

Background

On October 29, 2015, Governor Brown issued an Emergency Proclamation ([Attachment A](#)) in response to the dramatic and extensive die-off of trees in the state. With this proclamation, the Governor established the Tree Mortality Task Force (TMTF).

The Governor's Task Force meets the second Monday of every month and includes various agencies and organizations that coordinate activities to successfully achieve task force goals. Working Groups meet regularly to analyze and address issues. These Working Groups are broken out into focus areas in order to provide information and recommendations on various needs. These groups include:

- Healthy Forest & Resiliency
 - Prescribed Fire group merged with the Healthy Forest Working Group
- Mapping & Monitoring
- Resource Allocation
 - Subgroup developed to address possible assistance for private landowners
- Public Outreach
- Regulations
- Utilization Bioenergy
- Utilization Market Development

SNC staff participates on five of the Working Groups.

Information on current activities of the Task Force can be found on the Tree Mortality Website, maintained by CAL FIRE at <http://www.fire.ca.gov/treetaskforce/>.

Current Status

To date, The Sierra Nevada Conservancy has expended \$568,444 out of the \$1,000,000 apportioned by the Board in March 2016 for Tree Mortality projects. \$431,556 remains for upcoming grant applications for sites impacted by tree mortality.

The Forest Service recently conducted aerial surveys of the state. This has resulted in new tree mortality numbers. An additional 28,551,517 trees have died of drought and bark beetle since October 2015. This brings the statewide mortality level to over 68,000,000 since 2010.

Multiple entities are making strides to address the tree mortality issue. CAL FIRE intends to allocate additional resources to assist all ten counties later in this summer and into the fall. The USDA Forest Service is looking at using Special Use Permits to provide for a Categorical Exclusion for a year of tree removal. Trees may be felled and moved, but not sold. The Market Development Working Group continues discussions with Department of Water Resources to identify high volume use of wood chips for dust control at the Salton Sea.

The Office of Emergency Services (OES) continues to pursue disaster funding. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) participated in a flyover of High Hazard areas. Information and data collected by OES for the funding request is scheduled to be provided to FEMA before Labor Day.

All ten of the Priority counties have developed their own county task forces to address tree mortality. CAL FIRE sent guidance out in an effort to engage local fire entities regarding logistics and other fire safety concerns occurring at the local level. The guidance will be especially important to out-of-state crews fighting fire in the current conditions.

Trees on private land continue to be a huge concern of affected counties. There are limited resources available for those individuals who want to remove hazard trees adjacent to their homes. The Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) has applied for \$10 million which would be made available to owners of non-industrial forestlands (10 acres and more) for removal of dead trees. It is a forest health grant, not a disaster mitigation grant and cannot be used within 200 feet of structures. It is administered through the NRCS EQIP program.

PG&E recently announced an expanded tree management program to help customers who have dead or dying trees threatening power infrastructure. The newly expanded program is available to PG&E customers in 10 counties. If drought/bark beetle infested trees have the potential to come into contact with PG&E electrical facilities, the company is willing to take the trees down and remove the debris from the property. It is noted that the utility will only haul away debris that it takes down. The debris must be reasonably accessible by equipment/machinery. It must also be within 100 feet of permanent structures or within 20 feet of serviceable roadways. There is no cost for customers.

Next Steps

While the Task Force's attention continues to be on those counties most severely affected by tree mortality, there is a growing understanding of the need to increase efforts to increase resiliency in forests not yet impacted to the same degree. Forest experts anticipate that mortality will continue to move northward, although the pace and magnitude is not easily predicted.

Scientific and government documents stress that future forest management must take into account the impacts of climate change, the duration of the drought, and the wave of beetles which are affecting various trees. These infestations occur on various species of trees stressed by injury, drought, poor site conditions, root disease, overcrowding, or old age. As beetle populations increase, attacks may involve most trees six inches in diameter or greater in the outbreak area, regardless of their apparent health.

Restoration efforts must take into account which species may have the highest likelihood of survival in areas where conditions are changing. There is a possibility of vegetative type conversion in many areas. Only combined efforts and collaborative approaches can make a difference in the survival of the Sierra Nevada forests.

It is likely that the forest of the future in the Sierra Nevada will be quite different than those of the past, making thoughtful, collaborative approaches essential in addressing the challenges we face. The SNC will continue to address this issue in a number of ways, including communications efforts. Staff recently developed a tree mortality fact sheet, focusing on the carbon storage and greenhouse gas emissions aspects of the situation.

Recommendation

This is an informational item only; no formal action is needed by the Board at this time, although Board members are encouraged to share their thoughts and comments.