

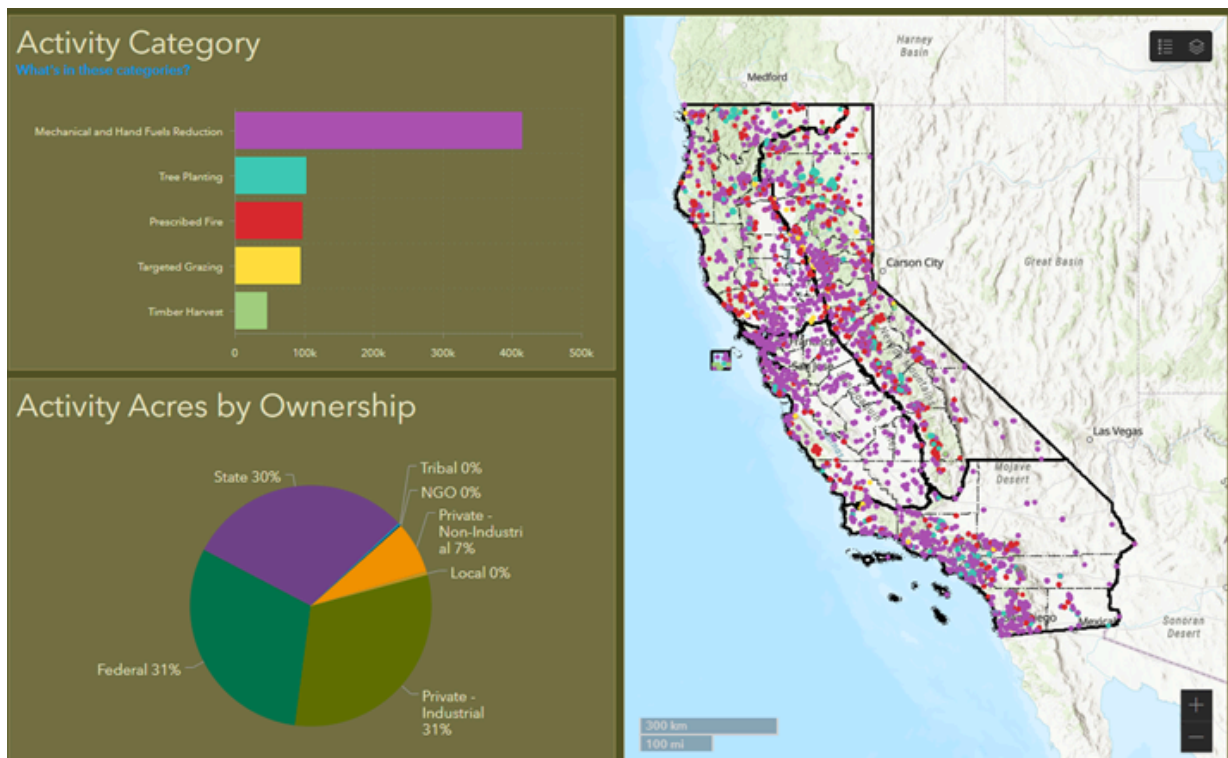
Wildfire Strategy Roadmap

Summary

Climate change is making wildfires in California more dangerous and frequent, with the ten largest wildfires occurring in the past ten years. In this document I lay out what I believe is a comprehensive strategy to combat wildfires. Our investments in wildfire prevention and suppression, as well as forestry health, have resulted in a recent decline in the scale of wildfires, but there is still much work to do.

What are the critical issues in this area?

As Chair of the Senate Subcommittee responsible for wildfire funding, I am ensuring that California leads in investments in wildfire prevention and in timely suppression of wildfires. Despite tighter budget conditions in fiscal year 2023-24, the 2023 Budget Act included \$3.3 billion to CalFire in fiscal year 2023-24; and committed the following: \$118 million for one-time firefighter positions, \$60 million for aviation program contracts (over multiple years), \$87 million for personal protective equipment (over multiple years), and \$119 million for additional training and capital outlay projects. Also, we have remained steadfast in our resolve to improve forest health by retaining \$1.1 billion spread over multiple years for such efforts.



Graphic: California's [Interagency Treatment Dashboard Beta](#) is tracking the implementation of the Wildfire and Resilience Task Force's recommendations through all the major prevention categories.

A key to limiting large wildfires is early detection and early suppression. Here, our investments in technology and aerial resources have made a big difference. As reflected in the chart below, we have still experienced a significant number of wildfires but we were able to detect and put them out sooner. We also, of course, benefited from better conditions with more rain the last two years, but fires are still occurring, we are just getting to them sooner.

	Total Fires	Acres burned	Structures Destroyed
2021	7,396	2,569,386	3,560
2022	7,477	363,939	772
2023	7,127	324,917	71

What is our strategy to address these problems?

The eight areas below are the core of the wildfire strategy. As the Chair of the Senate Budget Subcommittee responsible for Resources, Environmental Protection and Energy these are my priorities for funding on the prevention and firefighting side.

Firefighting	Wildfire Prevention
Firefighters and Equipment Aerial Resources Home Hardening Integrating New Technologies	Prescribed Burns Healthy Forest Management Insulating/Undergrounding Power Lines Biomass

Priority Issue	Description of California’s Latest Actions/Plans
Firefighters and Equipment	California currently invests over \$3 billion annually into wildfire prevention and suppression efforts as well as forestry health. The 2023 Budget included a one-time increase of \$118 million and an additional 503 firefighters, \$18 million for personal protective equipment, and \$119 million for additional training and capital outlay projects.

