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AIR POLLUTION CONTROL DISTRICT

HEALTHY AIR LIVING™

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DATE: November 4-5, 2026

TO: SJVUAPCD Governing Board

FROM: Samir Sheikh, Executive Director/APCO
Project Coordinators: Jason Lawler/Jon Klassen

RE: ITEM NUMBER 7: DISCUSS WILDFIRE PREVENTION AND RESPONSE STRATEGY AND COLLABORATION OPPORTUNITIES

RECOMMENDATION:

Discuss the District's wildfire prevention and response strategy, including efforts to promote resources for reducing exposure to harmful wood smoke, and opportunities to further collaborate with land managers, including federal, state, local or private entities, to increase prescribed burning, and reduce forest fuels through alternative treatments to minimize air quality impacts from wildfires.

BACKGROUND:

Air pollution generated from wildfires is enormous and can well exceed the total industrial and mobile source emissions in the San Joaquin Valley, overwhelming all control measures and resulting in periods of excessively high particulate matter and ozone concentrations that cause significant impacts to public health. Your Board has long supported efforts to reduce the intensity and frequency of wildfires through enhanced forest management measures to reduce fuel buildup in the forests. However, in addition to excessive fuel build-up throughout the wildlands in the state due to decades of fire suppression and widespread drought-driven tree mortality, changing climate conditions, including higher temperatures and drier conditions in recent years, have contributed to extended and more intense wildfire seasons in the western United States.

The purpose of today's item is to discuss and receive feedback on efforts to address wildfires and improve forest management, including hearing from state officials on scaled-up forest and wildfire

management efforts, including opportunities to support new biomass and bioenergy development, and potential partnership opportunities.

DISCUSSION:

District Efforts to Support Fuel Reduction Projects and Wildfire Exposure Mitigation

The 2020 and 2021 wildfire seasons broke records across the state of California, burning over 6.8 million acres across the two years, and setting records for the largest fires in state history. The August Complex in 2020 set a new record for the largest fire in state history, burning over 1 million acres, while in 2021 the Dixie Fire in northern California set a record for the largest, single non-complex wildfire in state history, burning over 960,000 acres. In addition, in 2024, the Park Fire in northern California became the 4th largest wildfire in state history, burning over 429,000 acres. According to Cal Fire reports, 10 of the top 20 largest wildfires in California history all occurred since the 2020 season, highlighting the severity of these past few years. In addition, in January 2025, two of the top three most destructive wildfires in California history occurred in Southern California, those being the Easton and Palisades Fires in Los Angeles County.

These points underscore how extreme and extensive these recent wildfire seasons were for California, at times severely impacting the Valley's air quality. By comparison, the 2026 wildfire season has been less severe thus far, with only 339,000 acres burned year-to-date, while the previous five-year average was approximately 1,097,000 acres burned at this point in the year.

In addition to wildfires directly impacting particulate matter concentrations, wildfire emissions include high concentrations of ozone precursors, which can often lead to increased ozone concentrations at the Valley floor beyond what is normally experienced. During the past number of ozone seasons, the peak ozone concentrations in the Valley commonly occur when excessive smoke and ozone precursor emissions from wildfires were impacting the region's air quality.

Due to the importance of this issue, and its direct impact on the Valley's air quality, your Board has provided direction and guidance to the District to implement a number of programs and employ a variety of tools to support fuel reduction efforts, reduce exposure, and notify the public during wildfire air quality impacts, which include:

