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March 6, 2026

The Honorable Jesse Gabriel, Chair  
Assembly Committee on Budget  
1021 O Street, Suite 8230  
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable David Tangipa, Vice Chair  
Assembly Committee on Budget  
1021 O Street, Suite 8230  
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable David Alvarez, Chair  
Assembly Committee on Budget  
Subcommittee No. 3  
1021 O Street, Suite 8230  
Sacramento, CA 95814

**RE: FY 2026-27 Budget Request to Establish the Center for Sustainable Forest Health at Shasta College**

Dear Chair Gabriel, Vice Chair Tangipa, and Chair Alvarez,

I respectfully request \$75 million to establish the Center for Sustainable Forest Health (CSFH) at Shasta College as a regional workforce and training hub for forest health and wildfire resilience in the western United States. This investment will address California's urgent forest management and wildfire challenges by expanding workforce capacity, strengthening rural economies, and supporting proactive forest stewardship.

Over the last decade, Northern California has served as the epicenter of catastrophic wildfire events, including the Carr Fire, Camp Fire, and Dixie Fire. These fires have destroyed communities, devastated millions of acres of timberland, and exposed the limits of California's reactive wildfire response system. The scale of the challenge requires a fundamental shift toward proactive forest management, landscape restoration, and a trained workforce capable of implementing these strategies on the ground.

A major barrier to achieving forest resilience is the severe shortage of trained professionals capable of carrying out forest restoration and fuels reduction work. Current workforce data indicates that approximately 1,600 forest health jobs go unfilled annually across California, including positions for heavy equipment operators, log truck

drivers, forestry technicians, fire stewards, and mechanics. Without a significant expansion of the training pipeline, California's goal of treating one million acres of forest annually will remain unattainable.

The Center for Sustainable Forest Health would address this workforce bottleneck by creating a field-based training ecosystem that integrates community colleges, universities, industry partners, and state agencies. Through a partnership with Sierra Pacific Industries and the California Registered Apprenticeship of Forest Training, the Center will move training from the classroom to active forest landscapes, allowing apprentices and university students to gain hands-on experience with modern forest management techniques and heavy equipment operations.

The CSFH will focus training on high-demand occupations that are essential for modern forest management, including log truck driving, heavy equipment logging operations, prescribed burn stewardship, reforestation, forestry data analysis, and equipment maintenance. By prioritizing these high-utilization fields, the program will rapidly expand the workforce needed to reduce wildfire risk, restore forests, and support California's climate and carbon-sequestration goals.

In addition to addressing workforce shortages, the CSFH will serve as a statewide training hub that connects rural forest landscapes with students from urban and disadvantaged communities. The program will provide residential training opportunities and specialized recruitment partnerships with tribal nations, veterans' programs, and workforce development initiatives to ensure that California's forest health workforce reflects the diversity of the state.

Therefore, I respectfully request inclusion of the following in the FY 2026-27 budget:

#### Center for Sustainable Forest Health – Shasta College

- \$50 million one-time for construction of the CSFH Regional Hub, including dormitories, laboratories, classrooms, and heavy equipment maintenance facilities.
- \$12 million one-time for equipment procurement, including logging fleets, heavy equipment, and specialized training technology.
- \$8 million over five years for personnel costs, including faculty, training assistants, and administrative staff.
- \$3.5 million one-time for program operations, including food services, student support services, fuel, and insurance.
- \$1.5 million one-time for outreach and workforce recruitment efforts.

This investment will establish a nationally significant training center capable of supplying the skilled workforce necessary to meet California's forest restoration goals while supporting rural economic development and strengthening wildfire resilience across the state.

Thank you for your consideration of this request. If you require any further information or would like to discuss this request in more detail, please do not hesitate to contact Andrew Nickens in my office at (916) 319-2011.

Sincerely,



**HEATHER HADWICK**

Assemblymember, District 1