

**Dogwood Mountain Community**

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Supervisor (District 5) Debbie Poochigian  
County of Fresno  
Hall of Records  
2281 Tulare Street  
Third Floor, Room #300  
Fresno, CA 93721

Dear Supervisor Poochigian:

This letter requests support and resources to clean up and slow forest mortality occurring in eastern Fresno County. Prolonged drought and overcrowded forest conditions have led to the continuing attack of pine trees in the area by bark beetles. Dogwood is one of the many subdivisions in the mountains of Fresno County being impacted by tree mortality. Homeowners could be liable for tree removal costs exceeding \$10,000 to protect their homes.

Last year you passed a resolution on the tree mortality which resulted in the Governor to declaring a State of Emergency. The existing mortality event is unprecedented in its effect to the Sierra Nevada ecosystem. It will also greatly impact the economy of the area and has potential to threaten health and safety if not treated with urgency. The scale of the mortality makes managing the problem monumental for all agencies and private citizens alike.

**Background:**

A combination of events have created this problem. The lack of natural fire has changed species composition, density, and vigor of the forests. Most areas have more than 10 times the number of trees the carrying capacity of the land can support. The last 4 years of drought, paired with climate change, have acted as the catalyst to stress the trees and provide ideal breeding habitat for the western pine beetle (*Dendroctonus brevicomis*). This has allowed the beetles to generate epidemic population which increases exponentially every 3 months. At these levels, we are seeing otherwise healthy trees that have been well managed by thinning and/or prescribed burning killed by beetles. The last estimates for only the Sierra National Forest are 350,000 acres impacted with more than

50 million dead trees. This material is now standing dead and tinder dry creating a public safety hazard adjacent to roads, campgrounds, and structures.

On October 30, 2015 Governor Brown proclaimed the area a disaster as a result of your resolution and other input. A multi-agency task force is being formed to try and address this problem before the trees begin to fall or burn. Currently no substantial funding has been identified and the cost of safely removing trees or treating them on-site to reduce future wildfire impacts is daunting. The cost of hazard tree removal around private residences must be born by homeowners. To compound the problem, the local mills are already full with logs from recent wildfires, eliminating the normal market for the trees. The result is each felled tree costs hundreds to thousands of dollars to remove from the site. An example of this same issue was 2004 at Lake Arrowhead in San Bernardino County. While that was a smaller area, it resulted in an extreme wildfire conditions from the dead trees. Heavy rains the following winter resulted in erosion and flooding that proved fatal to people below the fire.

### **Issues:**

- Local agencies are currently analyzing the situation and compiling resources to address the problem, but it is a complex issue that will require considerable resources and a unified plan across all stakeholders.
  - The primary concern is to reduce the threat of falling hazard trees. These could directly harm residences, down powerlines, or block roads.
  - Dead trees need to be treated on-site or moved to another location.
  - The forest as a whole needs to be treated to produce a healthy and resilient forest before a catastrophic wildfire puts communities at risk.
- Regulatory roadblocks need to be overcome to get this work completed.
- Funding in the hundreds of millions of dollars will be needed to effectively solve the problem. Innovations in technology or entrepreneurship many result from this process. Since forest health is in the same state for most of the western United States, a viable solution here may serve as an example for other locations in the future. All forests in the Sierra Nevada may suffer a similar fate, if the drought and drying climate continues.
- A longer term viable market needs to be created to allow local forests to be managed for health and resilience of the ecosystem into the future.

### **Possible Solutions:**

- Provide funding for homeowners who have hazard trees threatening their homes. Leaving these hazard trees standing more than a year after death will increase the risk to life, limb, and property.
- Provide funding and direction to improve the economic viability for use of forest fuels in California milling and biomass plants. For example, assist with transport

costs for logs and biomass chips to mills and processing plants further from the affected areas where facilities are too impacted to handle the material. This may encourage adding another shift to the mill and increased usage of forest biomass rather than taking material to a refuse disposal site. This funding could help increase the infrastructure available for future forest management. This funding could also be utilized to fund development of industries to use the biomass in domestic applications for urban areas.

- Provide funding for fuel disposal teams using air curtain burners and chippers in key staging areas which would use equipment to deliver the fuel. This may also require relaxing of local Air Quality regulations during the emergency to allow treatment.
- Future treatments will need to include funding for reforestation and soil stabilization.

Please feel free to contact me if you need any further detail on these issues.

Sincerely,

Donald Lee Dukleth  
Registered Professional Forester #2644