

BOARD OF FORESTRY AND FIRE PROTECTION

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Report to the Board Regarding Our Participation on the Tree Mortality Task Force By Rich Wade, 1/25/2016

The link to all documents generated by the TMTF and its workgroups is: www.treetaskforce.org

The Tree Mortality Task Force was created to respond to Governor Brown's Proclamation of a State of Emergency due to drought mortality.

The TMTF has met as a body of the whole every month since November, and these meetings are scheduled for the second Monday of every month.

The TMTF has generated several products to date, including:

- A draft "Explanation of Directives within the Executive Order"
- Draft High Hazard Zone maps, overlaying mortality with infrastructure to be protected.
- A "Resource Matrix" identifying potential sources of funding.

The TMTF created 8 working groups to focus on achieving specific objectives identified in the Governor's Emergency Proclamation of October 2015.

The Board was assigned to participate in four of the eight working groups:

- Forest Health and Resilience Group, chaired by Helge Eng
- Prescribed Fire Group, chaired by Nick Goulette and Craig Thomas
- Regulations Group, chaired by Matthew Reischman
- Utilization-Bioenergy Group, chaired by Kim Carr and Angie Lottes

Each of these groups has had at least one meeting or telephone conference call to date. I have attended each of the meetings, and most of the conference calls, but I did miss the initial prescribed burning conference call.

Here's a brief summary of what I believe is the Board's relevance, influence, or contribution to meeting the goals of these respective groups:

In general, CAL FIRE has a primary role in the TMTF, working in concert with the OES and the Governor's Office to coordinate the group's efforts. It shoulders a wide range of responsibilities, is providing most of the key leaders in the effort, and is tasked with achieving meeting many of the specific directives in the Emergency Proclamation.

Forest Health and Resilience – This group has objectives addressing not only the immediate evaluation and response to drought mortality, but also in envisioning more long-term measures to achieve forest health and resiliency. There is a very wide range of views represented by the workgroup members. The Board's mandate and activities are very much aligned with the work of this committee, and Board input will be valuable in providing the framework of existing regulation and policy pertaining to these goals.

The Board's mission is to lead California in developing policies and programs that serve the public interest in environmentally, economically, and socially sustainable management of forest and rangelands, and a fire protection system that protects and serves the people of the state.

Regulations – This workgroup is tasked with facilitating the development and use of storage sites, including identifying and addressing the regulatory constraints on a federal, state, and local level.

The Regulations group is also tasked with creating emergency guidelines for landowners who are removing trees, “... setting forth the relevant criteria to remove dead and dying trees and incidental vegetation in high hazard zones.” The Proclamation directs Cal Fire to issue these emergency guidelines.

The development of these guidelines in the workgroup is in progress. The Board’s passage on an emergency basis of the drought mortality exemption (1038(k)), and our current effort to extend this exemption, should be an important element of these guidelines. If tree removal operations are determined to be commercial in nature, this exemption and other rules of the Board afford protections for the environment while capturing information regarding the location and extent of the operation, as desired by the Task Force. If operations are not commercial, guidelines regarding operational restrictions largely mirror the 1038(b) exemption and the Forest Practice Rules for slash disposal. All the guidelines offered in draft form provide constraints consistent with the Act and Rules.

As field operations in response to the emergency gain momentum in the coming weeks and months, the Board, working in concert with the Department and other resource agencies, may wish to review the constraints and allowances provided in the Rules to assure that they are not unduly impeding the response to these emergency conditions, while providing adequate protections for the environment.

The Utilitization-Bioenergy group is tasked with maintaining and expanding the consumption of forest wastes from High Hazard Zones by forest bioenergy facilities. Objectives include extending contracts on existing biomass facilities, encouraging the execution of contracts for new facilities that may be developed, facilitate interconnection agreements, and identify funding that subsidizes the higher costs of biomass. While the Board has no direct role in these immediate efforts, longer-term shifts in forest products utilization and tools to address forest health are the direct outcome of the work of this group.

Prescribed Burning – This workgroup has the short-term goal of increasing the opportunities to dispose of forest residues through burning, and a longer term goal of increasing the use of prescribed burning in order to restore fire resiliency in California’s forests. In this regard the Board would play a key role in formulating policy.

I am happy to continue to represent the Board at meetings and in conference calls; nonetheless, I suggest it would be good to form an ad-hoc committee of Board members, and perhaps Board staff, to assure that a.) our participation in TMTF meetings, and contributions that we may make to further the goals of the TMTF, is fully realized, and b.) the Board is able to draw upon a range of ideas and talents regarding its interaction with the TMTF.