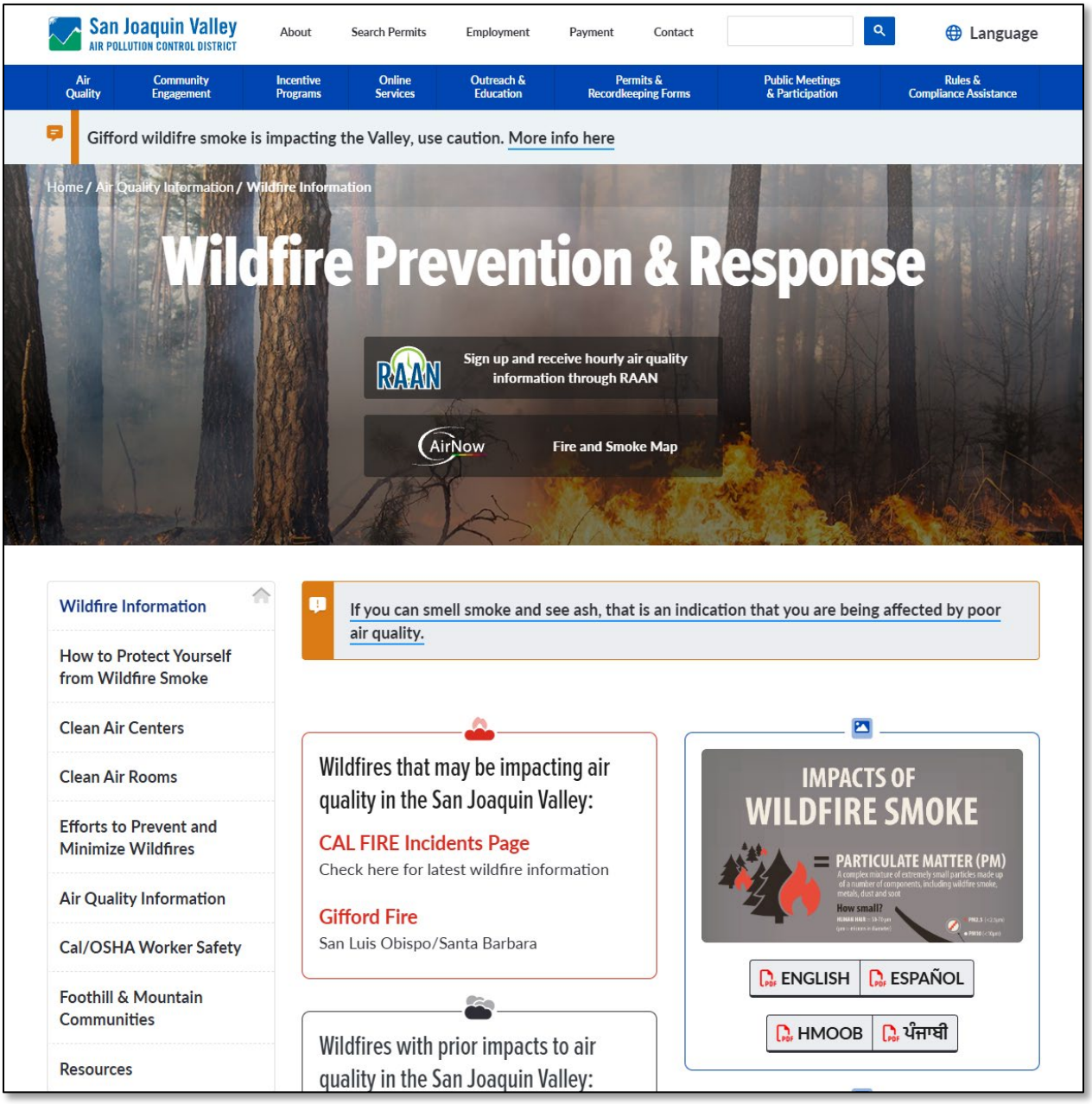
- Supporting prescribed burning projects through providing air quality and meteorological forecasts to ensure projects occur during periods of good atmospheric dispersion

- Providing enhanced flexibility, as directed by your Board in 2015, in approving prescribed burn projects to increase the amount of projects that can be conducted each year and total number of acres that can be treated
- Working closely with Valley land managers on planning and policy issues including hosting an Annual Cooperator's Meeting and attending and participating in statewide land manager meetings
- Working with local prescribed burn groups to produce clear how-to guides for private land owners to help them with preparing Smoke Management Plans
- Maintaining grant funding through CARB to support the District's administration of its prescribed burn program, allowing the District to waive fees for land managers conducting burn projects
- Issuing air quality advisories and alerts when wildfire smoke impacts occur, to notify the public of potential health impacts and actions to protect themselves
- Management and administration of air monitoring equipment cache program, lending equipment to and supporting land managers in monitoring and providing local air quality information to residents in communities near wildfires or prescribed burn projects
- Enhancing outreach through the use of social media, partnerships with the Valley's county public health officers, and media partnerships to increase awareness of the health impacts of wildfire smoke
- To help mitigate episodic impacts from wildfires and other events, launching a first-of-its-kind program providing air purifiers to low-income families and residents living in disadvantaged communities throughout the Valley
- Working with entities throughout the Valley to establish an expansive Clean Air Center network using available state funding
- As a whole, implementing the District's *Wildfire Prevention and Response Program*, which was awarded a Best Practice in Air Pollution Control by the Association of Air Pollution Control Agencies (AAPCA) in 2024

District's Wildfire Web Resource Page

In response to the significant concerns of Valley residents, District staff work diligently to share timely and comprehensive information about wildfires affecting the region. A key resource for the public is the District's Wildfire Prevention and Response page (www.valleyair.org/wildfires), which is updated daily—including weekends and holidays—and serves as a trusted public resource. The page features real-time wildfire and air quality data from CalFire, along with tools to help residents make informed decisions. It provides details on current wildfires, hourly air quality readings, health protection tips, and links to temporary air monitors in mountain and foothill communities. The District also supports the expansion of air quality monitoring through collaboration with state and federal land managers and by directly deploying temporary monitors. All monitoring data is accessible through the Wildfire Resource page, reflecting the District's proactive commitment to delivering the most accurate and up-to-date air quality information during wildfire events.

Figure 1: District's Wildfire Prevention and Response Webpage



District Support of Prescribed Burning Fuel Reduction Projects

As described above, your Board has long been supportive of prescribed burn and fuel reduction projects in the region due to the recognized need and benefit of reducing forest waste and mitigating the impact of future wildfires. Through these efforts, the District works closely with land management agencies who conduct prescribed burning through the implementation of District Rule 4106 (Prescribed Burning and Hazard

Reduction Burning) and Title 17 of the California Code of Regulations, Subchapter 2 (Smoke Management Guidelines for Agricultural and Prescribed Burning). Before a prescribed burn is conducted, land managers must submit a Smoke Management Plan to the District, which describes their technical plans for the project, fuel type and duration, and public notification and outreach details. After approval of the Smoke Management Plan, the District also issues a daily authorization during the period that the project is being conducted, based on air quality and atmospheric dispersion outlooks, assisting the land manager in conducting the project in a safe manner that considers current air quality conditions in the area.

