

Proposition 3 water bond

Preventing destructive fires, and recovering from fire

For decades, fires in our watersheds have been suppressed quickly, allowing large amounts of brush and trees to accumulate. These conditions, combined with increasingly hot and dry conditions caused by climate change, have led to a series of devastating large fires. Fires of record size have been experienced two years in a row (Thomas fire in 2017 and Mendocino Complex fire in 2018). Huge fires in the Sierra Nevada (Rim fire, Rough fire, Ferguson fire and many others) have degraded water quality and changed patterns of runoff.

In addition to the immediate aftereffects of fire, regrowth of dense stands of young trees threatens to repeat the fire cycle, and these “dog hair forests” consume vast quantities of water. Unless they are thinned, they will not develop into the mature well-spaced forests which are resistant to fire, and which produce late-stage forest ecological and timber benefits.

Proposition 3 recognizes that preventing devastating fires through brush and tree thinning, and recovering watersheds after fires through thinning and appropriate replanting is the way to achieve better, evenly spaced high quality runoff that will benefit people, fish and wildlife. Controlled burns must also play a role.

Proposition 3 recognizes fire as a major factor in watershed health:

“86001 (m) Severe fire conditions can lead to significant erosion, reduced water quality and impacts on water infrastructure. This division provides funding to manage forests and watersheds to reduce fire danger, mitigate the effects of wildfires on water supply and quality, and enhance water supplies.”

All conservancies and other land management agencies receiving funds pursuant to Proposition 3 are allowed to spend those funds to “mitigate the effects of wildfires on water quality and supply”.

Agencies receiving funds are directed to create innovative technology, including in the area of fire threat reduction:

86178. Agencies implementing this division shall give special consideration to projects that employ new or innovative technology or practices, including decision support tools that support the integration of multiple strategies and jurisdictions, including, but not limited to, water supply, wildfire reduction, habitat improvement, invasive weed control, flood control, land use, and sanitation.

Proposition 3 includes the following fund allocations:

Sierra Nevada Conservancy: \$50 million for “hazardous fuel reduction, postfire watershed rehabilitation, forest management practices that promote forest resilience to severe wildfire, climate change, and other disturbances, and development of local plans to reduce the risk of wildfires that could adversely affect watershed health.”

CalFire: \$50 million for the same purposes outside of jurisdiction of Sierra Nevada Conservancy.

In addition, Sierra Nevada Conservancy receives \$200 million for programs of “forest restoration ... undertaken to improve water supply and quality, protect and restore ecological values and to promote forest conditions that are more resilient to wildfire, climate change, and other disturbances.”