



A Call to Stewardship of Headwaters & Forest Communities

Support for the Wildfire and Landscape Resilience Action Plan

August 7, 2026

The organizations above have joined together to advance healthy and resilient watersheds—from ridgetop to river mouth—as an essential strategy for adapting water infrastructure, reviving rural communities, and restoring and protecting the ecosystems upon which all Californians depend.

We strongly support the direction and priorities in the 2026–2031 California Wildfire and Landscape Resilience Action Plan (Action Plan) and we are committed to work with the Task Force to advance and integrate efforts in the upper watersheds with downstream projects to revive floodplains and manage working lands for multiple benefits.

California's forests, watersheds, rangelands, farms and communities are one interconnected system. Healthy headwaters are integral to public safety, water security, rural economies and the environmental health and wellbeing of the entire state.

The Action Plan offers a practical framework for coordinated federal, state, tribal, local, nonprofit and private action. The Task Force wisely recognizes that landscape resilience, community preparedness and regional implementation must advance together—and that wildfire, water and ecosystem risks overlap jurisdictional and property boundaries and need larger solutions.

Toward those goals, this coalition urges focus on five considerations:

1. Healthy forests and watersheds are critical parts of a resilient water infrastructure.

California's forests, alpine lakes and meadows capture rain and snowmelt, controlling runoff into reservoirs that generate hydropower; serve farming, ranching and working lands; and provide essential drinking water for communities across the state.

High-severity wildfires can destabilize soils and increase erosion and debris flows – filling reservoirs with sediment, impairing water quality and damaging water treatment and hydropower facilities.

Therefore, forest and watershed management strategies must be crafted and funded to protect California's water system. While protecting rural and urban communities from wildfire is a priority, a comprehensive and integrated approach is needed to ensure water quality and supply reliability throughout California's highly integrated water system.

The Action Plan's focus on drinking-water source watersheds, post-fire hazards and drought vulnerability is an important step toward treating natural and built infrastructure as one system — from ridgetop to river mouth.

2. Integrating landscape restoration efforts benefit all Californians and our environment.

Healthy forests and headwaters are fundamental to well-functioning ecosystems, vibrant habitats and the restoration of endangered species such as salmon. Forest restoration and wildfire-risk reduction protect source waters and riparian corridors, reduce erosion and sedimentation, sustain cold-water refugia and improve habitat conditions for spawning, incubation, rearing and migration in the upper watershed.

These investments should be coordinated with actions throughout the river system, including temperature management, spawning-gravel enhancement, fish passage, floodplain reactivation, beneficial pulse flows, hatchery modernization and tributary restoration. Together, these measures can help restore ecological function that will benefit a wide variety of species, including all four runs of Chinook salmon, while also supporting reliable water supplies, farms, communities, recreation, and hydropower.

3. Community-scale wood product businesses are critical to restoring forests and forested communities.

Thinning overgrown forests requires ongoing removal of small-diameter timber and other woody biomass. Without a means to process this material, the debris is left in place as a fire hazard, or is pile-burned or decomposes, producing methane, a potent

greenhouse gas. With modern and community-scale processing facilities, woody biomass can be used to produce jobs, increase economic security and restore communities.

Rural communities in California's forests and watersheds have experienced over three decades of job losses and struggle with a disproportionate higher percentage of low-wage and seasonal jobs. Wood utilization businesses – lumber mills, advance wood product manufacturing, biochar refineries and more – in areas where restoration is needed the most offers local residents the best hope for meaningful income, stability, and hope for a better future.

The Action Plan acknowledges this nexus and economic development in forested communities should be a priority for policymakers, north and south, coastal and inland. Forest health and forest community health are one and the same.

4. [A vibrant regenerative economy is the cornerstone of sustainable and resilient communities and watersheds.](#)

Developing wood utilization facilities in rural areas could be the foundation of a regenerative economy that benefits the entire state.

Regenerative economies anchored in rural forested communities involve enterprises that use natural resources to produce value-added products that support additional restoration work and contribute to long-term environmental sustainability.

Over time, this business activity reduces the risk of catastrophic wildfire, and protects wildlife habitat, water supplies and air quality.

For example, projects such as the Sierra Institute's Mosaic Timber facility will produce cross laminated timber (CLT) panels for building high quality, fire resistant and carbon sequestering homes and businesses. This technology is particularly well-suited for rebuilding after wildfire and other disasters and reducing the carbon impact of construction.

This is the regenerative economy at a state scale: downstream beneficiaries investing in source watershed restoration and community development to reduce the statewide consequences of catastrophic wildfires and help both the environment and society adapt to climate change.

5. [Adequate and shared investments are needed to achieve resiliency.](#)

Managing headwaters and watersheds will require ongoing investments. Funding based on surplus revenue and one-time investment is inadequate to address catastrophic wildfire risk and advance long-term environmental sustainability. The State has made progress on coordinating grants and moving toward regional approaches to ensure more consistent funding streams. But the State needs to develop a funding strategy that taps into traditional public sources – federal, state and local – as well as those who benefit from the reduction in catastrophic wildfire and headwaters restoration work.

The cornerstone of an adequate funding model should be the development of community-scale wood product industries that create jobs and a value-added demand for the woody biomass that must be removed from the forest on an ongoing basis. Given the ecosystem benefits of debris removal, it is essential that a proportionate share of the hauling costs from distant headwaters be borne by alternative funding sources to ensure the feasibility of these processing facilities. The success of these businesses will reduce over time the public funding required to remove and dispose of that material.

Based on that foundation, the State should develop a funding strategy with the following characteristics:

- Provide reliable state support beyond individual budget cycles and fully deploy available Proposition 4 wildfire and landscape-resilience funds.
- Leverage federal, local, water-agency, philanthropic and private investment.
- Support planning and permitting wood utilization work and landscape assessments, along with workforce development, implementation, monitoring and long-term ecosystem maintenance.
- Prioritize projects that deliver multiple benefits, including water-supply protection, community safety, habitat restoration, carbon resilience and rural economic development.
- Ensure program accessibility to smaller local, tribal and nonprofit organizations.

[Our Commitment](#)

As water suppliers, nonprofit organizations and local governments, we stand ready to work with the Governor, the Legislature, the California Wildfire and Forest Resilience

Task Force, state and federal agencies, tribes and regional partners to help implement the Action Plan.

Beyond that, we are ready and willing to become more active partners in developing state policies that support integrated regional approaches for the entire natural and engineered water systems.

Many water agencies in California have made substantial progress by collaborating with conservation organizations, environmental scientists and landowners to restore ecological functions that support struggling species. We are adapting water supply systems to a hotter and drier climate by better managing groundwater and increasing recharge during floods.

As reflected in this shared statement, many water agencies now want to move further upstream and work more closely with those who have been stewarding upper watersheds and forested communities.

We are excited to work together.