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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

Juan Vargas
51st District, California

COMMITTEE ON FINANCIAL SERVICES
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WESTERN HEMISPHERE, CIVILIAN SECURITY,
AND TRADE
MIDDLE EAST, NORTH AFRICA,
AND INTERNATIONAL TERRORISM

April 28, 2022

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Chairwoman
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kay Granger
Ranking Member
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chair DeLauro and Ranking Member Granger:

I am requesting funding for the “Wildfire Fuel Management and Control Strategy” project in fiscal year 2023, in the amount of \$3,000,000. The entity to receive the funding is the County of San Diego, located at 1600 Pacific Highway, San Diego, CA 92101.

San Diego County has experienced several catastrophic wildfires over the past two decades. At the time, the 2003 Cedar Fire was the largest and most destructive wildfire in the history of California. The 2007 wildfires lead to the unprecedented evacuation of over 500,000 people. Multiple devastating fires have occurred since then. County Fire established the Community Risk Reduction Division in order to better safeguard homes and communities through a cohesive pre-fire strategy, focusing on public education, defensible space inspections, structure hardening and fuels management.

If funded, fuels projects would consist of identification of at-risk communities within rural areas of the County. After communities are identified, specific fuel treatments would be evaluated to determine which is best suited for that community. It is anticipated that 10-12 communities would benefit from this project which would follow the County’s cohesive pre-fire strategy. This could range from a community/subdivision fuel break, evacuation corridor protection (roadside fuel management), and the use of prescribed fire. Additionally, some funds would be used to maintain existing high value fuel breaks. The funds would initially be spent to conduct environmental analysis of the area to be treated. As projects move forward funds would be used to employ contract hand crews as well as heavy equipment companies to conduct mechanical treatments. It is anticipated that these funds would facilitate fuels treatments as described above for 3-5 years.

This project is a good use of taxpayer funds because San Diego County is a mixture of local, tribal, state and federal lands, and wildfires have no regard for jurisdictional lines. The 2003 Cedar Fire started on federal land and devastated the region after spreading to state, tribal and municipal areas. Federal assistance is needed in order to better protect communities throughout the region by carrying out effective vegetation management. San Diego County Fire has a partnership with CAL FIRE in order to provide firefighting, emergency medical response, training, communications, and community risk reduction. CAL FIRE is responsible for wildland fire protection in the State Responsibility Area.

Additional funding for fuel management would increase the ability of CAL FIRE to better protect homes and communities during a wildfire.

This project has received written support from San Diego County Board of Supervisors Chairman Nathan Fletcher.

I certify that neither I nor my immediate family has any financial interest in this project.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Juan Vargas". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "J" and "V".

Juan Vargas
Member of Congress