



There is a future where fire protects our forests.

Together we can plan for it.

California Climate Resilience Plan | Megafires

Thanks to Smokey Bear and a century of fire suppression, California's Sierra forests are dangerously overgrown. Now, trees are packed together at up to five times their natural density, and fires that should regenerate our forests explode into infernos that destroy them. California's inland forests help provide 60% of our state's developed water supply and losing them would compromise the quality and reliability of clean drinking water for millions of people. Science shows that ecological forest restoration — prescribed fire and ecological thinning — can curb catastrophic megafires in California when done in the right places and at the right scale.

Our State has committed an unprecedented level of funding for wildfire resilience. Last year's historic wildfire package appropriated \$1.5 billion for fire preparedness and forest resilience, and the proposed 2022 budget includes \$1.2 billion over the next two years for wildfire prevention. However more funding is needed to address the threat of megafires in California by increasing the pace and scale of forest restoration, promoting healthier forests, and bringing good fire back to the landscape.

TNC has identified these top funding and policy priorities to help stop megafires before they start:

1. Increase funding for wildfire and forest resilience to ensure we allocate \$1 billion per year
2. Increase the use of prescribed fire
3. Build project development capacity to proactively restore our forests
4. Invest in the infrastructure needed to accelerate forest restoration

Increase funding for wildfire and forest resilience to \$1 billion per year

- **Increase funding for wildfire monitoring and research:** The proposed 2022 budget includes \$15 million over two years to support rigorous monitoring and robust scientific inquiry. An additional \$5 million should be added to evaluate forest health and fire prevention grant projects and assess their effectiveness for the following criteria: fuels management, community protection, improving habitat, water quality, protecting native plant species and fostering forest complexity. This evaluation will provide valuable insights to improve future projects and identify needed maintenance in previously treated areas.
- **Require reforestation funding to be used for climate-smart reforestation:** The proposed 2022 budget includes \$100 million for reforestation. Investing in post-fire restoration and reforestation is vitally important to protect water quality and habitat and to achieve California's climate goals. However, the type of reforestation method used is critical to ensuring the durability of investments. This funding must be used for climate-smart reforestation, including a tree species mix and density that will be resilient to California's changing climate. This can also include meadow restoration which offers important habitat benefits.

Increase the use of prescribed fire

- **Enact SB 926 (Dodd) and increase funding for the Prescribed Fire Claims Fund:** SB 926 would establish the Prescribed Fire Liability Pilot Program and implement the Prescribed Fire Claims Fund. This bill would require CAL FIRE, by January 1, 2023, to establish the Prescribed Fire Liability Pilot Program to support coverage for losses from permitted prescribed fires by individuals and private entities. Additionally, SB 926 would operationalize the Prescribed Fire Claims Fund which received \$20 million in appropriations in the 2021 budget. These actions will signal that California supports the prescribed fire community, while assisting in the recruitment of qualified burners.

Build project development capacity to proactively restore our forests

- **Staff and support Good Neighbor Authority Program:** Last year TNC sponsored AB 697 (Chau, Chapter 232, Statutes 2021), which requires the Natural Resources Agency to establish a Good Neighbor Authority Program to conduct ecological restoration and fire resilience projects on national forest lands. However, the 2022 budget does not include any additional staff for this new program. Over the next two years, \$5 million is needed to hire staff and support this program. This funding will ensure that the state takes full advantage of its Good Neighbor Authority to meet its treatment goals.
- **Allocate resources for a cultural burning liaison:** Last year TNC supported AB 642 (Friedman, Chapter 375, Statutes of 2021), which, among other things, requires CAL FIRE to appoint a cultural burning liaison. However, no funding for a cultural burning liaison position is included in the proposed 2022 budget. Funding for this position must be added to the budget, allowing the state to hire an experienced, cultural fire practitioner.

- **Increase funding for planning and outreach to \$20 million:** While the proposed budget includes \$9 million for Land Use Planning and Public Education Outreach, this amount should be increased to \$20 million. This augmentation would ensure that every county with high fire risk has access to University of California Cooperative Extension Specialists, who are vital to California's wildfire and forest resilience efforts.
- **Match funding from the federal infrastructure bill for prescribed fire training:** In November 2021, President Biden signed the \$1.2 trillion infrastructure bill, with \$5 billion for federal wildland fire management, including prescribed fire. California should invest \$25 million in matching funding to establish a joint US Forest Service-California prescribed fire training center. This will allow the state to develop the workforce needed to increase the pace and scale of forest restoration and prescribed fire.

Invest in the infrastructure needed to accelerate forest restoration

- **Increase funding for a biomass transportation pilot program:** Woody biomass utilization is a vital component of forest resilience in California. An analysis completed by TNC and Bain & Company found that one of the key barriers associated with making economic use of the by-products of forest restoration is the cost of transporting the woody biomass material. The proposed 2022 budget includes \$44 million to expand the wood product supply chain and workforce preparedness in the wildfire resilience sector through targeted investments to address market barriers to the beneficial use of woody biomass. Specifically, the proposed budget also includes \$10 million for transportation grants to support the removal of hazardous forest fuels from state and federal lands; however, this amount should be increased to \$50 million over two years and ensure that the funding is used for the byproducts of forest restoration projects.

