



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR RESILIENT HEADWATERS

The Association of California Water Agencies (ACWA) represents more than 460 public water agencies that collectively deliver over 90 percent of the water in California. Public water agencies play a vital role in managing California's water resources, including our forests and headwaters. As the climate changes, severe wildfires are threatening our already constrained water resources. ACWA recognizes the importance of resilient headwaters as an unmatched source of clean, reliable water and air for people and ecosystems across the state.

WHAT ARE HEADWATERS AND WHY ARE THEY IMPORTANT?

Headwaters are where the rivers, streams, and lakes begin, providing flow to surface and groundwater supplies across the state. Like most western states, two-thirds of California's surface water supply originates in these mountainous and typically forested regions. The majority are located in public lands, including several National Forests, and span from the Cascade Range through the Sierra Nevada Range, down to the San Bernadino mountains and coastal ranges.

Improving the health of our headwaters can significantly improve water quality, water supply, ecosystems, and habitat, as well as public safety and recreation, increase carbon sequestration and reduce harmful emissions and particulates from catastrophic wildfire, and reduce stress on water supplies during periods of drought.

THE PROBLEM

Decades of fire suppression in conjunction with a lack of investment in forest health projects, an emphasis on short-term management priorities, increased occurrence of pests and disease, weather extremes and a warming climate have contributed to the decline in headwaters forest resilience.

The challenges we collectively face to restore and improve our headwaters are great:

- Forest overcrowding promotes rapid wildfire growth, creating catastrophic megafires that cause long-term damage to the region's ecology and infrastructure.
- Overstocked forests result in greater competition for water and increased evapotranspiration, reducing water infiltration into aquifers and increasing strain on water supplies during times of drought.
- Dense and homogenous forests are more susceptible to pest infestation that can cause widespread tree death.
- Fragile ecosystems in unhealthy headwaters are at greater risk because of poor water quality, reduced in-stream flows, increased sedimentation of rivers, and loss of habitat.



HOW DO WE IMPROVE HEADWATERS HEALTH?

FEDERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Protect and Expand Investments

- Build on federal investments through FY 2023 appropriations, the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act and the Inflation Reduction Act supporting U.S. Forest Service and Department of Interior programs providing project funding to State and local governments, including water agencies as eligible recipients of funding, increasing the pace and scale of forest management, landscape-scale restoration activities, source water protection and post-fire water quality monitoring, and wildfire mitigation and recovery projects.
- Establish and expand federal programs for disaster mitigation to provide funding to municipal water agencies for infrastructure for fire suppression and to protect critical water infrastructure in the wildland-urban-interface.

Improve Forest Management

- Improve the permitting process to expedite forest management projects with multiple benefits.
- Create long-term strategies to restore and maintain healthy watersheds. Implement the "Confronting the Wildfire Crisis" strategy developed by the Forest Service to put years of research and planning into action.
- Continue efforts to use every available tool in forest management, including prescribed fire, mechanical thinning, project maintenance, rehabilitation of forest access roads, and encourage partnerships with tribes, nongovernmental organizations, state and local governments.

STATE RECOMMENDATIONS

Improve Forest Management

- Aggressively pursue implementation of the "Roadmap to a Million Acres" strategy developed by the California Wildfire and Forest Resilience Task Force.
- Create stability and opportunity in the marketplace for increased utilization of trees and biomass products.
- Expand workforce training opportunities and programs statewide.

Secure Stable Funding for Headwaters Health

- Establish a permanent, progressive funding source for state investment in watershed and forest improvement and post-fire restoration.
- Ensure State funding is available to local agencies for rapid post-fire recovery projects, including erosion control, soil, rock and tree removal, and revegetation.
- Make funding for fire response in headwaters communities part of forest health priorities.



North Yuba Forest
Partnership
BEFORE



North Yuba Forest
Partnership
AFTER

STAFF CONTACT INFORMATION

David Reynolds

Director of Federal Relations
dlreyns@sso.org

Jay Tanner

Federal Relations Representative
jayt@acwa.com

Julia Hall

Legislative Relations Manager
juliah@acwa.com

Soren Nelson

State Relations Advocate
sorenn@acwa.com