



The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
Chair
Senate Agriculture Committee

The Honorable Glenn “GT” Thompson
Chair
House Agriculture Committee

The Honorable John Boozman
Ranking Member
Senate Agriculture Committee

The Honorable David Scott
Ranking Member
House Agriculture Committee

April 13, 2023

Dear Chairwoman Stabenow, Ranking Member Boozman, Chairman Thompson, and Ranking Member Scott:

On behalf of national, regional and local government entities responsible for managing resilient water infrastructure and providing wildfire response for communities located in the wildland-urban interface (WUI) throughout the Western U.S, we request your leadership to ensure inclusion of a vital element of defense against wildfire in the wildland-urban interface (WUI) in the 2023 Farm Bill. Specifically, we ask for your support to amend the USDA-Forest Service State and Private Forestry’s Community Wildfire Defense Grant Program (CWDG) to consider water infrastructure for fire suppression projects as eligible Planning, Prevention, Education, Outreach Projects.

Currently, programs to plan or implement necessary enhancements to communities’ water infrastructure for fire suppression are not eligible for CWDG assistance. The purpose of the CWDG program is to assist at-risk local communities and Tribes to plan for and mitigate against wildfire risks. A CWDG project proposal must be designed to achieve one or more of the following objectives.

- Assist a community with planning to address management of wildfire risk.
- Assist a community with mitigation measures or actions to reduce wildfire risk.

In 2021, the Caldor Fire burned 221,835 acres threatening to devastate the City of South Lake Tahoe and endangered the entire Lake Tahoe Basin. Disaster was averted due to a concerted, multi-year effort by the region to protect communities in the wildland-urban interface through a comprehensive strategy of hazardous fuels management, landscape-scale forest restoration, community defense planning and targeted installation of water infrastructure for fire suppression.

The Tahoe Water for Fire Suppression Partnership, in collaboration with fire agencies, NGO's and local-state-federal officials, work together to protect at-risk communities and the surrounding federal forest lands from the threat of wildfire. The core of the effort is to expediate the installation of critical water infrastructure for fire suppression (waterlines, hydrants, interties, generators, storage tanks) in the WUI.

Many communities located within or adjacent to federal lands are at major risk of wildfires. Inadequate water supply and infrastructure for firefighting in many of these WUI communities pose a major threat to public safety, public health, and the broader environment. The need for comprehensive wildfire planning and mitigation measures, including water infrastructure for fire suppression, is vital to protect all WUI communities – including rural, underserved, and Tribal areas.

As stakeholders representing local special district governments and water agencies, we seek your leadership in correcting this eligibility oversight to better protect our federal lands and at-risk communities. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact David French (Partnership), at dfrench@ensresources.com, Jay Tanner (ACWA) at jayt@acwa.com, or Cole Arreola-Karr (NSDC) at colek@nationalspecialdistricts.org.

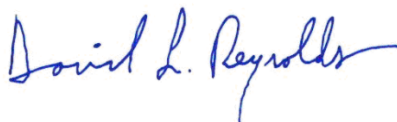
Sincerely,



John Thiel,
General Manager
South Tahoe Public Utility District
Tahoe Water for Fire Suppression Partnership



Cole Arreola-Karr
Federal Advocacy Director
National Special Districts Coalition



David Reynolds
Director of Federal Relations
Association of California Water Agencies