

May 6, 2022

To: The Lake County Board of Supervisors
From: Gary Prather, timberland owner and retired fire captain (CDF)
Subject: Tree mortality and emergency declaration request

Dear Sirs,

We are seeing an unprecedented number of trees dying in our forest lands throughout the county. These trees, primarily pines, firs, and cedars are dying as the result of beetle infestations, extended drought conditions, and the long term effects of climate change. The summer months are coming soon, and in spite of our best efforts to take these dead and dying trees down, it is difficult for us to keep up with the rate they are dying, or to remove the downed fuel. Experts are warning that the situation will only get worse as the year progresses.

As a retired fire captain that has seen and fought many raging forest fires, along with the loss of life and property that accompanied those infernos, it is wise to do as much as possible to reduce fuels that would contribute to extreme fire behavior. Standing fuels such as grasses and weeds are mowed short to reduce flame lengths. Similarly, the removal of dead and dying trees in our forests is critical to preventing extreme flame lengths in the crowns of trees, which can spread fire brands miles away to other areas.

This type of fire behavior has been seen numerous times in recent years, beginning with the Valley Fire in the Cobb Mountain area, as well as the River/Ranch Complex fires that hit the north end of the county a few years ago. The forests in our county are primed for another major disaster if something cannot be done to mitigate the impact of such an event. Wildfires such as these not only cause massive destruction of property and possible loss of life, they impact the environment for years to come, causing erosion in burned areas, destroying watershed and wildlife, not to mention the economic impact on all of us as well!

Do we really want to ignore a chance to do something about it beforehand and be pro-active, or should we be reactive after a disaster happens? I urge you to support Supervisor Jessica Pyska's proposal to declare a state of emergency in our county due to tree mortality. Let's be prepared to mitigate this problem before the next calamity!

Thank you,
Gary R. Prather
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Middletown, Ca.