One of the key ways the District has successfully supported the expansion of prescribed burning is through its annual Prescribed Burning Cooperators Meeting. Hosted near the beginning of each burn season, this meeting brings together agency partners, private land managers, prescribed fire organizations, and tribal burners to discuss upcoming projects, coordinate planning efforts, review policy and procedural updates, and share feedback and lessons learned from previous burns. In recent years, the District has also invited the National Weather Service to provide an outlook on anticipated weather and fire conditions for the upcoming season. The meeting provides an opportunity for the District to highlight resources available to support prescribed burning projects, including the cache of portable EBAMs for smoke monitoring, project-specific weather forecasts provided by the District's forecasting team, and public outreach assistance to help communicate planned burning activities to surrounding communities. Over the years, these meetings have been instrumental in strengthening working relationships between the District, our federal and state partner agencies, local prescribed fire organizations, private land managers, and tribal partners. By fostering open communication, collaboration, and a better understanding of each partners objectives and challenges, the Cooperators Meeting has helped establish a shared commitment to expanding prescribed burning and increasing the number of acres treated while minimizing smoke impacts and protecting public health.

Figure 2: Prescribed Burning Cooperators Meeting



Through this collaborative process, thousands of fuel reduction projects have been completed in the San Joaquin Valley over the decades, leading to increased fire safety, fewer air quality impacts from wildfires when they move through these areas of treated lands, and improved public health. The District will continue to strongly support these projects as they are planned and implemented by the various land management agencies operating in the Valley.

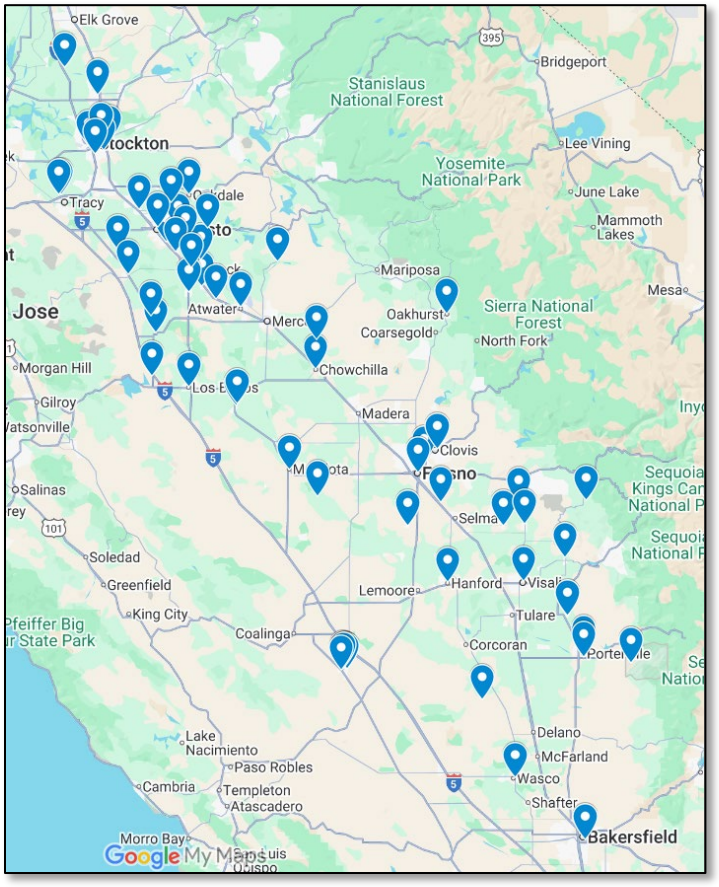
District's Clean Air Rooms and Clean Air Centers Programs

To help mitigate the harmful health effects of wildfire smoke on Valley residents, and in particular the District's most vulnerable populations, the District has developed the Clean Air Rooms Program to provide residential air purifiers free to Valley residents in disadvantaged communities or low-income households. In a well-sealed indoor environment (e.g., windows and doors closed and sealed tightly), High Efficiency Particulate Air (HEPA) filtration devices can reduce particulate matter indoors by more than 90 percent. The District encourages the use of air purification devices during wildfire events and the creation of "clean air rooms", such as a bedroom, to ensure that homes have a dedicated space with safe indoor air quality during smoke events caused by wildfires. Since the launch of the program in 2022, the District has distributed over 29,300 free air purifier units to households throughout the Valley.

The District also works with the California Air Resources Board (CARB) to administer the Clean Air Centers program, which was established by AB 836 (Wicks, Chapter 393, Statutes of 2019) and provided the District with $750,000 in funding for grants to provide portable high-efficiency air cleaners in support of creating a network of clean air centers to offer vulnerable populations a respite from wildfire and other smoke events. The guidelines established by CARB provide the San Joaquin Valley with resources to assist in creating clean air centers at schools, community centers, senior centers, sport centers, libraries and other publicly accessible buildings. The District has fully expended the funding resulting in 79 Clean Air Centers in the Valley.

As wildfires are expected to continue to be a growing threat to air quality in the coming years, the District will also continue to seek out and advocate for additional funding to keep these programs operating successfully to assist Valley residents in reducing their exposure to poor air quality when wildfires occur in the region.

