

25 January 2017
Little Hoover Commission
925 L Street, Suite 805
Sacramento, CA 95814

Honorable Chair,

I am sorry that I cannot attend tomorrow's hearing but due to continuing impacts to our area from the Soberanes Fire, I will not be able to attend in person. I am a 20-plus year resident and property owner in Big Sur. I am pleased that your Commission has decided to look at Forest Health and Forest Management. The current crisis in the Sierras is absolutely unprecedented. I would also add that the needs are great on the Central Coast.

It is well-documented that poor forest management and the recent drought have greatly degraded our forests. While the severity of the situation in the Sierras is now front and center, I would like to point out that forests along the Central Coast region have been in collapse since before 2000. In addition to the terrible impacts of drought that we see throughout the state, Big Sur suffers from the terrible blight known as Sudden Oak Death (SOD). The tree morality detected during the Aerial Detection Survey showed huge increases. These factors have led to three major fires in the Big Sur area in the last ten years. Our forests and our community cannot withstand this onslaught. Big Sur needs resources for better forest management. I hope that when your commission makes recommendations on future funding, you remember us.

Having just gone through the Soberanes Fire, it is very clear to me that a better fuel management program might have prevented the explosive spread of that fire. We are losing our forest diversity because some areas are burning too frequently. We have a great deal of praise for the fire fighters but they could have been far more effective if we were able to better prepare for our fire. The amount of excess fuel appears to me to be a major reason for its severity.

As a community, we hope that the state creates a more pro-active, collaborative approach to forest management throughout the entire state that respects both the environment and the communities located in or near our forests. In regards specifically to the annual parcel fee for fire protection, while we recognize the urgent needs in the Sierras, we believe it is fitting that a significant amount of money collected in the Central Coast area should be used to improve our forests' health.

Respectfully,

Kenneth Ekelund
Garrapata Trout Farm