

Staff Report 41

PARTY:

California State Lands Commission

PROPOSED ACTION:

Authorize staff to take necessary and lawful actions to carry out critical fuels reduction projects as defined in the Governor’s March 1, 2025 emergency proclamation.

AREA, LAND TYPE, AND LOCATION:

Statewide

BACKGROUND AND STAFF ANALYSIS:

The Commission manages approximately 458,843 acres of lands designated as [school lands](#) which are held and managed for the benefit of the California State Teacher’s Retirement System. Staff estimates that approximately 55,000 acres of these school lands are forested and susceptible to wildfire risk. The Commission has invested in building staff capacity and funding to assess the Commission’s forested parcels and initiate responsible forest management strategies ([Item 58, February 25, 2025](#)).

On March 1, 2025, Governor Newsom issued a [Proclamation of a State of Emergency](#) to fast-track critical wildfire prevention projects (Proclamation). The Proclamation suspends certain laws and regulations to the extent necessary to expedite critical 2025 fuels reduction projects such as clearing vegetation for fuel breaks or defensible spaces. The Proclamation creates flexibility to quickly carry out wildfire risk abatement projects by exempting these projects from California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and California Coastal Act requirements.

As staff pursue fuel abatement projects this calendar year, some potential projects may fit within the Proclamation. Empowering staff to use the resources created in

the Proclamation, when appropriate, will ensure the Commission has the ability to explore all possible opportunities for managing its forested lands. Therefore, staff request the Commission authorize staff to pursue any fuels reduction projects permitted by the Governor's Proclamation, if the opportunity arises on school lands.

Staff actions may include site visits, surveys, partnerships with other public agencies, leasing and permitting proposed work on school lands, entering into access agreements, efforts to secure funding, and contracting with consultants for fuels reduction services. Additional Commission approvals may be required at a later date depending on the scope and complexity of any projects pursued through this emergency order.

RECOMMENDATION:

AUTHORITY:

Public Resources Code sections 6005, 6216, 6501.1, 6503, and 8705; California Code of Regulations, title 2, sections 2000 and 2003; Governor Newsom's March 1, 2025, Proclamation of a State of Emergency to carry out critical fuels reduction projects

CALIFORNIA ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY ACT:

Any potential projects authorized by this Commission action will be carried out under the Governor's March 1, 2025, Proclamation of a State of Emergency which creates an exemption from CEQA and the Coastal Act.

CLIMATE CHANGE:

Climate change, coupled with decades of fire suppression, has created a heightened wildfire risk across California's forested landscape. The frequency and severity of catastrophic wildfires is projected to increase due to climate change ([California's Wildfire and Forest Resilience Action Plan, 2021](#)). Responsible and sustainable forest management practices can improve forest health and support forest resilience, reducing wildfire risk.

CONCLUSION:

For the reasons stated above, staff believe authorization to utilize the Proclamation to pursue fuels reduction projects is in the best interests of the State.

OTHER PERTINENT INFORMATION:

1. This action is consistent with the “Leading Climate Activism” Strategic Focus Area of the Commission’s 2021-2025 Strategic Plan.
2. This authorization is limited to activities that are specially exempted from the requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act pursuant to the Governor’s March 1, 2025, Proclamation of a State of Emergency

EXHIBIT:

- A. Governor’s March 1, 2025, Proclamation of a State of Emergency

RECOMMENDED ACTION:

It is recommended that the Commission:

CEQA FINDING:

Find that the activities authorized by this action are limited to activities exempted from CEQA by the Governor’s March 1, 2025, Proclamation of a State of Emergency.

AUTHORIZATION:

Authorize staff to take necessary and lawful actions to carry out critical fuels reduction projects as defined in the Governor’s March 1, 2025, Proclamation of a State Emergency.