Submitted Written Testimony

To:

The House Committee on
Government Reform, *Subcommittee on Energy, Natural Resources and Regulatory Affairs*
Doug Ose, CA – Chairman

5 May 2004

CA State Senator William Campbell (Ret.)
Chairman, CA Governor's Blue Ribbon Fire Commission

Prepared Statement Before the House Committee on Government Reform, *Subcommittee on Energy, Natural Resources and Regulatory Affairs*
Doug Ose, CA - Chairman

CA State Senator William Campbell (Ret.)
Chairman, CA Governor's Blue Ribbon Fire Commission

5 May 2004

Chairman Ose, distinguished subcommittee members, I am honored to be invited to testify before your subcommittee. My name is Bill Campbell, I am a retired state Senator from California who was asked by former Governor Gray Davis and then Governor-elect Arnold Schwarzenegger to be the chairman of the Governor's Blue Ribbon Fire Commission.

The Commission was formed November 2, 2003, in the wake of California's unprecedented series of wildland and urban interface fires that ravaged Southern California.

In October of 2003, Southern California experienced the most devastating wildland fire disaster in the state's history. Over 739,000 acres burned; 3,631 homes (including the home of your colleague Chairman Duncan Hunter), 36 commercial properties and 1,169 outbuildings were destroyed; 246 injuries; 24 fatalities, including one firefighter. At the height of the siege, 15,631 personnel were assigned to the fires. Presidential declarations of disaster were declared in San Diego, Los Angeles, San Bernardino, and Ventura Counties. In the aftermath of the fires in San Bernardino County, a barren mountain canyon landscape, impacted by a rainstorm, produced a flashflood and mudslide causing even more tragedy and destruction. 16 more lives were lost in this follow-on disaster on Christmas day of 2003.

34 Blue Ribbon Fire Commission members comprised of federal, state and local officials assembled to examine the wildland fire disaster response and the critical public policy issues that impede or strengthen our firefighting efforts. We were honored to have Senator Dianne Feinstein and Representatives Jerry Lewis and Susan Davis on our Commission. I am truly grateful for their leadership, dedication and support.

The Commission was tasked by the Governor to examine:

1. Reducing and eliminating jurisdictional and operational barriers that prevent the expeditious response of military and other resources to combat wildland fire;

2. Readiness training of personnel and military resources approved for use within the California incident command system;
3. Development of an interstate and/or regional master mutual aid system similar to California's;
4. Updating local building and planning regulations to include more stringent construction standards for high fire threat zones, requirements for brush clearance and fuel modification, and land use planning techniques; and,
5. Public safety communications interoperability.

We were given 120 days to examine and deliberate on these issues and report back to the Governor with recommendations. We held six hearings in the impacted counties of Southern California: San Diego, San Bernardino, Los Angeles, Ventura and Orange counties.

The Commission has published a report of our findings and deliberations and I would like to submit two copies of this report for inclusion into the official record. The Executive Summary of this report is a part of my submitted written statement. I would like to share with you a few of the key federal recommendations from the report at this time.

- The Commission recommends that the federal agencies, to include the Department of Interior and Forest Service, work in conjunction with California state and local fire agencies and the military, to jointly develop and adopt agreements, regulations and operating policies for the deployment of aerial assets during wildland/urban interface firefighting efforts;

- The Commission recommends that Congress increase efforts to provide training for local fire departments

through federal grant programs and expand the Rural Fire Assistance (RFA) grant program; and,

- The Commission recommends that sufficient standardized frequencies be issued by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to meet the interoperable communications needs of fire and emergency personnel.

Our 48 recommendations have been categorized as primarily public policy solutions or fiscal issues. The Commission was sensitive to the financial plight of government at all levels, and recognized that <u>few of the fiscal recommendations would have meaningful value in the absence of the critical public policy changes that must proceed them</u>.

In summary of our Commission's examination let me state that the magnitude of this tragedy, not only in terms of the loss of human life and property, but in the loss of valuable watershed, wildlife, and critical environmental habitats, was truly catastrophic. After the series of extensive and deliberative public hearings, the Commission determined that, while the bravery and dedication of California's fire service continues to be exemplary, many lessons from similar past tragedies have gone unlearned by those responsible for development of fire safety and prevention policies.