<p>Aerial Resources</p>	<p>We have made a concerted effort to procure state-of-the-art aerial fire-suppression resources — including \$20 million in the 2023 Budget Act . This has helped us prevent 90% of wildfires from getting above 10,000 acres.</p> <p>After procuring additional aerial resources, the totality of Cal FIRE’s future fleet will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 16 FireHawk night-capable helicopters, with increased capacity to carry water.• 20 Rockwell OV-10 tactical aircraft.• 23 Grunman S-2T airtankers.• 7 Lockheed C-130 Hercules airtankers• 3 King Air A200 <p>These aerial resources and the highly skilled pilots, and aviation support staff are strategically located at 14 air tanker bases, 10 CAL FIRE helitack bases, and one CAL FIRE/San Diego County Sheriff helitack base.</p> <p>CalFire’s aerial fleet will total 69 aircrafts, making it the largest aerial firefighting fleet in the world.</p>
<p>Home Hardening and Defensible Space Inspections</p>	<p>California is investing in the ability for high fire risk homes and buildings to access funding options for home hardening projects as well as conducting defensible space inspections on properties. CalFire is currently expanding its defensible space and home hardening programs. During fiscal year 2022-23, 253,587 defensible space inspections were conducted. CalFire will launch a new program building upon the Governor’s 35 Emergency Fuel Break Projects through developing a list of 500 high priority fuel breaks across the state. I am additionally advocating for funding for this in the climate bond.</p> <p>Various resources exist for individual homeowners to simplify and fund this process for their own homes. In my district, the Sierra Club Loma Prieta Chapter provides a comprehensive list of local and statewide resources.</p>

<p>Integrating Novel Technologies</p>	<p>Embracing new wildfire technology is a focus of mine, given my technology innovation background and representation of Silicon Valley. In 2022, I hosted a Wildfire Technology Town hall highlighting promising new technologies.</p> <p>Fortunately, CalFire continues integrating and funding novel fire suppression technologies through the newly created Research Development and Innovation office at CalFire. The Legislature appropriated \$6 million this year for this office^[JR5], as well as \$17 million through 2028 for new aviation parts and logistics.</p> <p>As a result of this focus, various technologies have been integrated into wildfire detection and suppression both statewide and locally. CalFire, for example, has positioned Pano AI sensors that identify smoke through multiple Southern California cities. Locally, San Mateo County’s CalFire division has used Zonehaven, a program that allows for first responders to communicate real-time evacuation routes.</p>
<p>Prescribed Burns</p>	<p>Fires have always been a natural part of California’s ecological cycle. They maintain healthy forests, providing the opportunity for new growth. California now uses prescribed burns strategically to control and foster forest management and health.</p> <p>Native Americans understood the vital role of fire in their environment and used it themselves as a tool.</p> <p>The state’s Strategic Plan on prescribed burns includes expanding cultural and tribal burns, streamlining regulatory processes through an online system, and creating a public tracking system.</p>
<p>Healthy Forest Management</p>	<p>We are aiming to scale-up forest management to meet the state and federal 1 million-acre annual treatment and restoration target by 2025 (CalFire and other state entities will expand its fuels management crews, grant programs, and partnerships to scale up fuel treatments to 500,000 acres annually by 2025).</p> <p>In fiscal year 2022-23, 97,575 acres were treated by fuel reduction.</p>

<p>Reducing Fire Risks for Utility Infrastructure (i.e. Insulating/undergrounding power lines)</p>	<p>California’s regulating body of electricity utility is requiring a continued investment in fire risk mitigation to comply with Wildfire Mitigation Plan requirements. Parts of this plan include undergrounding: While PG&E is targeting undergrounding 10,000 miles of transmission lines, the most recent financial plans for PG&E approved \$13.5 billion of investments into 1,230 miles of line for the next three years, which is going to reduce the risk of wildfires by 94%, per the company’s estimates. We are working to make sure we use more cost-effective alternatives for lower risk lines such as insulation of transmission lines, which can help to ensure ratepayer savings. Other utilities are investing: SCE proposed a 26% increase in investments into wildfire mitigation expenditures.</p> <p>These investments and better forecasting have resulted in less need for utilities to shut off their transmission lines during high weather risk events — known as public safety power shut offs — from around 2 million impacted customers in 2019 to only 33,725 in 2023.</p> <p>To ensure that these investments are done wisely, we appropriated increased funding for oversight of these programs at the PUC: \$6,342,000 ongoing from the PUC Reimbursement Account for 29 positions to ensure continued legal, ratemaking, and administrative support of the various wildfire prevention, cost recovery, and enforcement mandates.</p>
<p>Developing Biomass</p>	<p>To implement these efforts, the Office of Planning and Research is leading the development of a comprehensive framework to expand the biomass sector by creating a statewide roadmap. Biomass procurement generally is supportive in reducing the amount of flammable material available that increases the intensity of wildfires; however, I am ensuring that these investments result in net reductions of greenhouse gas emissions.</p>

Roadmap on Expanding Wildfire Insurance

Home insurance is in crisis. My constituents call every day to tell me how they couldn’t get home insurance or are now paying exorbitant prices. This is a priority safety and equity concern for residents in San Mateo County and Santa Clara County, and I am working with my legislative colleagues to restore access to home insurance and help individuals increase their protection from wildfires.

In response to major insurance companies pulling out, the Department of Insurance has asked insurers to bring on more policy holders from the FAIR insurance plan. I am monitoring the implementation of the agreement outlined by the Department of Insurance by December 2024.

Conclusion

Timely suppression and wildfire prevention are a top priority as the Chair responsible for wildfire funding. As climate change aggravates the risks and threats of wildfires, I am focused on strategically prioritizing investments and policies to meet the moment.