



COUNTY OF SISKIYOU

Board of Supervisors

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May 14, 2025

Chief Daniel Berlant
California State Fire Marshal
California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection
P.O. Box 944246
Sacramento, CA 94244-2460

Re: Request for Time Extension and Reconsideration of Fire Hazard Severity Zone (FHSZ) Mapping Impacts

Dear Chief Berlant,

On behalf of the Siskiyou Board of Supervisors, I am writing to express our concerns regarding the recently released updates to the Fire Hazard Severity Zone (FHSZ) maps, coupled with the mandatory regulation of vegetation and home hardening imposed on private properties within our county. Given the complexity of implementation and changes in building codes we are requesting an extension to the current 120-day timeline for its review and adoption. The maps presented show major changes with significant implications for our residents, yet there was little to no substantive engagement or communication from your office during the 5 years these maps were in development.

While we acknowledge and support the State's mission to better assess and mitigate wildfire risk, the methodology and implementation of these updated maps raise serious issues.

First and foremost, the maps presented are static and fail to function as interactive, regularly updated tools that modern wildfire planning demands. Given the pace at which conditions on the ground evolve due to mitigation efforts, development, and changing fuel loads, it is concerning that the maps lack flexibility and responsiveness. Without frequent updates, these maps risk becoming outdated within just a few seasons and impose serious, long term financial harm to land owners, regardless of condition.

Additionally, the accuracy of the mapping is questionable. In Siskiyou County, we have observed numerous instances where fire hazard classifications do not align with physical reality. Adjacent parcels are assigned vastly different designations without justification, and property boundaries, slope, and vegetation data are applied inconsistently. These inaccuracies undermine the scientific credibility of the maps and create unnecessary confusion and hardship for property owners.

Another clear misrepresentation of fuel hazards within the county are related to recent wildfires. These high severity wildfires have virtually eliminated all fuels on large landscapes near private lands. None of those reduced fire risk/hazard areas are reflected in the current mapping. It is recognized that those

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District 3

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District 5

areas in 15-20 years may return to similar conditions, but the current designation unnecessarily imposes undue financial burden on private landowners in proximity to those fires.

Equally concerning are the unintended consequences these designations have already begun to produce. Residents are seeing dramatic increases in insurance premiums and, in many cases, outright coverage cancellations. Though your office maintains that FHSZ maps do not directly influence insurance markets, reality tells a different story. In news media across our state many large insurance companies have announced that they will no longer serve some areas or write new policies in high severity hazard areas.

These financial impacts are especially severe for rural property owners in our county, many of whom live on fixed incomes and are least able to absorb them. Fire insurance is a requirement for obtaining a home mortgage, and as coverage becomes harder to secure or afford, home values are declining. This has a devastating effect on the housing market and, in effect, constitutes a regulatory taking by diminishing property values through no fault of the homeowner.

We are also deeply troubled by the lack of recognition for mitigation and home hardening efforts. Siskiyou County residents have invested in defensible space, fire-resistant construction, and other risk-reduction measures. The current mapping process offers no clear path for these efforts to be acknowledged or credited, either in terms of map designation or insurance consideration. This discourages the very behavior we should promote as part of a statewide strategy for resilience.

Lastly, there remains significant ambiguity around governance and decision-making. Your office's role, relative to the California Fire Marshal Authority and local jurisdictions, has not been communicated. The process, so far, has lacked transparency and created confusion about who has the authority to respond to public concerns, request adjustments, or negotiate more accurate classifications.


Siskiyou County is committed to protecting its residents and preparing for wildfire threats, but we also expect an interactive process grounded in technical accuracy, fairness, timeliness and meaningful public engagement. A 120-day window imposed with little warning does not provide enough time for our staff to analyze the data, consult with our communities and receive informed feedback.

Therefore, Siskiyou County Board of Supervisors requests a formal extension of the FHSZ adoption deadline. Our goal is to work constructively with your office on a mapping process that improves fire safety while also reflecting the realities of our region.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. We look forward to your response and to a collaborative path forward.

Sincerely,

Signed by:


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Nancy Ogren

Chair, Siskiyou County Board of Supervisors

cc: See attached list

CC:

State Board of Forestry
Rural County Representative of California
California State Association of Counties
Senator Megan Dhale
Assemblywoman Heather Hadwick
Congressman Doug LaMalfa
Shaw Yoder Antwith Schmelzer and Lange