



COUNTY OF PLACER
Community Development/Resource Agency

Michael J. Johnson, AICP
Agency Director

PLANNING
SERVICES DIVISION

E.J. Ivaldi, Deputy Director

MEMORANDUM

TO: Honorable Board of Supervisors

FROM: Michael J. Johnson, AICP 
Agency Director

By Brett Storey, Senior Management Analyst

DATE: January 20, 2015

SUBJECT: PROTECTION OF FORESTED WATERSHEDS FROM CATASTROPHIC FIRES

ACTION REQUESTED

1. Adopt a Resolution in support of further Federal, State, and regional efforts to address the catastrophic wildfire risk to the area's forested watersheds.

BACKGROUND

During the past several years, the Board of Supervisors has directed staff to work with other agencies to identify opportunities to lower the risk of catastrophic fires in the County. To date, through County efforts, a strategic plan has been developed, partnerships have been forged, a forest biomass-to-energy facility has been approved, and multiple on-the-ground efforts have been performed that have all contributed to lowering the risk of catastrophic fires. Even with these efforts by the County, catastrophic fires continue to occur. Most recently in 2014, the King fire burned into Placer County and severely damaged a portion of the watershed of the Middle Fork Project (a hydroelectric project that the County is a partner in with PCWA). The results of the fire were devastating to the forest landscape and wildlife within the area, and severely degraded air quality to the entire region. The results of this fire will continue to degrade the ecosystem and incur physical and financial cost to the watershed for years to come.

With the increased fire danger in the Sierra Nevada mountain range (which supplies 60 percent of California's developed water supply), several agencies have discussed putting resources together to combat this threat to the region. Most notably, the Sierra Nevada Conservancy (SNC) is developing a Sierra Nevada Forest and Community Action Plan, which is building on efforts such as Placer County's utilization of biomass and reduction of open-burning, to enhance the ability to properly manage our forests in a sustainable manner. The USFS will play a significant role, as will the State of California, in planning and funding these efforts. Other agencies, such as the Regional Council for Rural Counties (RCRC), are also requesting that each forested County get involved with the effort to work with them to support an increase in funding to manage the forest. Your Board has been active in this area working with the RCRC for years. A Supervisor from your Board will also be sworn into a Board-level position this year for the SNC representing the Central sub-region. To assist the effort to protect the County's forested watersheds, staff has prepared a Resolution in support of SNC's request for support in this effort and believes this is the beginning of a bold endeavor to reduce the threat of catastrophic fire even further.

FISCAL IMPACT

There is no fiscal impact associated with this action.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1: Resolution

Before the Board of Supervisors County of Placer, State of California

In the matter of:
An Action Plan for the Protection of
Forested Watersheds of California
from Catastrophic Wildfires.

Resolution No.: _____

The following Resolution was duly passed by the Board of Supervisors of the County of Placer at a regular meeting held _____, by the following vote on roll call:

Ayes:

Noes:

Absent:

Signed and approved by me after its passage.

Attest:
Clerk of said Board

Chair, Board of Supervisors

Clerk of the Board Signature

Chair Signature

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS OF THE COUNTY OF PLACER, STATE OF CALIFORNIA, AS FOLLOWS:

WHEREAS, catastrophic wildfires continue to threaten lives, property, critical infrastructure and the natural resources of the state of California, including the majority of the State's important watersheds;

WHEREAS, more than 50 percent of Placer County is forested;

WHEREAS, approximately 80 percent of all California's developed surface water supply for domestic, agricultural, manufacturing, and wildlife habitat originates on watershed lands within rural counties such as portions of Placer County;

WHEREAS, since 2000, eight major wildfires within Placer County have occurred, causing severe damage to more than 106,000 acres;

WHEREAS, the Governor of California declared a drought emergency in 2014 for the entire state, based on the occurrence of the driest year on record in California;

WHEREAS, the 2014 King Fire burned 97,000 acres (approximately 30,000 acres within Placer County), impacting the watershed of the American River creating significant threat of erosion and landslides that can degrade water quality and obstruct hydroelectric power;

WHEREAS, Placer County, in concert with regional and local U. S. Forest Service, California agencies, Placer County Air Pollution Control District, and local fire districts, has worked to enhance forest management sustainability, to reduce conditions for catastrophic fire and create a healthier forest, to facilitate use of forest waste (biomass) as a renewable energy source , and to lower harmful emissions in both the air and water from open pile burning of waste biomass and natural wildfire;

WHEREAS, Federal and State funding for reduction of fuels through forest management is significantly underfunded and poses significant wildfire-related impacts to health and safety, property, water and air quality, and wildlife habitat;

WHEREAS, the escalating costs of fighting fires on State and Federal land over the last 10 years has diverted resources from critically needed prevention and hazard reduction measures that can reduce effects of wildfires;

WHEREAS, the funding necessary to adequately manage Federal and State lands to reduce wildfire risk has been shown to result in numerous benefits for protection of property and resources;

WHEREAS, the mitigation of wildfire emissions is vital to reach the goals stated in the California Global Warming Solutions Act of 2006 (AB 32);

WHEREAS, catastrophic wildfires significantly increase the levels of greenhouse gases and other harmful emissions in Placer County and throughout the State;

WHEREAS, because of the widely recognized extremely high risk of catastrophic wildfires in Placer County due to unnaturally heavy fuel loads and the early drying of wild land vegetation, Placer County developed a Strategic Plan for the Wildfire Protection and Biomass Utilization program to work with all affected agencies to combat this risk. The County's partnership with the Forest Service through a Master Stewardship Agreement that allows cost effective and sustainable removal of biomass waste has pioneered efforts in the region, and the Strategic Plan and Stewardship Agreement have shown positive results since 2007. Moreover, these actions can be replicated to encompass other forested areas in the State.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Placer County Board of Supervisors declares:

1. There is an ongoing crisis due to the extreme threat of wildfire in California,
2. The Federal, State, and local governments, through actions and proclamations, acknowledge the severity of this threat,
3. The County urges the Governor and Congressional members to fund and take action in California's Federal and State wild and forestlands to deliver results in the prevention and maintenance to mitigate the ongoing and increasing risk of catastrophic wildfires.