**Background**

On October 29, 2015, Governor Brown issued an Emergency Proclamation (Attachment A) in response to the dramatic and extensive die-off of trees in the state. With this proclamation, the Governor established the Tree Mortality Task Force (TMTF or Task Force). The Governor’s Task Force convenes the second Monday of every month to meet with the various agencies and organizations to coordinate activities which successfully achieve Task Force goals.

Information on current activities of the TMFT can be found on the Tree Mortality Website, maintained by CAL FIRE, at http://www.fire.ca.gov/treetaskforce/

**Current Status**

Deputy Cabinet Secretary Saul Gomez has replaced Wade Crowfoot as the Governor’s Representative on the Task Force.

The Task Force continues to meet monthly, with updates from each working group and those counties affected by Tree Mortality. Though the numbers of dead conifers are not exact, it’s most probable that the stated 66 million dead trees amount has increased significantly since that figure was announced. Workgroups within the Task Force are pursuing a variety of different processes to achieve the goals of removal, restoration, and building resilience.

**The Public Outreach Workgroup** continues to promote funding opportunities for tree removal and share messaging across networks. The Task Force’s Twitter account continues to be very active, sharing news generated by Workgroup members, relevant research, and information about Task Force-related events. Sierra Nevada Conservancy (SNC) is working closely with CAL FIRE’s account managers to amplify messages through the Task Force’s 400+ followers. The group is developing a Fact Sheet identifying the accomplishments of the Task Force in the year since the Governor’s proclamation.

**The Forest Health and Resilience Working Group** have two primary products that are being developed: 1) a Sierra Nevada Forest Health Report which will identify current conditions, desired future conditions and the actions necessary to achieve resiliency; and 2) a strategy to guide reforestation decisions in areas deforested by bark beetles. Both products are expected to be completed by the end of 2016. Additionally, a draft white paper titled “Sierra Forest Health Report” authored by John Amodio and Larry Camp is under review by the working group. The Sierra Nevada Conservancy supports the recommendations put forth in the white paper, which is largely recommending the implementation of the Sierra Nevada Watershed Improvement Program.

**The Mapping and Monitoring Working Group** has received a list of active wood storage and processing facilities and created a map of these locations. Additionally, the workgroup responded to a request to analyze potential locations for log storage and processing facilities in Mariposa County. These locations are under evaluation by the local CAL FIRE unit and county personnel. The group is working with the Forest Health
and Resiliency Workgroup to develop a map that overlays high mortality areas with seed zones to help with cone collection and reforestation planning.

**The Resource Allocation Working Group**

Equipment has been distributed to various counties but has been idle due in part to unavailable trained personnel and forest condition concerns during this past fire season.

**Regulations Working Group** has submitted a letter to the Governor’s office requesting USEPA to authorize emergency use of air curtain incinerators without a Title VI permit. Because of fire season, none of the air curtain burners have been used beyond testing, but CAL FIRE hopes to begin use soon. CAL FIRE has developed a draft document titled “Issues with the Movement of Wood Material from the Drought Induces the Bark Beetle Epidemic,” developed in response to concerns surrounding debris removal.

**Bioenergy Working Group** reported that the three investor-owned utilities are to purchase a minimum of 50 MW of power from facilities using feedstock primarily from the high hazard zones. Bidders submitted offers to the utilities last month and the utility companies are reviewing those bids. The contract-awarded facilities are slated to be announced in November. Senate Bill 859 requires an additional 125 MW of power to be procured from existing power plants.

**The Utilization and Market Development Working Group** continues to explore emerging technologies that utilize dead trees for a broad range of uses. Additionally, the group has contracted with the Beck Group to identify the most feasible technologies and business opportunities suitable for private investment using dead tree material from the TMTF-designated area. A final report is expected in May 2017 and will likely add information to SB 859 report being prepared for legislature in June.

**High Hazard Counties**

All ten (Kern, Fresno, Tulare, Madera, Mariposa, Tuolumne, Calaveras, Amador, El Dorado, and Placer) counties have established task forces and are coordinating with the Governor’s Task Force. Many share the same basic concerns of finding ways to assist private landowners: identifying available funds to match other grant opportunities, ensuring ingress and egress along roads for escape routes from potential wildfire, identifying funding to support tree removal on private lands, and mobilizing equipment delivered to counties. Many pieces are not in use due to lack of trained personnel and fire conditions.

Tuolumne County has launched a fundraising effort to support removing dead and dying trees on private property owned by seniors over 60 and disabled adults.

The California Association of Resource Conservation Districts submitted a Regional Conservation Partnership program application focused on the restoration of forests in response to the tree mortality crisis. If the grant is awarded, it will provide $10 million for removal of trees for biomass on private property through the EQIP program.
Legislation and Funding
Governor Brown and legislators reached a deal to spend $900 million in revenue from cap and trade revenue for climate programs in SB 859. The Governor had proposed $150 million to CAL FIRE for forest health projects in his budget, however, the legislature reduced that amount to $25 million. The legislation included a section requiring the utilities to enter into five-year contracts for 125 MW of biomass power from facilities that generate energy from wood harvested from high-fire hazard zones. This language was orchestrated by Assembly Member Brian Dahle and will likely save a number of plants from closing (due to expiration of contracts and the utilities unwillingness to offer economically viable contract extensions). These plants are important in the efforts to dispose of materials resulting from tree mortality, as well as restoration efforts in green forests.

Senate Bill 859 also includes a directive to establish a working group on expanding wood products markets. Several members of the Governor’s Task Force Marketing and Utilization working group have been tapped to participate in the recently passed legislative mandate included in SB 859 to prepare a report to the legislature by June 1, 2017, outlining opportunities and strategies to support utilization of dead trees from tree mortality areas in the state.

Next Steps
To date, the SNC has expended $568,444 on Tree-Mortality focused grants out of the at least $1 million allocated. The staff is recommending an additional $994,985 at this meeting for projects addressing tree mortality. If approved by the Board, SNC will have expended in excess of $1.5 million for these type of projects.

The collaboration between governmental entities, nonprofit organizations, local government, local landowners, local businesses, community residents, and other stakeholders has been unprecedented and is key to the accomplishments of the Tree Mortality effort. SNC continues to provide grants, as well as coordination and facilitation, to assist numerous groups to identify other grant opportunities, leverage efforts, and improve collaboration.

Recommendation
This in an informational item only; no formal action is needed by the Board at this time, although Board members are encouraged to share their thoughts and comments.