



**DIANNE JACOB**  
SUPERVISOR, SECOND DISTRICT  
SAN DIEGO COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

**AGENDA ITEM**

**DATE:** August 13, 2002  
**TO:** Board of Supervisors  
**SUBJECT:** Fighting Fire with a Preventative Brush Clearing Strategy (District: All)

**SUMMARY:**

**Reference**

San Diego County is facing the worst fire conditions that the region has ever experienced. The second largest fire in the County's history, the Pines Fire, has consumed nearly 60,000 acres, destroyed 35 residences and 106 outbuildings, and will cost fire agencies an estimated \$30 million to put it out. Unfortunately, the fire conditions will only get worse.

One of the greatest challenges that firefighters face is not being able to access rugged terrain to prevent a fire from spreading. Fire breaks are critical for keeping a wild land fire from threatening residential areas. Unfortunately, funding has decreased to perform these services and no uniform plan is in place to coordinate our efforts locally. San Diego County needs a team of local, state and federal agencies to come up with a comprehensive fire management plan so that large wild land fires can be contained with fire breaks, brush abatement and controlled burns.

**Recommendation(s)**

**SUPERVISOR DIANNE JACOB:**

1. Direct the Chief Administrative Officer, with the assistance of the County Fire Code Specialist and the County Fire Services Coordinator, to put together a team of representatives from CDF, US Forest Service, BLM, fire districts and wildlife agencies, to develop a comprehensive plan for establishing and maintaining fire breaks, performing controlled burns, clearing hazardous brush and establishing a bug crew to develop a plan to eradicate the beetle population and eliminate dead trees in the unincorporated area of San Diego County.
2. Direct the Chief Administrative Officer to draft a letter for the Chair's signature to our region's State and Federal legislators, requesting support for additional funding for fire management in the San Diego County region.
3. Direct the County's Sacramento and Washington D.C. representatives to advocate for additional funding for fire management.

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4. Direct the Chief Administrative Officer, with the assistance of the County Fire Code Specialist and the County Fire Services Coordinator, to work with the County fire agencies to establish a residential chipping program and report back to the Board in 60 days.

**Fiscal Impact**

There is no fiscal impact associated with today's action.

**BACKGROUND:**

San Diego County is facing the worst fire conditions that the region has ever experienced. The second largest fire in the County's history, the Pines Fire, has consumed nearly 60,000 acres, destroyed 35 residences and 106 outbuildings, and will cost fire agencies an estimated \$30 million to put it out. Unfortunately, the fire conditions will only get worse.

One of the greatest challenges that firefighters face is not being able to access rugged terrain to prevent a fire from spreading. Fire breaks are critical for keeping a wild land fire from threatening residential areas. Breaks in the dry fuel can give firefighters some space to attack the blaze on multiple fronts, not just from the air. Historically, state and federal fire agencies have created fire breaks and performed controlled burns. Unfortunately, funding has decreased to perform these services and no uniform plan is in place to coordinate our efforts locally.

Previous fire breaks need to be maintained and future fire breaks need to be identified. As we experienced with the Pines Fire, far too much of the backcountry is vulnerable to a wild fire that can spread uncontrolled and consume thousands of acres in its path. San Diego County needs a team of local, state and federal agencies to come up with a comprehensive fire management plan so that large wild land fires are contained with fire breaks, brush abatement and controlled burns.

Furthermore, the forest area in this region is facing a devastating beetle problem that is killing pine trees. This beetle has killed over 30% of the pine trees and the result is an extreme fire hazard. The dead trees literally explode when caught on fire. Part of the fire management plan needs to focus on the beetle epidemic that we are facing. Other jurisdictions have initiated bug crews in the past and San Diego should be exploring the same concept.

Today's action also works with local fire agencies to establish a residential chipping program. This program will assist homeowners in cutting back brush as a preventative measure. Currently, this service is provided by private companies, however, the cost can be prohibitive for many homeowners.

Today's action will authorize the County's Fire Code Specialist and Fire Services Coordinator to put together a team of representatives from CDF, US Forest Service, BLM, fire districts and wildlife agencies, and develop a comprehensive plan for establishing and maintaining fire breaks, performing controlled burns, clearing hazardous brush and establishing a bug crew in the unincorporated area of San Diego County. This

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action will also ensure that San Diego County advocates for an increase in funding for those agencies responsible for performing these critical fire prevention services. I urge your support.

Respectfully submitted,

DIANNE JACOB  
Supervisor, Second District