Figure 3: Map of Valley Clean Air Centers



Wildfires and Prescribed Burning in Relation to Federal PM2.5 Standards

As the District continues to work and progress towards meeting the federal PM2.5 air quality standards, emissions from wildfires continue to be a concern as they directly impact the Valley's air quality. Through the Valley's ongoing collective efforts, the District has attained both the 24-hour PM2.5 standard of 65 $\mu g/m^3$ and recently the annual PM2.5 standard of 15 $\mu g/m^3$, while we continue to make progress towards the 24-hour standard of 35 $\mu g/m^3$, and annual standards of 12 $\mu g/m^3$ and 9 $\mu g/m^3$.

When intense and severe wildfires occur, as California has experienced over the past several years, not only does the Valley experience extremely elevated 24-hour average PM2.5 concentrations, the long periods of wildfire smoke impacts throughout the season leads to much higher annual average concentrations for the region. This affects the Valley's ability to meet both the 24-hour and annual average federal PM2.5 standards. Recognizing these challenges, the U.S. EPA within its regulations and policies allows air agencies to document wildfire impacted days as "exceptional events", and therefore the air quality readings on these days would not be used in calculations for air quality standard attainment purposes. This process requires an enormous

amount of work on the part of air agencies to gather the data to satisfy the threshold for EPA to approve the event, and has continued to become more time consuming as wildfires have become more severe with longer durations. Additionally, in EPA's exceptional events regulations, air quality impacts from prescribed burning can also be documented and taken into account for attainment purposes, but must meet a number of strict criteria found within a smoke management program.

The District has extensive experience developing technical analyses and documentation as required by EPA's current Exceptional Events process. The current process requires extensive documentation and resources, and once submitted by an air agency, there is significant delay for EPA to review submissions. While labor intensive and with significant room for improvement, this process generally worked for documenting short duration events that push the region far over applicable standards for the 24-hour PM2.5 design values (single day impacts). When dealing with an annual standard, the process is much more burdensome and unwieldy, as dozens of days may have to be evaluated and documented, resulting in thousands of pages of technical analysis. Adjusting exceptional events policy as it relates to the annual standard is critical to make the process more workable for long duration events. Additionally, given the importance of this documentation, prompt EPA action on this submittal is critical.

Additionally, although EPA recently released new exceptional events policy regarding the preparation of the analysis for prescribed burning and wildfire impacts on PM2.5, the potential amount of work required to prepare a demonstration to address an annual PM2.5 standard is still overwhelming. EPA needs to revisit its guidance on exceptional events, particularly as it relates to the annual long duration events and look for ways to further streamline the process to make the workload more reasonable for air agencies to conduct. Furthermore, there is a need for policy enhancements to ensure that prescribed burns and related air quality impacts are properly accounted for in air quality planning and attainment demonstrations, particularly with respect to addressing the more stringent new NAAQS in the midst of significantly increased prescribed burning activity.

To ensure that increased local, state, and federal forest management efforts are not adversely impacted by more stringent NAAQS, the District supports EPA's commitment to work closely with the U.S. Forest Service, states, and regions to develop streamlined and enhanced policies to make it clear that treatment of the forest through prescribed fires, that meet specified criteria, will be flagged as exceptional events if there are negative air quality impacts, and do not hamper the state's ability to meet the standards.

The District is also tracking the progress of the Wildfire Emissions Prevention Act (WEPA), a bipartisan federal legislation intended to encourage greater use of prescribed fire to reduce hazardous vegetation, prevent catastrophic wildfires, and improve long-term air quality. If passed, WEPA could help facilitate expanded prescribed burning and fuel reduction activities in the San Joaquin Valley by streamlining the regulatory requirements under the Clean Air Act for smoke impacts

associated with prescribed burning, while maintaining smoke management requirements and the Districts ability to protect public health during prescribed burning operations.

Update on State Fuel Reduction Goals and Fire Policy

California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection

On the heels of the record breaking 2020 wildfire season across the State of California, the Governor's Forest Management Task Force prepared and published *California's Wildfire and Forest Resilience Action Plan*[1] in January 2021. This Plan described the statewide goal for fuel reduction efforts between both state and federal land management agencies within the state, with a combined goal of 1 million acres treated annually for restoration, by the year 2025. This includes a goal of 500,000 acres treated by Cal Fire annually, as well as the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) treating 500,000 acres annually, both by the year 2025.

Specifically for the use of prescribed burning, the Plan includes a goal of increasing the Cal Fire prescribed burning activity up to 100,000 acres annually by 2025. In addition, this Plan includes an objective of the USFS to significantly increasing their prescribed burning activity to attain its goal of 500,000 acres per year to be treated for fuel reduction. In addition to prescribed burning, a significant portion of the 1 million treated acres per year goal will rely upon using alternative, non-burning treatment methods.

To support the tracking of this statewide interagency goals, the Governor's California Wildfire and Forest Resilience Taskforce has developed a tool to display totals of projects completed and acres treated annually throughout the state. This tool, called the California Wildfire and Landscape Resilience Interagency Treatment Dashboard, will continue to be updated as California and the U.S. Forest Service make progress toward their joint fuel reduction goals.

[1] https://wildfiretaskforce.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/californiawildfireandforestresilienceactionplan.pdf

Figure 4: View of Interagency Treatment Dashboard



In addition, following the devastating Los Angeles County wildfires in January 2025, the California Governor issued an emergency proclamation suspending certain California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and California Endangered Species Act (CESA) requirements to expedite qualifying wildfire prevention projects. Since that time, approximately 550 projects have reportedly been approved through the streamlined process. The Governor has also recently signed SB 1370 (Stern) establishing a more permanent statutory framework for streamlining environmental review and permitting of qualifying wildfire prevention and fuel reduction projects.