Foremost among those lessons, is the lack of political will to prioritize among competing but important, public policy goals. Vegetation and fuel management, habitat preservation and environmental protection have often conflicted with sound fire safe planning in the development of wildland areas. When adverse weather and fuel

conditions combine, our firefighters have been given the impossible task of protecting life and property in the face of those policy conflicts.

Additionally, the Commission recognized the difficulty the fire service faces in meeting the fire protection challenges of explosive development growth along the wildland/urban interface. Among the findings and recommendations, the Commission urges the same commitment of professional training afforded the valiant men and women of law enforcement to our California fire service.

In closing, Chairman Ose, members of this Subcommittee, I believe it is essential to understand <u>that unless and until public policymakers at all levels of government muster the political will to put the protection of life and property ahead of competing political agendas, these tragedies are certain to repeat.</u>

This concludes my oral testimony, thank you for this opportunity to testify, I would be pleased to take your questions

##########################

Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger
State of California

Governor's Blue Ribbon Fire Commission

Report to the Governor

Senator William Campbell, (Retired)
Chairman

“Unless and until public policymakers at all levels of government muster the political will to put the protection of life and property ahead of competing political agendas, these tragedies are certain to repeat.”

—*Senator William Campbell (Ret.), Chairman*
Blue Ribbon Fire Commission

Governor's
Blue Ribbon Fire Commission

FORWARD

In October of 2003, Southern California experienced the most devastating wild land/urban interface fire disaster in its history. According to the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, a total of 739,597 acres were burned, 3,631 homes were destroyed and 24 lives were lost, including one firefighter. The aftermath of the fires saw even greater loss of life wherein 16 people perished in a flash flood/mudslide in an area of San Bernardino County due to the loss of vegetation impacted by the fire.

The Governor's Blue Ribbon Fire Commission was established to conduct a review of the efforts to fight the October 2003 wildfires and present recommendations to make California less vulnerable to disasters of such enormity in the future.

The Governor's Blue Ribbon Fire Commission includes the following federal, state, and local partners:

Chair

California State Senator William "Bill" Campbell (Ret.)

Federal Partners

U.S. Senate – Dianne Feinstein, Senator
U.S. Congress – Susan Davis, Congresswoman
U.S. Congress – Jerry Lewis, Congressman
U.S. Department of Defense – Peter Verga, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary
U.S. Forest Service – Jerry Williams, Director, Office of Fire & Aviation
U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Federal Emergency Management Agency – David Fukutomi, Federal Coordinating Officer
U.S. Department of the Interior – Larry Hamilton, Director, Office of Fire & Aviation, Bureau of Land Management

State Partners

California Senate – Deirdre Alpert, Senator
California Senate – Jim Brulte, Senator
California Senate – Dennis Hollingsworth, Senator
California Senate – Nell Soto, Senator
California Assembly – Robert Dutton, Assembly Member
California Assembly – Christine Kehoe, Assembly Member
California Assembly – Jay La Suer, Assembly Member

State Partners (continued)

California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection – Andrea Tuttle, Director
California Emergency Council – Chip Prather, Chief, Orange County Fire Authority
California Office of Homeland Security – Rick Martinez, Deputy Director
Governor's Office of Emergency Services – Kim Zagaris, Chief, Fire & Rescue Branch
Office of American Indian Affairs – Marilyn Delgado, Director
Office of American Indian Affairs – Ed McOrmond, Fire Chief, Pechanga Fire Department
Office of State Fire Marshal's Office – Ronny Coleman, Fire Marshal (Ret.)
FIRESCOPE – P. Michael Freeman, Chief, Los Angeles County Fire Department

