Bill and on behalf of California Governor Edmund G. Brown Jr., I am writing to recommend watersheds for designation as priority treatment areas under the Healthy Forest Restoration Act Section 602. In considering these recommendations, the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) and the U.S. Forest Service met to identify areas that meet the Section 602 criteria and considered other social, political, practical and infrastructure aspects.

After additional consultation with pest specialists and foresters across California, we have found that the following watersheds are in need of designation pursuant to Section 602:

- **McCloud/Pit River Watersheds**

Klamath, Shasta-Trinity and Modoc national forests

These watersheds straddle three national forests and include the entire Burney-Hat Creek Collaborative Landscape Restoration Project. They include multiple land ownerships providing a high opportunity for collaborative work across all lands. There are high levels of predicted risk throughout these watersheds according to the 2012 National Insect and Disease Risk Map. They have elevated levels of recent mortality due to insect outbreaks according to the Regional Aerial Detection Survey. The watersheds have large areas of U.S. Forest Service-designated wildland-urban interface along all of the national forest boundaries and border Burney Falls State Park, one of California's most popular state parks.

- **South Fork American River Watershed**

El Dorado National Forest

This watershed has large swaths of U.S. Forest Service-designated wildland-urban interface along a heavily traveled and visible state highway corridor with multiple small permanent and seasonal residences and heavy recreational use. National forest project planning is in progress within this watershed and multiple land ownerships provide a high opportunity for collaborative work across all lands. The watershed has very high levels of predicted risk throughout the watershed according to the 2012 National Insect and Disease Risk Map and faces growing levels of bark beetle activity and predicted increasing bark beetle mortality due to the ongoing drought in the area. The high visibility of this watershed can be leveraged for educational and outreach purposes to encourage future forest health work.

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- **Santa Ana Watershed**

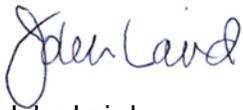
- San Bernardino National Forest*

- This watershed is heavily visited and contains a large residential area near Big Bear Lake within national forest boundaries, all of which is wildland-urban interface. The watershed falls within the recently designated Chiefs' Joint Landscape Restoration Partnership project area and has a large area of elevated risk according to the 2012 National Insect and Disease Risk Map. The watershed currently has numerous small pockets of insect activity and the current drought conditions are raising concerns about a large-scale outbreak. The area also includes the Santa Ana Watershed Project Authority, a collaborative venture among local water agencies which is an active partner in managing the upper watershed.

The watersheds mentioned above are all experiencing declining forest health based on annual surveys. They are at risk of substantially increased tree mortality over the next 15 years due to insect or disease infestation, based on the National Insect and Disease Risk Map. These are areas where hazard trees pose an imminent risk to public infrastructure, health and safety. They are experiencing increased bark beetle activity and mortality, and are subject to even greater bark beetle levels due to current drought conditions. These forests are also demonstrating loss of carbon storage capacity due to death and decay of trees caused by bark beetles.

For the reasons above, we are recommending the above watersheds for designation as priority treatment areas under the Healthy Forest Restoration Act Section 602. We look forward to continuing our partnership with the U.S. Forest Service and hope to further collaborate whenever possible to improve forest health in California.

Sincerely,



John Laird
California Secretary for Natural Resources

cc: Randy Moore, Regional Forester, U.S. Forest Service Pacific Southwest Region 5