

September 15, 2020

The Honorable Mike Lee
Chairman
Subcommittee on Public Lands, Forests, and Mining
U.S. Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
361A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Ron Wyden
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Public Lands, Forests, and Mining
U.S. Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
221 Dirksen Senate Office Bldg.
Washington, D.C., 20510

Dear Chairman Lee and Ranking Member Wyden:

We write today on behalf of national, state, and local entities that cumulatively provide water resources to more than 50 million Americans. As entities responsible for delivering sustainable water supply and renewable hydropower for millions of citizens throughout the Western U.S., we are writing in support of S. 4431, the *Emergency Wildfire and Public Safety Act of 2020*. To date wildfires have burned more than 5.9 million acres of public and private lands and currently 4.6 million acres are actively on fire in 12 different Western states.

Fire is an important part of a healthy forest ecosystem. Unfortunately, the state of our nation's forests, particularly those in the West, are not healthy. The fires that have forced more than half a million people from their homes are also not part of a normal forest ecosystem. These catastrophic fires burn with greater intensity causing tragic losses of life, and significant harm to communities, ecosystems and watersheds.

National Forest lands are the largest single source of water in the U.S. and in some regions of the West contribute nearly 50% of the overall water supply that supports families, farms, cities, industries, and the economy. The unhealthy state of these forests, which contain some of the nation's most valuable watersheds, increases the threat of catastrophic wildfires like those currently burning throughout the West. These high intensity wildfires jeopardize the reliability and quality of water for tens of millions of Americans. The adverse watershed impacts last long after the fires have been extinguished in the form of erosion and sedimentation.

The *Emergency Wildfire and Public Safety Act of 2020* recognizes the need to improve our nation's forest health. It is bipartisan legislation built on collaborative forest management practices. It authorizes new programs to safeguard communities and critical infrastructure, streamlines review process, and would improve forest and watershed health. It does so in a thoughtful and constructive manner.

We also urge the Committee to consider proposed changes to the legislation that would allow for the emergency actions to facilitate the removal of sediment and debris to protect and restore water and energy infrastructure.

We appreciate your leadership on this important issue and urge prompt consideration and passage of S. 4431, *Emergency Wildfire and Public Safety Act*.

If you require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact Ian Lyle with the National Water Resources Association (202-360-6429) or Dan Keppen with the Family Farm Alliance (541-892-6244).

Respectfully,

National Water Resources Association
Family Farm Alliance
Agribusiness and Water Council of Arizona
Idaho Water Users Association
Montana Water Resources Association
Oregon Water Resources Congress
Washington State Water Resources Association
Central Valley Project Water Association (CA)
Charleston Drainage District (CA)
Colorado River District (CO)
Dolores Water Conservancy District (CO)
Fremont-Madison Irrigation District (ID)
Friant Water Authority (CA)
Kittitas Reclamation District (WA)
Mercy Springs Water District (CA)
North Unit Irrigation District (OR)
Panoche Drainage District (CA)
Panoche Water District (CA)
Placer County Water Agency (CA)
Snow Goose Farms (CA)
Solano Irrigation District (CA)
South Tahoe Public Utility District (CA)
Truckee Carson Irrigation District (NV)
United Water Conservation District (CA)

CC

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski
The Honorable Joe Manchin
The Honorable Dianne Feinstein
The Honorable Steve Daines