<u>State Funding to Support Wildfire and Forest Resilience</u>

Building upon past budgets, the recently enacted 2026-27 State Budget includes $445 million for wildfire resilience programs, including $328 million from Proposition 4 (passed by voters in 2025) and an additional $117 million from Cap and Invest Greenhouse Gas Reduction Funds (GGRF). These are dedicated funds for resilience projects and local grants administered through various state agencies including Cal Fire, the Department of Conservation, California Conservation Corps, Cal OES, and a variety of conservancies throughout the State. Additionally the 2026-27 State Budget allocates approximately $4.8 billion in total to Cal Fire (down from $5.0 billion in revised 2025-26 figures) for its wildfire prevention and response operations. This allocation represents a continuation of the state's multi-year trend of investing a significant amount of funding to support Cal Fire's fuel reduction and wildfire response programs. Last year, the State began utilizing cap and invest revenues to support Cal Fire's core operations, shifting $1 billion of Cal Fire's funding from the General Fund to the GGRF. The 2026-27 budget builds on that transition, adding an additional $150 million for a total of $1.15 billion backfilled by GGRF revenues to replace General Fund support.

State Efforts to Support Additional Biomass Utilization

The California Natural Resources Agency (CNRA) is continuing to explore opportunities to support new biomass development as part of the State's broader efforts to accelerate fuel reduction projects, improve forest health, and reduce wildfire risk. As those statewide efforts expand, there is a growing need to develop sustainable and economically viable options for utilizing the woody biomass generated through forest management and fuel reduction projects. CNRA recognizes that existing bioenergy policies, regulatory authorities, and funding mechanisms are fragmented across multiple State agencies, creating challenges relating to project development, affordability, and long-term economic viability. To address these issues, CNRA Secretary Wade Crowfoot is collaborating with principals from across the various agencies to identify opportunities for improved partnership, streamlining regulatory and policy frameworks, and develop practical solutions to encourage new biomass utilization and bioenergy projects. Part of these discussions also include evaluating the feasibility of smaller, distributed biomass energy systems in comparison to larger, centralized facilities, considering factors such as project costs, feedstock availability, transportation expenses, and energy demand.

In addition to addressing regulatory and economic barriers, the State is working to strengthen partnerships with local agencies, fire safe councils, prescribed burn associations, and other organizations to expand fuel reduction activities and create more consistent opportunities for beneficial biomass utilization. The State's Wildfire and Forest Resilience Task Force is developing an updated five-year strategy and action plan, expected to be released soon, which will help guide future priorities and investments in wildfire resilience and forest management. These efforts include expanding education, training, and technical assistance to increase capacity for prescribed and cultural burning. Collectively, these initiatives are intended to establish a more coordinated approach to fuel management and biomass utilization, reduce barriers to new biomass development, and support sustainable solutions that provide environmental and economic benefits while advancing California's wildfire prevention, clean energy, and air quality goals.

Update on Federal Fuel Reduction Goals and Fire Policy

U.S. Forest Service

The US Forest Service manages forest health and fire policy through a combination of its Confronting the Wildfire Crisis Strategy and the National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy.

In January 2022, the USFS published its assessment of the current challenges and described its long-term goals in its *Confronting the Wildfire Crisis*[2] report. In this report,

[2] https://www.fs.usda.gov/sites/default/files/Confronting-Wildfire-Crisis.pdf

the USFS presented its 10-year strategy to improve forest health across the nation, including the following goals:

- Treat up to an additional 20 million acres on National Forests and Grasslands.
- Treat up to an additional 30 million acres of other Federal, State, tribal, and private lands.
- Focuses heavily on high-risk "firesheds" where fires can quickly reach homes and infrastructure.
- Uses a combination of mechanical thinning, selective pruning, prescribed burning, and managed natural ignitions to reduce heavy fuels.
- Develop a plan for long-term maintenance beyond the 10 years.

The report fits into the broader National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy, which calls for the Forest Service to work collaboratively with other federal, state, tribal, and private partners across all landscapes using the best science driven approaches to make meaningful progress toward three goals:

- Resilient Landscapes – restoring fire-adapted ecosystems so the land can handle natural disturbances without catastrophic damage.
- Fire Adapted Communities – Helping towns and neighborhoods prepare structures, defensible space, and evacuation plans for when wildfires occur.
- Safe and Effective Wildfire Response – Coordinating effective and efficient, risk-informed wildfire suppression.

National Park Service

In its *Wildland Fire Strategic Plan (2020-2024)* report, the National Park Service describes its plan to address the Secretary of the Interior's direction for active management of forest and fuels, which include:

- Use existing policies more aggressively
- Think differently about how those policies may be applied
- Look for opportunities to partner with adjacent agencies, state and local governments, tribes, and private landowners to maximize resources
- Look carefully at existing management plans and ask if you are doing all you can today to address the threats of tomorrow
- Ensure that landscapes are restored and maintained to meet the mission.

The National Park Service is currently developing and has not yet released its updated version of this strategic plan for 2025 and beyond.

