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November 7, 2013

J. Keith Gillless
Chairperson
State Board of Forestry and Fire Protection
P.O. Box 944246
Sacramento, CA 94244-2460

Dear Chairperson Gillless:

As the Assemblymember from the North Coast and the Chairperson of the Assembly Natural Resources Committee, it has been a priority of mine to advance balanced timber harvest reform in the state. During the last two years, I have worked with stakeholders through the Timber Harvest Working Group to pass AB 1492 and AB 904. Both of these bills received support from members of the environmental community and timber harvesting groups as they both advance environmental goals and provide regulatory relief for forest landowners.

As you know, AB 904, which was signed by the Governor in October, creates the Working Forest Management Plan (WFMP) for nonindustrial landowners with less than 15,000 acres of timberland. This bill is modeled off of the successful Nonindustrial Timber Management Plan (NTMP), but contains more environmental protections, including stricter sustained yield requirements, mandatory erosion control plans, periodic agency review, and the standard of no net loss of late successional forest stands. To implement the WFMP, the bill requires the Board of Forestry to adopt regulations by January 1, 2016. As the Board goes through the rulemaking process for AB 904, please do not hesitate to contact my office if there are questions about legislative intent. My office has spent almost two years negotiating the provisions of this bill with the stakeholders and can help provide clarification if needed.

A previous version of AB 904 also contained the Small Forest Unevenaged Management Plan (SFUMP), which essentially would have been an NTMP tailored to timberland owners with less than 320 acres. This plan would have required more harvesting restrictions than an NTMP in exchange for a more streamlined permit that smaller landowners could afford. Our goal, as was the case with the WFMP, was to incentivize more forest landowners to engage in long term, sustainable forestry while complying with the California Environmental Quality Act. This would have the benefit of discouraging forestland conversion, incentivizing more light touch forestry, and promoting long-term management.

The SFUMP concept gained support by members of the environmental community, forest landowners, foresters, and the Natural Resources Conservation Service. Unfortunately, because of the amount of attention given to the WFMP, we were not able to fully develop the SFUMP provisions. As such, it was amended out of the bill toward the end of session with the belief that the Board of Forestry could use its expertise and existing authority under the NTMP statutes to further develop this concept.



My office has had several meetings with CALFIRE and Board of Forestry representatives, and there seems to be a significant interest in exploring the SFUMP concept through the Board of Forestry's rulemaking process. Therefore, I respectfully request that the Board use its authority under the NTMP statutes to develop a program that incentivizes more small forest landowners to engage in long term, sustainable forestry. If during this process the Board determines that it needs the assistance of the Legislature, I would be more than happy to help in any way I can. It should be noted that I will be termed out of the Legislature at the end of the 2013-14 session. If I am going to be of any assistance, I would suggest starting the process as soon as possible with the goal of finishing before the Legislature adjourns. I thank you for considering this request.

Lastly, I would like to provide clarification regarding the legislative intent of AB 744. The authors conferred with me at length as the bill went through the legislative process. It was my understanding that any fuel reduction activities authorized by this bill would be subject to prescriptive post-harvest slash treatment standards, like those established in Section 1038(i) of the Forest Practice Rules. This intent is articulated in the authors' October 3, 2013 letter to the Board of Forestry. I respectfully ask the Board to follow this legislative intent during the AB 744 rulemaking process, as this is necessary to ensure minimum risk to public trust resources, while accomplishing the goal of reducing the severity of catastrophic wildfire.

Thank you for your work on behalf of the state's forests. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact my office.

Sincerely,



WESLEY CHESBRO
Assemblyman, District 02

WC:mdb