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November 13, 2025

The Honorable Alex Padilla
U.S. Senate
331 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Adam Schiff
U.S. Senate
SD-B40B, Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

RE: S. 1462, Fix Our Forests Act - SUPPORT

Dear Senator Padilla and Senator Schiff,

I am writing on behalf of the Kern County Board of Supervisors to express our strong support for the Senate version of the *Fix Our Forests Act* (S. 1462), and to respectfully urge the inclusion of several critical provisions from the House-passed version, H.R. 471, that are essential to protecting our communities from catastrophic wildfire.

Kern County has experienced firsthand the devastating impacts of wildfire, including the 2024 Borel Fire, which burned over 59,000 acres and destroyed hundreds of structures. It was our largest wildfire on record. This follows the devastating Erskine Fire in 2016 and the French Fire in 2021. These events underscore the urgent need for comprehensive federal action to reduce hazardous fuels, restore forest health, and support local fire resilience.

We commend the Senate bill's focus on establishing the Wildfire Intelligence Center, emphasis on long-term collaboration, data sharing, and community preparedness. However, we believe the following provisions from H.R. 471 would significantly strengthen the legislation through operational effectiveness:

1. Fireshed Management Areas and a Dedicated Fireshed Center

The House bill's creation of "fireshed management areas" and a centralized Fireshed Center would provide a powerful framework for identifying high-risk landscapes and coordinating cross-jurisdictional fuel reduction efforts. This model would allow for more targeted, data-driven interventions in areas like Kern County's wildland-urban interface, where wildfire risk is most acute. The Fireshed Center would also serve as a hub for integrating federal, state, tribal, and local planning and ensure that resources are deployed where they are most needed.

2. Streamlined NEPA Compliance and Interagency Strike Teams

H.R. 471 proposes practical reforms to accelerate forest health projects by simplifying National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) reviews and deploying interagency “strike teams” to expedite compliance with NEPA, the Endangered Species Act, and the National Historic Preservation Act. These changes would reduce bureaucratic delays that have historically hindered urgent fuel treatment work, enabling faster deployment of thinning, mechanical treatments, and prescribed burns, all tools that are critical to protecting Kern County’s communities and infrastructure.

3. Litigation Reform to Expedite Forest Restoration

The House version includes provisions to limit certain types of litigation that have delayed forest restoration projects. While maintaining environmental safeguards, these reforms would provide greater legal certainty and allow urgently needed treatments to proceed without prolonged court delays. For counties like ours, where fire seasons are growing longer and more destructive, this operational flexibility is essential to saving lives and property.

4. Biochar Demonstration Projects and Expanded Stewardship Contracting

H.R. 471’s inclusion of biochar pilot programs and expanded stewardship contracting authority would create new economic opportunities for rural communities while supporting forest health. Biochar production can reduce waste from thinning operations and sequester carbon, while stewardship contracts allow local contractors and fire crews to participate in long-term forest management, thus building local capacity and resilience.

5. Reforestation and Nursery Infrastructure Investments

While the Senate bill includes important seed supply and watershed provisions, the House version goes further by investing in reforestation capacity, seedling supply chains, and nursery infrastructure. These investments are critical to post-fire recovery and long-term forest regeneration, especially in areas like Kern County that have experienced repeated large-scale burns.

We believe that a final version of the *Fix Our Forests Act* that blends the Senate’s collaborative vision with the House’s operational tools will best serve the needs of wildfire-prone counties like ours. We appreciate your leadership on this issue and stand ready to support your efforts to advance this vital legislation. Thank you for your continued commitment to protecting California’s communities and natural resources.

Sincerely,



Leticia Perez, Chair
Kern County Board of Supervisors

cc: Honorable Members, Kern House Delegation
Townsend Public Affairs