Role and Efforts of Local Fire Safety Organizations

In the past, distributing federal grant funding to wildfire-prone areas of the nation was often a lengthy and cumbersome process. In light of this, the federal government established the National Fire Plan and the Healthy Forest Restoration Act as a vehicle to provide more funding to local community groups focused on reducing fuel and wildfire

risk. At the same time of these federal actions, in 1993 the state established the California Fire Safe Council (CFSC) as a project of Cal Fire.

The CFSC focuses on bringing together community leaders, residents, and government agencies to help educate people living in wildfire-prone areas of the state about the need for fuel reduction, reducing wildfire risk, and promoting fire safe practices. The CFSC also focuses on creating the Fire Safe Council concept to place a stronger focus on local efforts to provide education and reduce wildfire risk. Local Fire Safe Councils continue to operate in the Valley today and work closely with foothill and mountain community residents.

In order to increase efficiency in distributing grant funding, the CFSC serves as the clearinghouse and distributor of fire prevention and mitigation funds from the U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, National Park Service, and the Fish & Wildfire Service. Local Fire Safe Councils (LFSCs), fire departments, governments, and other groups then use these grant funds from the CFSC to conduct their work. Since inception, the CFSC has provided more than 1,200 grants totaling more than $140 million to improve fire-resiliency across the state[3]. Anyone can initiate the formation of an LFSC when there is a shared concern about wildfire safety. LFSCs are coalitions of public and private sector organizations with membership often consisting of residents, local fire agencies, utilities, environmental groups, landscapers, real estate agents, local political leaders, homeowners associations, and other groups. The purpose of LFSCs is to work with local, county, and state fire agencies to make their communities safer places to live by developing an emergency preparedness plan for the community before a wildfire occurs, providing a space for community residents and organizations to voice concerns about public safety issues, and seeking funding for implementing fuels reduction, education, and outreach projects.

There are over 300 LFCS throughout the state with the following seven operating within the San Joaquin Valley:

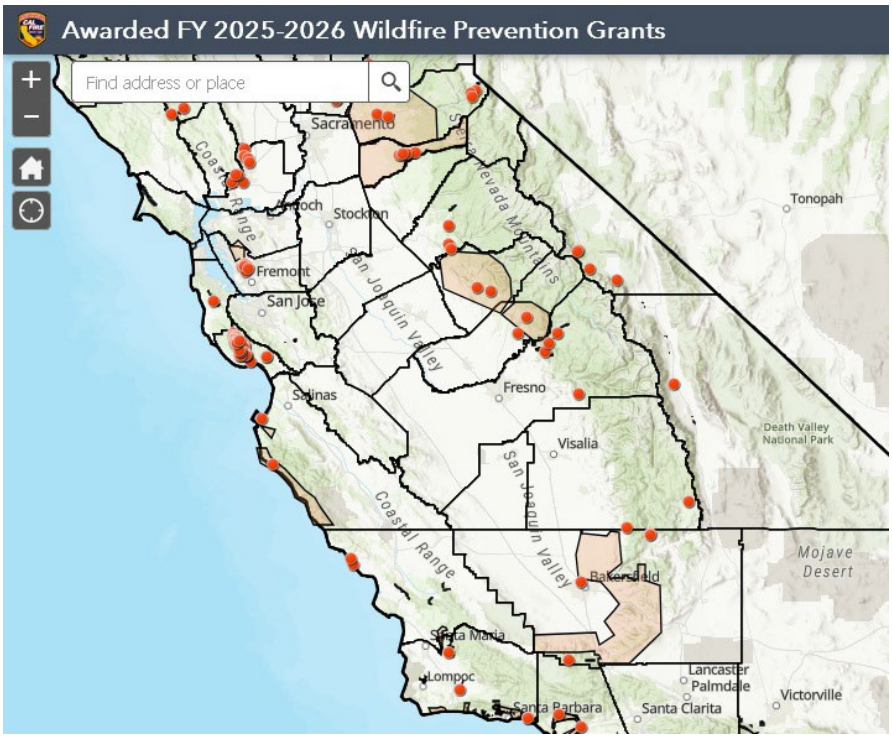
- Alder Creek (Tulare County)
- Cascadel Ranch (Madera County)
- Eastern Madera County (Madera County)
- Highway 168 (Fresno County)
- Kern (Kern County)
- Oak to Timberline (Fresno County)
- Three Rivers (Tulare County)

Opportunities still exist for adding new LFSCs and interested parties are encouraged to reach out directly to the California Fire Safe Council for more information. The District strives to stay connected with these LFSCs through sharing program information, attending meetings, and providing support where needed. The following figure shows the Fire Safe Councils in California that received wildfire prevention grants from Cal Fire

[3] https://cafiresafecouncil.org/about-us/about/

during the 2025-26 period, highlighting that a number of councils in the San Joaquin Valley received funding to conduct fuel reduction projects. The District will look to expand its outreach to the LFSCs to further support their critical work in raising wildfire safety awareness and conducting fuel reduction projects in the area.

Figure 5: Cal Fire Wildfire Prevention Grant Recipients for FY 2025-26



In addition to the LFSCs, the Prescribed Burn Associations (PBAs) in the region place a focus on conducting fuel reduction activities on private lands, as federal and state agencies often do not have the resources to conduct projects in these areas. PBAs are commonly made up of private land owners in a wildfire prone area, who work together to complete fuel reduction projects to better protect their land and community from the risk of catastrophic wildfires in the future.