Local Partners

Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors – Yvonne Brathwaite Burke, Supervisor
Riverside County Board of Supervisors – James Venable, Supervisor
San Bernardino County Board of Supervisors – Dennis Hansberger, Chair
San Diego County Board of Supervisors – Greg Cox, Chair
Ventura County Board of Supervisors – Judy Mikels, Chair
San Bernardino City – Judith Valles, Mayor
San Diego City – Dick Murphy, Mayor
San Diego Fire and Life Safety Services – Jeff Bowman, Chief, San Diego City Fire Department

Associations

California Metropolitan Fire Chiefs Association – William Bamattre, Chair & Chief, Los Angeles City Fire Department
California Fire Chiefs Association – William McCammon, President & Chief, Alameda County Fire Department
California State Firefighters Association – Jeff Sedivec, President
California Professional Firefighters – Bob Wolf, President

Table of Contents

Forward i

Table of Contents iii

Letter from the Chair v

Introduction 1

Acknowledgments 3

Preface 4

Executive Summary 5

2003 Fire Siege — Causes, Response and Recovery 25

2003 Fire Siege — Findings 33

2003 Fire Siege — Recommendations 55

2003 Fire Siege — Success Story and Model Programs 83

2003 Fire Siege — The Tragedy Continues 87

Appendices 91

LETTER FROM THE CHAIR

Senator William Campbell, (Ret.)
Commission Chairman

COMMISSION MEMBERS:

U.S. Senator Dianne Feinstein
U.S. Representative Susan Davis
U.S. Representative Jerry Lewis
Senator Deirdre Alpert
Senator Jim Brulte
Senator Dennis Hollingsworth
Senator Nell Soto
Assembly Member Robert Dutton
Assembly Member Christine Kehoe
Assembly Member Jay La Suer
Director Larry Hamilton
Deputy Director Rick Martinez
Director Andrea Tuttle
Director Jerry Williams
Supervisor Yvonne Brathwaite Burke
Supervisor Greg Cox
Supervisor Dennis Hansberger
Supervisor Judy Mikels
Supervisor James Venable
Mayor Dick Murphy
Mayor Judith Valles
Chief Bill Bamattre
Chief Jeff Bowman
Chief Bill McCammon
Chief Ed McOrmond
Chief Ron Coleman
Chief P. Michael Freeman
Chief Chip Prather
Chief Kim Zagaris
David Fukutomi, FCO, FEMA
Jeff Sedivec, President, CSFA
Peter Verga, Asst, Sec. of Defense
Bob Wolf, President, CPF

Commission Staff:
Jerry M. Haleva, Chief Counsel
R. Blair Springer, Counsel
Robert Gerber, Executive Secretary
Denise Banker, Executive Assistant

April 5, 2004

Honorable Arnold Schwarzenegger
Governor State of California
Office of the Governor
State Capitol Building
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Blue Ribbon Fire Commission Final Report

Dear Governor Schwarzenegger:

Just as it has been my great honor to serve as Chairman of the Blue Ribbon Fire Commission, I am now honored to present to you the final report of that body. As you know, this Commission was formed in the wake of California's historically devastating series of wildland fires that ravaged Southern California during the fall of 2003.

The magnitude of that tragedy, not only in terms of the loss of human life and property, but in the loss of valuable watershed, wildlife, and critical environmental habitats, was truly catastrophic. After a series of extensive and deliberative public hearings, the Commission determined that, while the bravery and dedication of California's fire service continues to be exemplary, many lessons from similar past tragedies have gone unlearned by those responsible for development of fire safety and prevention policies.

Foremost among those lessons, is the lack of political will to prioritize among competing but important, public policy goals. Vegetation and fuel management, habitat preservation and environmental protection have often conflicted with sound fire safe planning in the development of wildland areas. When adverse weather and fuel conditions combine, our firefighters have been given the impossible task of protecting life and property in the face of those policy conflicts. Unless and until public policymakers at all levels of government muster the political will to put the protection of life and property ahead of competing political agendas, these tragedies are certain to repeat.

Additionally, the Commission recognized the difficulty the fire service faces in meeting the fire protection challenges of explosive development growth along the wildland/urban interface. Among the findings and recommendations, the Commission urges the same commitment of professional training afforded the valiant men and women of law enforcement to our California fire service.

