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June 8, 2022

The Honorable Ben Allen
Chair, Senate Environmental Quality Committee
1021 O Street, Room 3230
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Assembly Bill 267 (Valladares) – SUPPORT As Amended

Dear Senator Allen:

On behalf of the Mountain Counties Water Resources Association (MCWRA), I write to offer our support for Assembly Bill 267, authored by Assembly Member Suzette Martinez Valladares, which would extend the sunset date by three years for current exemptions from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) for wildfire prevention projects done on federal lands that have already been reviewed under the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA).

While mountain county communities have historically borne the majority of destruction caused by high severity wildfires, wildfire risk has now become a statewide public safety concern as the wildland urban interface spreads over larger areas of the state due to climate change and impacts of renewed drought conditions in California. Wildfires are also a significant source of greenhouse gas emissions and compromise the quality and quantity of much of the state's water supply. MCWRA has long recognized the significant threat that wildfire has upon mountain county residents, infrastructure, and water and recreation resources. Moreover, when wildfire devastates the landscape of California's forested watershed, the impacts to our overall water system are felt statewide.

Recent catastrophic wildfires have originated on federally managed lands where fuels and forest management programs are slow to be implemented due to overlapping federal NEPA and CEQA regulations. Fuels and forest management programs on federal lands require compliance with NEPA and other federal laws but, because additional California State agencies have permitting authority on federal lands (e.g., State Water Resources Control Board or CA Department of Fish and Wildlife), CEQA requirements also must be satisfied, requiring additional years of unneeded environmental and public review processes.

Streamlining and expediting forest fuels management projects on federal lands are critical to reducing and avoiding future catastrophic wildfires and protecting California's water supply. MCWRA supports the need for this CEQA exemption to eliminate the redundant and time-consuming CEQA environmental review process associated with fuels management programs on federally administered lands in California. Timely implementation of scientifically-

sound forest management practices on the upper watershed, federally managed lands are critical to the ecosystem health, recreation economy, water quality and supply, infrastructure protection, and overall watershed functions.

MCWRA advocates for the water interests of its members in 12 of the mountain counties within the Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI) of woodland and forested lands in the Sierra Nevada. These foothill and mountain areas contain the headwaters for 40% of the state's developed water supply, which also provides for hydropower production, irrigation, recreation, water recycling, tourism, and instream flows that fuel the engine of our State's economy.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Justin Caporusso". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Justin" and last name "Caporusso" clearly distinguishable.

Justin Caporusso, Executive Director
Mountain Counties Water Resources Association

Cc: Board of Directors, Mountain Counties Water Resources Association
The Honorable Suzette Martinez Valladares, Member of the State Assembly