To further support local fuel reduction efforts, the District will strengthen its partnerships with LFSCs and PBAs to advance shared goals of reducing hazardous fuels and wildfire risk while improving forest health and air quality. This support can include providing letters of support for grant applications and participating in community meetings to increase awareness of the District's role in protecting air quality and supporting wildfire prevention efforts. Additionally, the District will explore opportunities to help identify and secure grant funding for LFSCs and PBAs to implement fuel reduction projects and expand fire safety education and outreach.

OVERVIEW OF CURRENT LEGISLATIVE EFFORTS:

The District continues to advocate for legislation and policy efforts that support fuel reduction projects and wildfire response, in order to protect the environment and reduce public exposure to wildfire smoke and associated significant health impacts. The District is guided in these efforts by the 2026 Legislative Platform, which includes specific language regarding fuel reduction and wildfire response, as shown below.

> ***(State/Federal) Support Adequate Resources and Policies to Reduce the Impact of Wildfires and their Attendant Public Health Impact:*** *Wildfires result in significant loss of life and property. Air pollution generated from wildfires is enormous and can well exceed total industrial and mobile source emissions in the San Joaquin Valley, overwhelming all control measures and resulting in periods of excessively high particulate matter and ozone concentrations. In addition to excessive fuel build-up in the state's wildlands due to decades of fire-suppression, widespread drought-driven tree mortality, higher temperatures and drier conditions in recent years have contributed to extended and more intense wildfire seasons in the western United States. Historically clean rural areas throughout the state and in the San Joaquin Valley have experienced their worst air quality in decades.*
>
> *Given the devastating public health impact that the Valley suffers from wildfires, the District supports measures that can help reduce the intensity, magnitude, and frequency of wildfires and enhance wildfire response and communication efforts, including the following:*
>
> A. *Support the implementation of the Agreement for Shared Stewardship of California's Forest and Rangelands which includes a commitment by the federal government to match California's goal of reducing wildfire risks on 500,000 acres of forest land per year. To protect public safety and ecology, experts agree that at least one million acres of California forest and wildlands must be treated annually across jurisdictions.*
>
> B. *Advocate and support bipartisan legislation at the state and federal level that advances forest health treatments, reduces hazardous fuel loads, and minimizes large scale wildfire smoke impacts in the San Joaquin Valley. This includes legislation to support enhanced management of federal lands to reduce wildfire risk, accelerate forest restoration, and improve long term forest resilience. The District supports legislation that enhances the treatment of prescribed fire activities with respect to Clean Air Act requirements to help ensure that prescribed fire, used as a critical forest management and wildfire prevention tool, does not unduly penalize air quality compliance while still protecting public health.*
>
> C. *Air districts work with local, state, and federal land management agencies, local fire safe councils, and other stakeholders to provide the necessary*

authorizations and provide support for prescribed burning to ensure that is done with minimal impacts on air quality and public health. This work has traditionally been funded through fees paid by the land managers who implement prescribed burn projects. To support reduced/eliminated District fees for prescribed burn projects, the District supports funding from the State and Federal government for air district work associated with supporting prescribed burn projects.

D. *Additional financial and staffing resources for public and private land managers to conduct prescribed burning and other fuel reduction practices as effective means for reducing fuel supplies that lead to large and uncontrollable wildfires.*

E. *When wildfires occur, fighting wildfires should be funded as other natural disasters are funded. Funding should not be diverted from forest management and fuel reduction activities to fight wildfires.*

F. *Lessening or removal of contradictory environmental protection policies that prohibit the use of mechanized methods, or prescribed burning to reduce fuels when those are the only feasible methods available.*

G. *Changes in the federal policies that better incorporate air quality concerns by shifting focus to prescribed burning and employing fire management techniques that reduce air quality impact when wildfires occur.*

H. *As the State moves forward with addressing public utility related wildfire risk reduction and heat episode efforts (e.g., Public Safety Power Shutdowns), advocate for resources for the mitigation of related emissions impacts from increased backup generator usage or other activities, and the development and deployment of new cleaner backup energy alternatives, such as fuel-cell microgrids.*

I. *In response to recent wildfires, a number of proposals and policies have been developed to ensure that air quality information is made available to the public, and that clean air facilities and filtration devices be provided to provide relief from wildfire smoke impacts. Based upon our extensive experience in providing air quality information and activity recommendations to the public, the District will support policies that are designed to provide real-time accurate air quality information to the public, and funding for clean air centers to provide relief for our most vulnerable populations during periods of smoke impact.*

State Legislation Regarding Cultural Prescribed Burning

Under current law, Native American tribes are not required to obtain permits when practicing cultural burns on federally recognized trust lands as defined in federal statute. Due to this, local Native American tribes conducting prescribed burning in the region on

federally recognized trust lands do not need a permit or approval to conduct their burn project within the District boundaries.

However, in an effort to expand prescribed burning and advance California's fuel reduction and wildfire resilience goals, Governor Newsom signed SB 310 (Dodd) on September 27, 2024, effective January 1, 2025. The law authorizes the California Natural Resources Agency and local air districts to enter into separate written agreements with federally recognized California Native American tribes to waive specified requirements for cultural burns within their ancestral territories. These burns are not automatically exempt from District permits or approvals; any District exemptions require a written agreement. As implementation expands, coordination with tribes will be important to minimize potential smoke impacts on Valley communities and support continued progress toward federal air quality standards.

