



March 28, 2024

Senator Bill Dodd, Chair  
Senate Committee on Governmental Organization  
1020 N Street, Room 584  
Sacramento, CA 95814

Senator David Min, Chair  
Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Water  
1021 O Street, Room 3220  
Sacramento, CA 95814

**RE: Support for SB 1101 (Limón) to Expand the Planning, Implementation, and Assessment of Beneficial Fire**

Dear Senator Dodd and Senator Min,

The intensity and frequency of California's wildfires will continue to worsen with climate change and the continued accumulation of vegetation. We must take concrete action to proactively restore more natural conditions to landscapes to protect our communities and help our natural areas prepare for fire. We, the undersigned, call on the State to accelerate the planning for and proactive use of beneficial fire to reduce the impact of and harm caused by uncontrollable wildfires in California. **We urge the legislature to expand the use of beneficial fire through:**

- **Expanding proactive fire planning across public and private lands,**
- **Accelerating CAL FIRE's implementation of prescribed fire by streamlining the Department's contracting and procurement processes, and**
- **Deepening our understanding of wildfire impacts and wildfire severity.**

Together, these approaches create the framework to expand California's use of beneficial fire to improve the health of the State's landscapes and people. Through these strategies, we can begin to address the unnatural amount and type of vegetation that has grown due to more than a century of fire suppression. Furthermore, these actions help California recognize beneficial fire as part of its cultural heritage and ecology.

Catastrophic wildfires have greatly harmed Californians, contributing an average of \$117 billion in economic damages annually, including loss of life and property damage, from 2017-2021 ([Moore Foundation](#)). Of this amount, an estimated \$5.0 billion annually was incurred as a fiscal loss by the State of California attributable to reduced tax revenues and increased wildfire response costs. Health impacts, which can include serious respiratory, cardiovascular, and eye effects, and even premature death, disproportionately burden communities of color, low-income families, outdoor workers, unsheltered residents, people with disabilities, and rural communities ([Kelp et. al.](#)).

Proactively using beneficial fire to remove excess vegetation and mitigate the conditions that fuel catastrophic wildfires reduces the intensity, frequency, and harm from fire ([LAO](#)). Carefully planned, less-intense fires can produce less smoke and reduce the negative air quality impacts from large-scale wildfires ([American Lung Association](#)). Fire is an inevitable part of life in California, but we can take control of our destiny and choose conditions where fire is safe and restorative rather than destructive.

Unfortunately, the State's existing use of beneficial fire is nowhere near the scale needed to ensure landscape resilience and community safety. [SB 1101](#) would help California meet the scale of the need in three major ways, described below.

#### **Plan for Fire**

We must proactively plan for managing unwanted wildfires as well as increasing beneficial fire. SB 1101 directs CAL FIRE to work with relevant partners to identify and map a network of potential

fire boundaries across state/federal jurisdictions to support both fire response and proactive use. This alignment and refinement of plans from federal, tribal, state, local, and private parties will result in a comprehensive awareness of potential fire boundaries. This coherent understanding of where we can control wildfire, and proactively burn when conditions allow, will be a valuable tool to increase community understanding of and engagement in fire planning.

### **Streamline CAL FIRE's Use of Beneficial Fire**

We must streamline CAL FIRE's ability to quickly and nimbly implement prescribed fire projects. As the State's lead fire agency, CAL FIRE is responsible for fire response and mitigation on over 31 million acres of California's wildlands – nearly a third of the state. The proposed legislation would allow CAL FIRE to implement prescribed fire projects using contracting and logistical support procedures similar to those currently used for emergency response. Prescribed fire projects are currently subject to standard state contracting rules, which include months of lead-time before the project. This prevents the Department from using burning opportunities that present during unexpected favorable weather conditions, such as a dry spell in January. These unforeseen opportunities are becoming more common due to climate change. SB 1101 would reduce these barriers.

### **Deepen our Understanding of Post-Fire Impacts**

Finally, this legislation would improve our understanding of wildfire impacts and outcomes. The bill would require CAL FIRE to collaborate with the US Forest Service to create maps that include fire severity (low, moderate, or severe burn intensity), instead of just acres burned. This will increase awareness that not every acre of fire is bad. It will also help inform how prior years of fire can be leveraged to implement more beneficial fire projects for community safety and landscape resilience.

Living with fire will require proactive efforts to have more fire under conditions that lead to positive outcomes. SB 1101 represents a major step toward better planning, implementation, and assessment, and we urge you to advance these initiatives with the urgency they warrant. Our warming climate will continue to increase our fire challenges in California. The coming decade will present the best climate conditions for beneficial fire, so we must urgently prioritize the planning, implementation, and social acceptance of projects that achieve good fire outcomes.

We urge your support of SB 1101 (Limón).

Sincerely,

**Active San Gabriel Valley**

David Diaz, Executive Director

**California Cattlemen's Association**

Kirk Wilbur, Vice President of Government Affairs

**California Climate & Agriculture Network**

Brian Shobe, Policy Director

**California Environmental Voters**

Marquis Mason, Advocacy Partnership Coordinator

**California State Association of Counties**

Catherine Freeman, Senior Legislative Advocate

**Central California Environmental Justice Network**

Nayamin Martinez, Executive Director

**Central Valley Air Quality Coalition**

Catherine Garoupa, Executive Director

**The Climate Center**

Baani Behniwal, Natural Sequestration Initiative Manager

**Coalition for Clean Air**

Bill Magavern, Policy Director

**Community Alliance with Family Farmers**

Jamie Fanous, Policy Director

**Cultural Fire Management Council**

Margo Robbins, Executive Director

**Defenders of Wildlife**

Pamela Flick, California Program Director

**Environmental Defense Fund**

Katelyn Roedner Sutter, California State Director

**Hispanic Access Foundation**

Hilda Berganza, Climate Manager

**Inland Empire Community Foundation**

David Hernandez, Regional Forest and Fire Capacity Program Manager

**Marin Wildfire Prevention Authority**

Mark Brown, Executive Officer

**Montecito Fire Protection District**

Nic Elmquist, Wildland Fire Specialist

**Pacific Forest Trust**

Paul Mason, Vice President, Policy and Incentives

**Santa Barbara County Fire Department**

Robert Hazard, Fire Marshal

**Santa Barbara County Fire Safe Council**

Paul Van Leer, President

**Santa Barbara County Range Improvement Association**

Penny Monighetti, Treasurer

**Sierra Business Council**

Steve Frisch, President

**Ted Chamberlin Ranch**

Russell Chamberlin, Manager

**Ventura County Resource Conservation District**

Monica Matthews, Conservation Ecologist & Prescribed Burn Association Coordinator

**Worksafe**

Karín Umfrey, Senior Staff Attorney

**Individuals**

Phillip Noia, Private Forest Landowner