



August 31, 2025

Governor Gavin Newsom
1021 O Street, Suite 9000
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: AB 2494 (Rogers) Modernizing Demonstration State Forests - REQUEST FOR SIGNATURE

Dear Governor Newsom,

The undersigned Tribal nations, governments, organizations, and Tribal interest groups write to urge you, in the strongest terms, to sign AB 2494, Modernizing Our State Forests System, into law. We do so not only as a matter of policy, but in recognition of the genuine leadership your administration has shown on Tribal stewardship and climate resilience — leadership that this bill is uniquely positioned to advance.

For nearly 80 years, the State Demonstration Forest System has prioritized timber production over environmental, cultural, and community values. It was built at a time when California's forests were believed inexhaustible, when destructive logging proceeded with little regard for future generations, and when Tribal voices and Tribal sovereignty had no place in forest management decisions. California has since built stronger laws and safeguards against those

practices, and your administration has gone further still — advancing formal policies that confront climate change through tribal land back, tribal co-management, and a genuine reckoning with the state's role in Tribal exclusion. Yet the legal framework governing the Demonstration Forests has not kept pace. It remains anchored to an industrial-era mission that constrains these forests from delivering the full range of ecological, cultural, and public benefits they should provide to all Californians.

We say this with genuine appreciation: your administration's record on expanding Tribal stewardship and conservation has been significant and historic, and we do not take it for granted. The recently released California Natural Resources Tribal Stewardship Policy, and its accompanying commitment to bring 7.5 million acres of California's lands and waters into Tribal stewardship, represents exactly the kind of ambition this moment demands.¹ Through your work, California continues to lead the way in elevating tribal governance—which in turn directly benefits conservation, restoration, and resilience. We strongly support recognizing Traditional Ecological Knowledge and building Tribal stewardship capacity as a pathway to conserving 30% of California's lands and waters by 2030,² to advancing the statewide Wildfire and Landscape Resilience plan,³ and to advancing the Natural and Working Lands Climate Smart Strategy.⁴ Finally, we applaud Executive Order N-82-20,⁵ which called on all state agencies to incorporate Traditional Ecological Knowledges and tribal expertise into land and resource management practices and decisions. These initiatives have never been more urgent as the state confronts increasingly catastrophic climate-driven fires and weather events, and seeks to develop a suite of nature based climate solutions. Signing AB 2494 is your opportunity to build on that legacy, directly adding 85,000 acres of

¹ California Public Resources Code 71450; California Natural Resources Agency, ["New Era": Landmark Policy to Expand Tribal Stewardship for At Least 7.5 Million Acres in California.](#) March 17, 2026.

² California Natural Resources Agency, [Pathways to 30x30 California](#), April 22, 2022 20.

³ [Draft 2026 Wildfire and Landscape Resilience Action Plan](#) 26.

⁴ [Natural and Working Lands Climate Smart Strategy](#), April 22, 2022 23.

⁵ [Executive Order N-82-20](#), October 7, 2020 2-3.

Demonstration State Forests to the state's 30x30 count and modeling for other landowners how their own lands can contribute to the state's targets in climate resilience. This bill would also set a clear, statutory pathway for Tribal stewardship integrated into demonstration of forestry where none previously existed.

AB 2494 helps further your administration's goals. It removes outdated authorities that promote extractive commercial logging and mining, and replaces them with a stronger foundation for stewardship rooted in ecological health, cultural values, and public benefit. Critically, the bill provides a clear pathway for CAL FIRE to seek co-governance agreements with local Tribes, creating durable pathways for joint stewardship and shared decision-making, and requires the integration of local Indigenous Traditional Ecological Knowledges into management practices — knowledge that will strengthen climate and wildfire resilience, improve forest health, and protect these lands for generations to come. We are also encouraged that the bill directs CAL FIRE to invest in research on Tribal stewardship itself, treating Indigenous knowledge not as an afterthought but as a subject worthy of sustained investment. These initiatives directly align with your administration's policies and goals around nature based solutions and tribal stewardship.

We want to be direct about what is at stake and what your signature would mean. By requiring CAL FIRE to actively pursue co-management and integrate Indigenous Traditional Ecological Knowledges, your administration would take a substantial, meaningful step toward strengthening Tribal sovereignty, honoring cultural heritage, and improving ecological outcomes across the state. Indigenous stewardship practices have sustained healthy ecosystems since time immemorial, and the science increasingly affirms what Tribal nations have always known.⁶ This knowledge has the potential to influence landscape level management and demonstration efforts across the country,⁷

⁶ Nikolakis, W., Gay, V., Merkel, G., Sunderland, T., & Morrison, J., *The relationship between Indigenous Peoples' lands and conservation: A systematic literature review*, *People and Nature*, 8, 1676–1691. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pan3.70310>, April 20, 2026.

⁷ See USFS demonstration projects, *Demonstration of Ecosystem Management Options*, <https://research.fs.usda.gov/pnw/projects/demo>. See also *Demonstration Forest projects in North*

especially as your administration has led the way in bold climate resilience and mitigation strategies. Expanding influence and strengthening policy in these areas is more necessary than ever given the federal rollbacks to progressive Tribal co-management models such as the one implemented at Bears Ears National Monument.⁸

This bill would transform the Demonstration State Forests into what their name has always promised but their governing law never allowed: true demonstration landscapes, showing California and the nation how to responsibly steward biodiversity hotspots while expanding access for, and stewardship by, Tribal Nations. By prioritizing ecological restoration, research, and co-governance with Tribes, these forests can become a living example of how the state cares for land while honoring Tribal cultural lifeways. AB 2494 will also support rural economies by refocusing management toward restoration work that relies on local forestry workers, research institutions, and Tribal communities.

Governor Newsom, you have already demonstrated the vision this moment requires. AB 2494 gives you the chance to translate that vision into statute — centering Tribal sovereignty, biodiversity conservation, wildfire resilience, public access, environmental restoration, and climate resilience in the management of California's Demonstration State Forests for the next 80 years.

For these reasons, we respectfully and urgently ask you to sign AB 2494 into law.

Carolina, N.C. Admin. Code tit. 15A, r. 21B.1000 (State Forest Rules, revised Sept. 20, 2021), defining "State Forest" as land managed for education, demonstration, training, forest research, wildlife habitat, forest products, and recreation, available at <https://www.ncagr.gov/divisions/nc-forest-service/state-forest-rules/open>; N.C. Forest Serv., *State Forests in North Carolina*, N.C. Dep't of Agric. & Consumer Servs., describing Bladen Lakes State Forest as a "self-sustaining demonstration forest" designed to demonstrate operational techniques in reforestation, prescribed fire, road construction, logging, and forest product utilization, available at <https://www.ncagr.gov/divisions/nc-forest-service/state-forests>; See also Maryland Demonstration Forests; <https://dnr.maryland.gov/forests/pages/publiclands/cfl/demonstration-forests.aspx>.

⁸ Smith, A.V., *Bears Ears cuts also end first-of-its-kind tribal land commission*, High Country News, July 17, 2026, <https://www.hcn.org/articles/bears-ears-cuts-also-end-first-of-its-kind-tribal-land-commission/>.

Sincerely,

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Available through September 30, 2026 to answer questions regarding this letter.

Chairwoman Jennifer Feliz
Coyote Valley Band of Pomo Indians

Chairman José Carlos Rivera, Jr.
Sherwood Valley Band of Pomo Indians

Chairperson Debra Ramirez
Redwood Valley Little River Band of Pomo Indians

Chairperson Sonja Poe
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