

**Background**

On October 29, 2015, Governor Brown issued an Emergency Proclamation ([Attachment A](#)) in response to the dramatic and extensive die-off of trees in the state. The proclamation references 22 million dead trees and forecasts tens of millions more to die, and identifies a broad range of actions to help mitigate the immediate threats to public health and safety and the environment. (Current estimates are that as many as 58 million trees may be dead or dying statewide.) With his proclamation, the Governor established the Tree Mortality Task Force (TMTF). Information about the task force is available <http://www.fire.ca.gov/treetaskforce/>

At the March Board meeting, the Sierra Nevada Conservancy Governing Board apportioned \$1 million of Proposition 1 funds for tree mortality focused projects. The SNC is represented on six of the Task Force working groups and the table below includes updates from each.

<p><b>Healthy Forest &amp; Resiliency</b> Attended by: Jim Branham Alternate: Randi Jorgensen</p>	<p>The Forest Health and Resiliency Working Group offers guidance on the effect of activities commenced under the tree mortality emergency proclamation on overall forest health and resilience. The group is initially focusing on developing a description of desired future conditions that can be used to provide such guidance. The process is still in the early stages.</p>
<p><b>Utilization &amp; Marketing</b> Attended by: Bob Kingman</p>	<p>The Utilization and Market Development Working Group of the TMTF consists of 23 representatives from ten state agencies, the timber industry, public utilities, and nonprofit organizations. The group has pursued ideas and possible opportunities to utilize dead trees for international export, in bioenergy facilities throughout the state, in the construction of the High Speed Rail Project, for manufacturing of pellets and other pressed wood products, in multiple variations of mulch products, in the production of bio-char for multiple uses, for large scale dust abatement at the Salton Sea, and for incorporation in bio-pavement. In addition, the group has researched business incentive programs and transportation alternatives to move dead trees to emerging markets and manufacturers. Staff has been active in assisting communities to plan site tours and meetings with prospective manufacturers and potential consumers of dead trees.</p>
<p><b>Mapping &amp; Monitoring</b> Attended by: Liz VanWagtendonk</p>	<p>The Mapping &amp; Monitoring Working Group is focusing on acquiring a new aerial survey of tree mortality data. The US Forest Service (USFS) has had to repeatedly postpone the aerial survey flight due to poor weather and in one case, illness. The group is also working on getting applications deployed to both record hazard tree removal in the field using a Smart Phone App, and a reporting app for field collection to measure tree mortality. The Workgroup is providing maps and analysis to support a possible application to FEMA for a potential Presidential Disaster Declaration.</p>

<p><b>Public Outreach</b>                  Attended by:                  Brittany Covich</p>	<p>The Public Outreach Working Group has focused on coordinating messaging, sharing outreach materials, and developing communication products for the task force. Calls are held monthly and include participation from CAL FIRE, SNC, USFS, PG&amp;E, California Forestry Association, Rural County Representatives of California, California State Association of Counties, California Natural Resources Agency, California Public Utilities Commission, and others. The Public Outreach Working Group is looking at a approaches to communicating the Task Force’s message to decision makers, and developing a web site and a social media presence for the TMTF to provide the public with a one-stop shop for information related to tree mortality, the state’s efforts, and upcoming events. The web site can be found at <a href="http://www.TreeTaskForce.org">www.TreeTaskForce.org</a>. The group is planning to develop routes for self-guided walking tours for the public. The goal for these tours is to allow the public to experience the tree mortality issue up close and at their own pace. Additionally, they are looking at developing a webinar targeted towards the public which will allow them to learn more about the tree mortality epidemic.</p>
<p><b>Resource Allocation</b>                  Attended by:                  Elissa Brown</p>	<p>The Resource Allocation Working Group works to remove dead or dying trees affecting communities and infrastructure through deploying portable equipment, engaging local communities in finding fairs, and maintaining a matrix of potential sources of funding and landowner assistance programs. Currently, the Working Group is developing a general letter from the Director that can be used to solicit help and partnership support from the California business community through California Volunteers, to assist affected counties. The Federal Excess Property Program has provided full clearance for state access to federal surplus vehicles and equipment to assist tree mortality efforts on the ground.</p>
<p><b>Prescribed Fire</b>                  Attended by: Nic Enstice</p>	<p>The monthly Prescribed Fire Working Group has been focused on a few fronts: reaching out to scientists to determine the appropriate role of prescribed fire in high tree mortality areas over the short and long term, if any; participating in discussions with the Fire Science Consortium to create a science synthesis on the topic to help advise management actions; continuing to better understand how and when air curtain burners can be used when material would otherwise be piled and burned; tracking related activities, such as the Fire MOU partnership, to increase coordination; and attempting to better understand when burn days are allowed, if more openings are possible, when they not being used and why. The answers to these questions will hopefully lead to more utilization of burn days for resource benefit.</p>

### **Current Status**

The areas of mortality are split into two tiers. High Hazard Tier 1 zones lie in close proximity to communities, roads, and utility lines. Tier 1 zones represent a direct threat to public safety. High Hazard Tier 2 zones are defined by watersheds that have significant tree mortality, combined with community and natural resource assets. Work at the Tier 2 level supports broader forest health and landscape level fire planning issues.

A critical new development is the expansion of the original six High Hazard counties (Kern, Tulare, Fresno, Madera, Mariposa, and Tuolumne) to ten. With the knowledge that the wave of bark beetle devastation is moving northward, Calaveras, Amador, Placer, and El Dorado counties are new areas of focus. Each of these counties either have established, or are in the process of putting together, local task forces to focus on the tree mortality issue. Staff is reaching out and participating in these meetings as well as county resource fairs to provide information and guidance.

The southern Sierra counties are currently experiencing the worst impacts. The primary focus of response to the situation has been protecting the public and infrastructure from falling dead trees, determining where to put the logs and slash; obtaining equipment to address chipping and masticating needs; addressing transportation needs to move biomass to operating co-gen plants; and addressing challenges to retain existing processing facilities and building new ones. For the northern counties, SNC encourages strengthening resistance by focusing on forest health and resiliency. All affected counties are struggling with the need for funding, accelerating efforts, and providing assistance to private landowners.

The tree mortality issue segues well into the discussion about the critical need to protect watersheds and magnifies the value of SNC's Watershed Improvement Program.

### **Next Steps**

The SNC staff will continue to stay engaged with stakeholders to provide maximum assistance to affected communities and watersheds in the region.

### **Recommendation**

**This is an informational item only; no formal action is needed by the Board at this time, although Boardmembers are encouraged to share their thoughts and comments.**