

# WILDFIRE

## THEMES

- Decades of fire suppression, increasing temperatures, climate change, years of drought, and lack of forest management have resulted in overgrown forests, filled with drought stricken and bark-beetle infested trees, and an incendiary supply of dry fuel.
- There are steps we can take to prevent the effects of climate change from contributing to wildfire disasters.
- California must invest in real science-based solutions that have a proven record of accomplishment to prevent catastrophic wildfires.
- Republicans are fighting to enact change that would have immediate impacts on the severity of wildfires in order to be able to shift funding from fire suppression to the prevention of wildfires.

## ISSUE

### BACKGROUND

- As the state's population has increased and homes built, fire suppression became the focus as a strategy to save lives and property. This practice has left the forests heavily overgrown and highly vulnerable to devastating wildfires.
- Exacerbating the problem, California has seen an increase in extreme heat events, lightning, and drought, which has resulted in a longer wildfire season.
- Not only have wildfires caused billions in dollars in economic losses as well as the incalculable loss of lives, Californians are experiencing Public Safety Power Shutoffs, cancelled or skyrocketing homeowners' insurance, increased carbon emissions, and dangerous air quality.
- There is now a growing consensus among forestry experts that reducing the number of trees and improving forest resiliency can help reduce the risk of major wildfires.

### STATISTICS

- There are 33 million acres of forested lands in California: 57% federal management, 3% state owned, and 40% privately owned (26% non-industrial and 14% industrial).
- 20 million acres need management through prescribed burns, mechanical thinning, other treatments, or a combination tools.
- There are over 147 million dead trees in California since the drought began in 2010.
- Insurers paid out \$25 billion in claims from California wildfires in 2017 and 2018. Of the 10 costliest fires in U.S. history, all 10 are in California.
- In 2020, 9,000 wildfires burned over 4.2 million acres- more than all of the acres burned in 2017 and 2018 combined. Six of the largest wildfires in the state's history occurred in August and September of 2020.

### CARBON EMISSIONS

- In September of 2020, cities such as San Francisco and Los Angeles, besieged by ash and smoke plumes from the record setting wildfires, clocked air quality measurements worse than heavily polluted cities in Asia.
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- California's 2020 wildfires put approximately 112 million metric tons of CO<sub>2</sub> into the air, which is 50 million more metric tons than the total CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from providing energy to the entire state.

## LEGISLATIVE HISTORY

- **SB 901 (Dodd, Statutes of 2018).** The Legislature, in the face of the unprecedented wildfires in 2018, made a number of changes to existing law with respect to forest management, wildfire prevention, electric utility liability for damages resulting from wildfires, and utility wildfire mitigation plans. This served as a significant first step in wildfire prevention. SB 901 also called for appropriating \$200 million a year from Cap and Trade revenues through 2023-24.
- **AB 1054 (Holden, Statutes of 2019).** This bill provided for the creation of an Insurance Wildfire Fund to pay certain wildfire claims for wildfires caused by electrical investor owned utilities. It further requires the utilities to comply with a Wildfire Mitigation Plan.

## BUDGETING

- The 2021 year included \$1.5 billion in spending for a [Wildfire and Forest Resilience Package](#) that included \$536 million in early action funding (2020-21 Budget) and \$988 million in 2021-22 (\$758 from the General Fund and \$230 million Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund).
- Most notably, the budget (SB 155) included a provision to make a \$200 million appropriation from the Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund a continuous appropriation through 2028-29.

## SOLUTIONS

We need comprehensive solutions to address wildfire issues facing homeowners, small landowners, and industrial landowners, as well as federal, state, tribal and local governments. Wildfires do not respect geographic boundaries.

- Create partnerships with federal, state, tribal, and local governments to address vegetation management on federal lands where wildfires could negatively affect nearby communities.
- Fund forestry management as a continuous appropriation under Cap and Trade.
- Provide CEQA exemptions and regulatory relief for thinning and vegetation treatment projects.
- Provide stable funding for forest health projects, California Vegetation Treatment Program projects, and grant funding for homeowners to comply with defensible space requirements and home hardening projects.

### REFERENCES FOR THE ABOVE CATEGORIES:

#### BACKGROUND

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- Kasler, Dale. (2020, September 9). 'Ground zero' for dead trees. How California mega-drought turned Creek Fire into inferno. *Sacramento Bee*.

#### STATISTICS

- The Little Hoover Commission report [Fire on the Mountain: Rethinking Forest Management in the Sierra Nevada](#) from February 2018.
- Miller, Rebecca; Field, Christopher; and Mach, Katharine. (2020, January 20). Barriers and enablers for prescribed burns for wildfire management in California. *Nature Sustainability*.
- Romero, Ezra David. (2020, September 3). Wildfires In California Will 'Continue To Get Worse,' Climate Change Experts Explore Why. *CapRadio*.
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- Hoeven, Emily. (2020, September 11). Fires set record books ablaze. *CalMatters*.
- 2021-22 Governor's Proposed Budget (2021, January 8) 2021-22 Governor's Proposed Budget

#### CARBON EMISSIONS

- Symon, Evan. (2020, September 12). California Air Quality Skyrockets to Some of the Worst Levels Ever in the Works This Week. *California Globe*.
  - Cart, Julie. (2021, July 30). California's 2020 Fire Siege: Wildfire by the Numbers. *CalMatters*.
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