Other State Legislation

California AB 187 (Gabriel), signed by the Governor on September 18, 2026, establishes specific wage and employment protections for goat herders involved in vegetation management and wildfire fuel reduction activities. It establishes alternative monthly minimum wage requirements for goat herders working 24-hour on-call shifts, along with requirements related to meal and rest periods, employer-provided equipment, lodging, and other working conditions. These provisions generally align with existing protections for sheepherders and remain in effect through December 31, 2028. AB 187 may increase labor and operational costs for contractors utilizing targeted grazing as a wildfire fuel reduction strategy, potentially affecting the affordability of these projects. It complements broader labor requirements established under AB 338 (2023), which extends prevailing wage requirements to certain publicly funded fuel reduction projects beginning July 1, 2026. Together, these measures could increase the cost of vegetation management and wildfire prevention projects throughout California, potentially affecting the amount of fuel reduction work that can be completed with available funding.

Federal Legislation in Development

In addition, at the federal level, Congress is considering legislation to strengthen fuel reduction, wildfire preparedness and response, and protection from wildfire smoke. The following summarizes selected measures with California delegation involvement. The District will continue to monitor these measures and advocate for provisions that advance Valley air quality and public health priorities.

<u>House of Representatives</u>

1. **H.R.178 (McClintock, CA-05)**
   Directs the Forest Service to "use all available resources" to suppress new fires on certain high-risk lands within 24 hours; tightens guardrails on backfires and prescribed burns

2. **H.R.179 - Proven Forest Management Act of 2025 (McClintock, CA-05)**
   Speeds up fuel-reduction projects, including a NEPA categorical exclusion (up to 10,000 acres) for qualifying work; adds monitoring and coordination requirements

3. **H.R.836 - Emergency Wildfire Fighting Technology Act of 2025 (Valadao, CA-22) Passed House by voice vote**
   Requires USDA/USDI to jointly evaluate the "container aerial firefighting system" and report to Congress

4. **H.R.582 - Community Protection and Wildfire Resilience Act (Huffman, CA-02)**
   Creates a new USFA wildfire-resilience grant program; expands a USFS risk-reduction grant program; requires USFA & GAO reports/resources

5. **H.R.903 - Smoke and Heat Ready Communities Act (Thompson, CA-04)**
   Authorizes EPA grants to help communities prepare for and mitigate wildfire smoke and extreme heat; establishes 4 Centers of Excellence

6. **H.R.2084 - Smoke Exposure Research Act of 2025 (Thompson, CA-04)**
   Directs USDA's Agricultural Research Service to research smoke exposure impacts on wine grapes in coordination with CA/OR/WA institutions

7. **H.R.4038 - Wildfire Response and Preparedness Act of 2025 (Young Kim, CA-40)**
   A multi-committee bill to bolster wildfire response, preparedness, and technology adoption

8. **H.R.4852 - Wildfire Emergency Preparedness Act of 2025 (Harder, CA-09)**
   Boosts preparation of structural firefighters for wildland/WUI response and improves inter-team coordination

9. **H.R.4990 - Wildfire Grid Resiliency Act (Norma J. Torres, CA-35)**
   Targets grid resilience in the face of wildfires

10. **H.R.6387 - Fire Improvement and Reforming Exceptional Events Act (FIRE Act) (Gabe Evans, CO-8) Passed House 220 – 198.**
    Delegation Support: Costa, Harder, Gray, Fong, Valadao, McClintock
    Revises Clean Air Act treatment of exceptional events and state-approved wildfire mitigation, including prescribed fire, and require EPA regional modeling and greater transparency in petition review

11. **H.R.10061 - Wildfire Response and Readiness Act (Joe Neguse, CO-2)**
    Expands prescribed-fire operations and training, strengthen smoke-management coordination and exceptional-event assistance for air agencies, and improve wildfire smoke monitoring and public alerts

Senate

1. **S.350 - Wildfire Emergency Act of 2025 (Padilla, CA)**
   Directs USDA to select and implement landscape-scale forest restoration and helps communities build wildfire resilience

2. **S.453 - Wildfire Intelligence Collaboration and Coordination Act of 2025 (Padilla, CA)**
   Seeks to improve wildfire intelligence sharing/coordination

3. **S.602 - Wildfire Resilience Through Grazing Research Act (Padilla, CA)**
   Directs research on wildfire resilience and grazing

4. **S. 2015/ H.R. 3889 - National Prescribed Fire Act of 2025 (Wyden, OR)**
   Directs the Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the Department of the Interior to increase the number and size of prescribed fires conducted on federal lands.

5. **S.2208 - Wildfire Resilient Communities Act (Merkley, OR) — CA support: Padilla & (now-Sen.) Schiff are original cosponsors**
   A community-resilience package focused on planning, mitigation and recovery

6. **S.5045 - Wildfire Emissions Prevention Act of 2026 (John Curtis, UT) CA support: Padilla is an original cosponsor. Bill passed full Senate by Unanimous Consent.**
   Clarifies prescribed-fire eligibility under the Clean Air Act's exceptional-events framework, streamline EPA review, and establish Smoke Ready Communities grants to reduce smoke hazards in community buildings

Major national package with broad California support

1. **H.R.471 - Fix Our Forests Act (Westerman, AR) - heavily cosponsored by CA members (both parties) Passed House 279 - 141**
   Creates "fireshed management areas," stands up an interagency Fireshed Center with public geospatial data, accelerates certain NEPA reviews, and supports restoration, and workforce