Finally, our recommendations have been categorized as primarily public policy solutions or fiscal issues. The Commission was sensitive to the financial plight of California government at all levels, and recognized that few of the fiscal recommendations would have meaningful value in the absence of the critical public policy changes that must proceed them.

In closing, and on a personal note, in my more than two decades as a member of the California State Legislature I have never been more privileged to serve with such a dedicated and committed group of professionals than with my colleagues who served on this Commission. You and former-Governor Davis are to be commended for selecting individuals who brought expertise, passion and a search for ways to prevent such future tragedies while resisting opportunities to either advance individual agendas or politicize a very controversial debate. We can only hope that our combined efforts result in the action the people of California deserve in the wake of this fire disaster.

Sincerely,

Senator William Campbell (Ret.), Chairman
Governor's Blue Ribbon Fire Commission

INTRODUCTION

For 40 years, the California fire service has operated the most effective and cooperative mutual aid and incident command systems in the country. Time after time, firefighters from across the State have responded to the aid of neighboring or distant communities to provide the necessary resources to combat California's catastrophic wildfires. Unfortunately, in October 2003, Southern California experienced the most devastating wildland fire disaster in state history. Over 739,597 acres burned; 3,631 homes, 36 commercial properties and 1,169 outbuildings destroyed; 246 injuries; and 24 fatalities, including one firefighter. At the height of the siege, 15,631 personnel were assigned to fight these fires.

"Through the action we take, we will serve the legacy of those who fought and perished in the fires."
— Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger

It is imperative that we learn from this disaster to reduce the impacts of wildfires on California residents. It is in this spirit that former Governor Gray Davis and Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger established the Governor's Blue Ribbon Fire Commission on November 2, 2003. The Commission, which is broadly representative of the firefighting community and local, state and federal stakeholders and affected communities, was tasked to hear testimony on what worked and what didn't work in the efforts to fight the State's 2003 wildfires and to review and provide recommendations on what is needed to improve and enhance wildfire response and operational relationships between the federal, state and local planning agencies.

"All of these firefighters are heroes. They have all done extraordinary work to defend peoples' properties and lives."
— former Governor Gray Davis

"We cannot continue those policies that impede our efforts to reduce dangerous fuel loads or hamper our fire protection and firefighting efforts."
— State Senator Bill Campbell (Ret.)

Tasked with a very short timeframe, the Commission examined:

- Reducing and eliminating jurisdictional and operational barriers that prevent the expeditious response of federal, state and local agencies to combat wildfires;
- Providing continuous readiness training of personnel and military equipment approved for use within the California incident command system;
- Developing and/or revising an interstate and/or regional master mutual aid system similar to California's; and
- Updating local building and planning regulations to include more stringent construction standards for high fire threat zones, requirements for brush clearance and fuel modification, and land use planning techniques that protect property.

"We are very grateful to the people who helped with the fires—to the fire departments and the forest service departments. I don't think we can thank them enough for the work that they did and the work that they do putting their lives on the line time and time again."
— Senator Nell Soto

We owe much to the heroic men and women who saved our lives and properties. However, we cannot continue to put them in harm's way without doing everything possible to prevent such destructive fires in the future.

Many who testified warned that similar catastrophic fires will take place again due in part to our warm temperatures and low humidity, prolonged drought periods, the Santa Ana winds, chaparral, dry brush, burgeoning population and residential development in wild land areas, to name a few. The Commission's recommendations stresses pre-fire management programs, which involve not only the cooperation of federal, state and local agencies, but also local communities and individual property owners.

