



April 2, 2020

The Honorable Richard Bloom, Chair  
Assembly Budget Subcommittee #3  
State Capitol, Room 2003  
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Bob Wieckowski  
Senate Budget Subcommittee # 2  
State Capitol, Room  
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Request to Fund the California Forest Improvement Program (CFIP)

Dear Chairman Wieckowski and Chairman Bloom:

On behalf of the state's registered professional foresters (RPFs) who work in all sectors of forestry, including industrial, consulting, academic, and governmental agencies, the California Licensed Foresters Association (CLFA) writes in strong support of a critical wildfire prevention program known as the California Forest Improvement Program (CFIP).

First and foremost, we recognize the current public health crisis occurring at the federal, state and local levels as public and private entities are facing significant challenges addressing the COVID-19 pandemic. CLFA's members, many of whom work for or contract with critical infrastructure businesses and governmental agencies involved in the forest products industry, are working hard to protect our workers and contractors while limiting the spread of COVID-19. Clearly, this is not just a public health crisis but also an economic one that will have a significant impact on state revenues and various programs.

At the same time, California has experienced, and continues to face a long-standing crisis that we must not forget; ongoing wildfire threats that continue to have significant impacts on public health, greenhouse gas emissions and the state's economy. Simply put, California's forest lands need treatment. This will require an all-of-the-above strategy, but special assistance is particularly needed to help small landowners manage their land. Nearly a quarter of the state's forest lands are being overlooked because they are within small non-industrial timber ownerships.

However, CFIP, a pre-existing cost-share program that encourages small landowners to steward their land, is a key program that can help prevent wildfires and has minimal costs to the state compared to long-term suppression efforts. The program has been successful for many years but currently lacks funding. To that end, CLFA respectfully requests the Legislature provide funding in the 2020-21 budget of at least \$20 million for CFIP. We estimate that this would represent a minimum amount of funding needed to account for a significant backlog from previous years and provide for new applicants this year.

### **Forest Economics and Impacts on Wildfires**

California's forests have been degraded from policies over the last century and a half, which prioritized fire suppression, while encouraging liquidation of valuable standing timber. It has been the policy of the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection and the US Forest Service to limit the size and scope of all fires since the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Prior to the passage of the Forest Taxation Reform Act of 1976,

landowners were taxed on the standing value of their timber; which in turn encouraged landowners to cut timber at a significantly higher rate than current activity. The result of these policies are forested stands that are generally younger, overstocked in both commercial and non-commercial timber, and through lack of fire management, have been left to grow uninhibited. Forests in this condition are biologically primed to enter a culling phase, which means in the absence of fire there is guaranteed to be a dramatic buildup of woody fuel in our forests. The need to actively manage California's forests and wildlands is becoming widely recognized, as fire seasons are becoming longer and more catastrophic. With this in mind, Governor Newsom and former Governor Brown have declared a need to treat at least half a million acres of forest land annually on state forest lands.<sup>1</sup>

There are roughly 34 million acres of forest land in California, and 14 million acres (40%) of that forestland is privately owned. Of the 14 million acres of private forest land in California, 9 million acres are in ownerships of less than 50 acres. That's over a quarter of all the forest land in California. Small non-industrial forest landowners are often the forgotten component when agencies and legislators try to tackle the ever-growing problems facing California's forests.

Forest management is inherently expensive. Work is often dangerous and tedious, and more often than not it requires equipment which only pays for itself at a large scale of implementation. Cost to implement is why many small forest landowners simply cannot manage their properties effectively. Competitive grants are also exceptionally difficult for small landowners to access. Among several factors, these grants require a significant amount of planning before the grant is even announced. Small scale projects don't rank highly in any funding sources and most grant applicants must be non-profits or governmental organizations in order to receive funding.

### **History and Benefits of CFIP**

Recognizing this problem, the California Licensed Foresters Association would like to bring to your attention the existence of a successful, yet underfunded, incentives program for small landowners in California. CFIP is an incentives program run by CALFIRE that encourages landowner participation in forest stewardship by providing economic incentives for planning and implementation of beneficial forest practices. CFIP is a reimbursement program that provides eligible landowners (those owning at least 20 acres of forestland but not more than 5,000 acres of forestland) with technical and financial assistance for planning, reforestation and resource management investments that improve the quality and value of forestland. It should also be noted that CFIP projects are non-commercial operations typically used to modify sub-merchantable trees or ones with no commercial value.

With respect to environmental impacts, CFIP has a Programmatic Environmental Impact Report (PEIR) that covers CEQA requirements for practices such as forest thinning, pruning, planting site preparation, and reforestation. These activities are all non-commercial, in that they cannot be implemented in connection with commercial activities. In other words, they do not generate capital to offset cost. The CFIP program offers a cost-share to landowners who implement these practices because it is widely recognized that these practices are beneficial for the health and resiliency of our forest land. The program requires that a forest management plan be written for the property by an RPF who then

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ca.gov/archive/gov39/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/5.10.18-Forest-EO.pdf>.

<https://www.gov.ca.gov/2019/12/31/california-certifies-statewide-programmatic-environmental-impact-review-to-protect-californians-from-catastrophic-wildfires/>

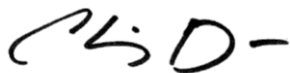
oversees the implementation of the practices prescribed in the plan to ensure environmental compliance. The program is easy to access for landowners, and it encourages private matching funds to public dollars for necessary forest treatments.

Historically, the CFIP program was funded by California's Forest Resource Improvement Fund (FRIF) as well as other sources from year to year. At this time, there is no secure funding source for the CFIP program. The program went completely unfunded through fiscal year 2018-2019. Since the passage of Proposition 68, a one-time influx of roughly 6 million dollars was allocated to the CFIP program, which is less funding than the need within the program and does not take into account a backlog from lack of fiscal funding.

### **Conclusion**

There is an enormous need to manage California's forests, so much so that Governor Newsom has declared an Executive Order and a State of Emergency concerning the treatment of forest lands. Nearly a quarter of those forest lands are being overlooked because they are within small non-industrial timber ownerships. We know fire does not recognize property boundaries. CFIP is a successful program that can reduce these wildfire threats, but it must be adequately funded in order to properly operate. If the State hopes to meet the annual forest management and greenhouse gas reduction goals set by the Governor, it cannot afford to ignore a quarter of its forest land. Long term, we believe CFIP needs a sustainable dedicated source of funding. For now, CLFA respectfully requests consideration of at least \$20 million to this program in the 2020-21 budget. We are happy to provide additional information and discuss this request with you and your staff at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely,



Chris Dow, RPF #3012

CLFA President

cc: Members of the Senate Budget Subcommittee #2  
Members of the Assembly Budget Subcommittee #3  
The Honorable Holly Mitchell, Chair of Senate Budget Committee  
The Honorable Phil Ting, Chair of Assembly Budget Committee  
Keeley Bosler, Director, California Department of Finance  
Vivek Viswanathan, Chief Deputy, California Department of Finance  
Wade Crowfoot, Secretary, Natural Resources Agency  
Thom Porter, Director, CalFire  
Anthony Williams, Legislative Secretary, Governor's Office  
Rachel Wagoner, Deputy Legislative Secretary, Governor's Office