

Message from the Chief

December 2013

California will always require a strong emergency response capability, and we will never waiver from our world class system. However, fire suppression efforts alone will not solve the State's wildfire problem. Unfortunately, in recent years, the other pieces of the equation, planning and prevention, have suffered significant budget reductions. We must renew our focus on what happens before the fire starts, and the current year budget has presented us an opportunity to do so.



We have just completed our second year of implementing the State Responsibility Area Fire Prevention Fee. I know this has been a difficult and challenging issue for all of us. Regardless of the controversy that surrounds it, we have a responsibility to use the funds generated by the Fee to support and bolster planning and fire prevention activities across the SRA. Directly supported by the Fee, the fiscal year 2013-14 Budget provided resources for the Department to renew and expand these efforts.

The Budget authorized the Fire **S**everity, **T**reatment, **E**ducation, **P**revention and **P**lanning (Fire STEPP) initiative, which provides funding to assist local government with their review and adoption of public safety elements within their General Plans, increased emphasis on vegetation management projects, and additional capacity for defensible space inspections and education outreach.

None of these efforts are new. In fact, all of them are identified within the 2010 Strategic Fire Plan for California. Individual Unit and Contract County Fire Plans are key in accomplishing our goals in this renewed effort. Over the next several months, additional and more detailed information will be forthcoming, as implementation plans are completed.

This opportunity could not have come at a better time. The impacts of climate change, drought and other social and environmental factors are producing more intense and damaging wildfires across the landscape. Over half of the 20 most damaging wildfires in the State have occurred within the last ten years, and we have seen the average length of California's fire season increase significantly in the last several decades.

This year is no exception. We saw significant fire activity as early as mid-April, and continue to face extreme fire conditions this month along the central coast and Southern California. These conditions illustrate why we need to renew our focus on planning and prevention efforts and why Fire STEPP will be a key initiative over the next several years.

Chief Ken Pimlott
Director