"I am confident that this Commission can come together to produce a report that will serve as a genesis for essential policy changes that will help prevent and protect Californians from future fire disasters."
-- Assembly Member Christine Kehoe

And finally, the Commission expresses its deepest sympathies to the families and loved ones of those whose lives were lost during this tragic fire siege, and to the many thousands who lost their homes and their private personal treasures.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Commission Staff:

Robert Gerber, Executive Secretary
Denise M. Banker, Executive Assistant
Robert Eplett, Photographer
Rob Allingham, Video/Audio Technician
Grace Koch, Executive Liaison
Patricia Livingston, Secretary

"I am truly optimistic that the work of this Commission will have a positive impact in addressing the wildfire challenge that California faces."
— Chief William R. Bamattre, L.A. City Fire Department

Acknowledgments

The Governor's Blue Ribbon Fire Commission wishes to acknowledge the valuable contributions made by the many individuals and organizations assisting the Commission on this most challenging endeavor. The Commission members sincerely appreciate the time and effort of those who prepared and/or presented both public and written testimony at our various hearings. The testimony from these individuals, the community and public and private officials were crucial in understanding the scope of the wildland fires and the promise for proactive solutions to mitigate future losses.

A special thanks to the Governor's Office of Emergency Services (OES), Director Dallas Jones and his executive staff for their administrative support to the Commission. Many thanks to the OES Information and Public Affairs Unit for their media affairs assistance and in documenting each Commission meeting in video, audio and still digital photography.

The Commission appreciates California Highway Patrol Commissioner D.O. "Spike" Helmick and his officers for providing security at the seven public hearings.

The firm of Sergeant Major Associates, Inc., especially Jerry M. Haleva, President, and R. Blair Springer, are thanked for assisting the Commission in the review of the October fires. The Commission would also like to thank Joan Kawada Chan and Kenneth Kobrin of Integrated Solutions for Business and Government, Inc. (ISBG) for analyzing the data and drafting the report.

"We are further ahead in our firefighting capabilities than any other state in the nation."
— Director Dallas Jones, Governor's Office of Emergency Services

"The system did not fail. It was strained. It was pushed to its max. But it didn't fail."
— Jim Wright, Deputy Director for Fire Protection, CDF

PREFACE

"In this state, there are now approximately 35 to 36 million people that are scattered over in excess of 100 million acres of interface and intermix with communities. The liability of one major interface or intermix incident not only affects residents, it jeopardizes communities, companies, as well as economies."
— Dave Neff, Deputy Chief, CDF

Over the course of the seven hearings that the Blue Ribbon Fire Commission conducted, it became abundantly clear that conflicting public policy mandates, lengthy bureaucratic administrative processes and procedures, and antagonistic litigation tactics were the most significant barriers and impediments to reducing the threat of wildland fires and preventing periodic, catastrophic loss of life and property from such disasters. The key to protecting our communities and residents is through fire prevention and effective vegetation/fuels management programs. While the State must act to ensure that our fire service agencies have the necessary funding, personnel, training, and resources to provide and maintain an effective firefighting capability, the State cannot ignore the public policies and governmental barriers that contribute significantly to the periodic catastrophic fires that overwhelm our firefighting response capability.

The Commission members recognize that continued expenditures on firefighting resources and capabilities without directly addressing and eliminating the public policy, bureaucratic and obstructionist litigation barriers to critical fuel management, fire safe building codes and fire wise community standards, will only marginally increase our ability to avoid future catastrophic losses to wildland fires.

"We have to strengthen our forest health, strengthen fuels management across the state, and implement regulations and codes for both building and infrastructure to make California as fire safe as we can."
— Jim Wright, Deputy Director for Fire Protection, CDF

The Governor's Blue Ribbon Fire Commission adopted a flow chart (Appendix I) to assist the members in articulating its findings and recommendations in an objective, risk management approach to mitigating the loss of life and property to wildland fires. This flow chart will also assist readers and policy makers in reviewing the Commission's findings and recommendations, and recognizing the barriers that impede the implementation of critical wildland fire prevention and fire safety measures.

The Commission members recommend that the flow chart be utilized as a reference tool in a review of the Commission's findings and recommendations, and in framing the public policy debate and determination to achieve sound, cost-effective, protection of life and property from the devastation of wildland/urban interface fires. This chart represents a "systems approach" to a very complex problem. It does not rely on any one factor that contributes to a large or catastrophic fire, but rather introduces a method that looks at how several factors need to be addressed in order to reconcile this level of threat under adverse weather conditions.

