



March 9, 2016

The Honorable Edmund G. Brown, Jr.
Governor of California
State Capitol
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Governor Brown:

We appreciate the opportunity to bring to your attention the role that biomass facilities play in maintaining healthy forests and therefore sustaining a healthy watershed.

The waters of our great state begin in the mountains. Whether it falls initially as snow or rain, the millions of tiny creeks that permeate our mountains and foothills eventually combine to form our great rivers, upon which nearly every Californian relies. This same precipitation also finds its way underground, where gravity and geology determine its role in the hydrologic cycle California depends upon.

Your recent Emergency Proclamation on tree mortality highlighted the unprecedented volume of dead and dying trees in the State's forests. As you are aware, the past recent years have seen devastating fires in our Sierras. While partly a function of drought, the sheer intensity of these fires has also been a function of tree density and overall forest health. We are just beginning to fully understand the roles that an over-crowded and unhealthy forest and a charred landscape can have on the health and sustainability of our water resources and our ecosystems.

Biomass plants are one tool to promote healthier forests by providing an outlet for removal of overgrowth and of dead trees. While mechanical thinning and other options present themselves as tools to address an increasingly-unhealthy forestry, the practical challenge rises of where the thinned trees can go so that California can capitalize on this valuable resource. Biomass plants provide an opportunity for California not only to improve the health of our forests, but also to capitalize on that resource to provide a critical tool for California as it reduces carbon emissions.

The effects of changing precipitation patterns and therefore water resources in California are becoming more pronounced. Combined, California's biomass plants produce more than 600 megawatts of baseload renewable energy and use roughly 6.6 million tons of wood biomass as fuel annually that would otherwise clog landfills or be open-burned. If left to decay, the waste can quickly turn into a fire hazard, as recent experience demonstrates with alarming perspicuity. These plants also reduce criteria pollutant production, avoiding the equivalent of 2.2 million tons of annual CO₂ emissions.

Furthermore, the pervasive scars of our most recent fires present another challenge: how California should address the charred remains of what was once majestic forest land and responsibly expedite the ecosystem's healthy recovery. Irrespective of the legal challenges facing forestry managers in the wake of a wildfire to access scorched terrain and remove charred trees, the additional practical challenge remains of what to do with those trees once they have been removed. Again, biomass plants provide an opportunity by providing an avenue for removed charred trees to be put to productive use, instead of standing for decades in an ashen wasteland.

Several of the state's agencies and the California Public Utilities Commission in particular are instrumental in finding a solution to this complex problem.

Thank you for your service and for the opportunity to bring this challenge to your attention.

Sincerely,



Philip A. Williams
Deputy General Counsel
Westlands Water District



John Kingsbury
Executive Director
Mountain Counties Water Resources Association

cc: Michael Picker, President, California Public Utilities Commission
John Laird, Secretary, Natural Resources Agency
Matt Rodriguez, Secretary, Cal-EPA
Karen Ross, Secretary, California Department of Food and Agriculture
Felicia Marcus, Chair, State Water Resources Control Board
Scott Smithline, Director, CalRecycle
Mary D. Nichols, Chair, California Air Resources Board
Michel Peter Florio, Commissioner, California Public Utilities Commission
Carla J. Peterman, Commissioner, California Public Utilities Commission
Liane M. Randolph, Commissioner, California Public Utilities Commission
Catherine J.K. Sandoval, Commissioner, California Public Utilities Commission