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## Governor Newsom Proclaims a State of Emergency to Expedite Critical Fuels Reduction Projects

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As the two-month anniversary of the devastating wildfires in Los Angeles and Ventura Counties approaches, on March 1, 2025, Governor Newsom issued a Proclamation of a State of Emergency to expedite fire-prevention projects. This order follows Executive Order N-4-25 to expedite housing projects by suspending the California Environmental Quality Act ("CEQA") and the California Coastal Act to rebuild areas devastated by the wildfires in January.

This latest Proclamation suspends certain environmental protection laws that may impede state and local government's ability to permit and implement high-priority forest management projects. Explaining that wildfires have grown in size, duration, and destructiveness due to drastic oscillation between extreme rain and extreme drought, Governor Newsom emphasized the importance and necessity of this measure.

As with Executive Order N-4-25, this Proclamation suspends CEQA and the Coastal Act to the extent necessary for expediting critical fuels reduction projects. Governor Newsom also suspended statutes, rules, regulations, and requirements that fall within the jurisdiction of the California Environmental Protection Agency ("CalEPA") and the California Natural Resources Agency to the extent necessary, as long as it is approved by the appropriate agency secretary.

The Proclamation also allows non-state entities and individuals to conduct critical fuels reduction projects and benefit from the suspension. For a "critical fuels reduction project" to be eligible for suspension, it must include at least one of the following activities as a primary objective:

- Removal of hazardous, dead, and/or dying trees;
- Removal of vegetation for the creation of strategic fuel breaks as identified by approved fire prevention plans, including without limitation CAL FIRE Unit Fire Plans or Community Wildfire Preparedness Plans;
- Removal of vegetation for community defensible space;
- Removal of vegetation along roadways, highways, and freeways for the creation of safer ingress and egress routes for the public and responders and to reduce roadside ignitions;
- Removal of vegetation using cultural traditional ecological knowledge for cultural burning and/or prescribed fire treatments for fuels reduction; or
- Maintenance of previously-established fuel breaks or fuels modification projects.

Furthermore, to benefit from the suspension, the activities must comply with the State Environmental Protection Plan or a comparable plan that balances expeditious fuels reduction and environmental protection.



CAL FIRE is required to immediately update the California Vegetation Treatment Program ("CalVTP") Environmental Impact Report to increase its efficiency and utilization. CAL FIRE originally developed CalVTP in 2019, which has allowed the streamlining of environmental review for vegetation management projects by relying on a programmatic EIR covering 20 million acres of the state. Despite this success, Newsom noted that California must expedite critical fuel reduction projects throughout the state.

Lastly, the Proclamation requires state agencies to arrange procurement of materials, goods, and services, including housing for hand crews and conducting required pre-work environmental surveys. The Governor specifically required CalEPA and the Natural Resources Agency to submit recommendations for increasing the pace and scale of beneficial fire, while ensuring consistency with local air pollution control district requirements.



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