Executive Summary

Executive Summary

Mission

The Governor's Blue Ribbon Fire Commission, which was established by former Governor Gray Davis and Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger on November 2, 2003, was tasked to conduct a thorough review of the Southern California wildfires and present recommendations to policy-makers that will promote a fire safe environment in the wildland urban interface environment in California.

"As Abraham Lincoln stated so well, a nation with no regard for its past will have little future worth remembering. Let's make the terrible lessons learned from our October fires our blueprint for the future."
— Supervisor Jim Venable, Riverside County

Background

In October of 2003, Southern California experienced the most devastating wild land/ urban interface fire disaster in California's history. The statistics are staggering: 739,597 total acres were burned; 3,631 homes, 36 commercial properties, 1,169 outbuildings destroyed; approximately 500 farmlands were torched costing $40 million in agricultural products alone; 246 people were injured and 24 lives were lost, including one firefighter.

To avert future catastrophes, then-Governor Gray Davis, along with Governor-elect Arnold Schwarzenegger, established the Governor's Blue Ribbon Fire Commission. Named to the Commission were firefighters, community officials, along with local, state and federal representatives. The Commission was tasked to conduct public hearings in the six impacted counties and report its findings and recommendations in 120 days.

"We have an ongoing crisis in California that could ultimately make the fires that burned over 3,000 homes look small in comparison. We have a million dead trees still waiting to burn, and thousands of acres of scorched soil that could come crashing down on whole neighborhoods."
— Congressman Jerry Lewis

Summary of Public Hearings

Hearings were held in the counties that were impacted by the wildland fires — Los Angeles, San Bernardino, Ventura, San Diego, Riverside and Orange.

The Inaugural hearing was conducted on November 13, 2003, in Manhattan Beach, California. The Commission

"I want to take this opportunity to thank every one of my fellow Commission members for their dedication and commitment attending these meetings. I have never witnessed a greater commitment of time, energy and focus by such a high level group of appointees, and I am truly grateful."
— State Senator Bill Campbell (Ret.)

"We need to explore what happened with these conflagrations and learn from them so that we can do a better job."
— Senator Dennis Hollingsworth

members were welcomed by then-Governor Gray Davis and were given a general description of the impacted areas, a chronological overview of the fires, and the challenges that confronted our firefighters during the October siege.

The second hearing was conducted on December 4, 2003, in San Bernardino, California. The focus of this hearing was on the resources available to combat the wild land fire, mutual aid, and barriers that prevented the expeditious use and response of these resources.

Fire prevention and pre-fire management efforts were the topics of the third hearing in Thousand Oaks, California, on January 7, 2004. Discussions centered on local building codes, planning and land use regulations, vegetation management and fuel modification programs.

"The losses were tragic, but I am confident the spirit of recovery will heal us and take us all forward."
— Director Andrea Tuttle, CDF

At the fourth hearing in San Diego, California on January 21, 2004, testimony was heard regarding after-action reviews conducted by other federal, state and local entities relative to the October 2003 fire siege, and an in-depth review of the responses to the Cedar Fire in San Diego County.

On February 5, 2004, at Riverside, California, the hearing focused on communications and interoperability.

The sixth hearing, which was conducted in Costa Mesa, California on February 19, 2004, centered on fire service training, emergency medical services, and building and insurance industry programs.

Finally, on March 18, 2004, the Commission met in Los Angeles to review the findings of their deliberations and to collectively reach agreement on the many recommendations contained in this report.

Summary of Findings

Following is the list of findings from the public hearings and written testimony received by the Commission.

Jurisdictional And Operational Barriers

Finding 1

There is confusion as to whether there is a requirement that all available local resources, including civilian contract aircraft, be exhausted before requesting federal resources to assist in fighting WUI (Wildland/Urban Interface) fires.

Finding 2

There are numerous conflicting land management and environmental laws and regulations at all levels of government.

"The role and mission of the United States Department of Defense is the military defense of our country. That is what we're organized, trained and equipped to do. We do have a longstanding tradition of providing support to civil authorities and have a well organized and well ordered process to do this."
— Peter Verga, Assistant Secretary, U.S. Department of Defense

Finding 3

One-third of the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection's (CDF) workforce has retired during the past few years, resulting in vacancies in key positions. In addition, the number of fire crews has decreased due to a decline in the number of Department of Corrections (CDC) inmate firefighters, California Youth Authority (CYA) wards and California Conservation Corps (CCC) members. As a result, CDF had to deploy higher level managers to perform Assistant Chief level functions during the October 2003 Fire Siege.

"Our challenge is to live and build our communities in a more fire safe manner, reduce the unnatural fuel levels in our wildlands, improve our evacuation plans and communication systems."
— Director Andrea Tuttle, CDF

Finding 4

CDF is operating a fire protection system year around on an eight month budget allocation.

"We are keenly aware that fires do not have an eight month season in San Diego, but a year long danger."
— Congresswoman Susan Davis

Finding 5

CDF acquires used military aircraft through the federal excess property program and refurbishes them into working firefighting aircraft. However, availability of these federal excess property aircraft is diminishing and will soon be exhausted.

"When I was able to send two engines with eight members instead of three engines with nine members, I was able to cover more ground and spread the engines further because it allowed one person to take a command role, to plan, to look where the fire's going, to properly manage the fire."
— Captain Fred Burris, Ventura County Fire Department

Finding 6

Four person (4-0) staffing on fire engines may be more efficient than lower levels of staffing and allow firefighters to be more productive in their fire suppression activities, thereby maximizing engine response capability during WUI fires.

Finding 7

CDF aircraft, federal aircraft and military aircraft equipped with Modular Airborne Fire Fighting System (MAFFS) units operate with inflexible "cut-off" time policies.

Finding 8

The National Interagency Fire Center (NIFC) in Boise, Idaho, is the nation's coordination center for wildland firefighting and has the ability to call upon the DOD when additional assistance is needed.

"We need to discuss what went well, because a lot of things did go well. We also need to discuss what we can improve on."
— Assembly Member Robert Dutton

Finding 9

Aerial firefighting resources cannot be solely relied upon to establish an effective fire line. It requires a coordinated effort with ground firefighting resources.

Finding 10

There is a fundamental yet unmet need in WUI suppression and management to be able to consistently monitor and understand the behavior of wildland fires at their full scale and as they occur.

Training

Finding 1

There are currently no minimum statewide service level or training standards mandated by law for California firefighters, nor are there statewide mandates for continuing training or maintenance of performance standards.

"The lives of our brave firefighters and those they protect depend upon quality and accessible training programs."
— State Senator Bill Campbell (Ret.)

Finding 2

Training of California's firefighters is complex and diverse, and has many agencies participating in the development and delivery of training programs. While California has led the way in developing new training programs, the programs have yet to be brought together in a coordinated manner.

Finding 3

Because participation in CDF/OSFM training programs is unfunded, a statewide needs assessment has not been conducted, new programs take years to develop, training programs are not readily available in all areas of the state, and instructor availability is limited in some geographic areas.

"When you send crews into a threatened neighborhood when everybody else is trying to get out, the ability for them to do their job is not based on the fire truck they're on, it's based on their background, education and experience that allow them to function safely in that kind of environment."
— Ronny J. Coleman, Interim Chief, City of Santa Rosa Fire Department

Finding 4

Funding for the Army National Guard to conduct or participate in multi-agency training is not available at a time when integration of their resources into the state's firefighting resources is needed.

"We need to give due credit to the training that the military does on bucket drops."
— Assembly Member Jay La Suer

Finding 5

Keeping up with the firefighting training component of the active military is very difficult.

Finding 6

The USFS has six centers in California that provide training to federal, state and local government fire service employees and a National Wildfire Training Center that houses its national apprenticeship program.

"It is an appropriate federal responsibility to play a role in some of the funding relating to training and re-training."
— Congressman Jerry Lewis

Finding 7

A comprehensive public awareness education program is needed.

Interstate/Regional Mutual Aid Systems

Finding 1

"The compacts were put together in the 50's and 60's so many people aren't aware of the compacts. Also, issues such as who is covered under workers' compensation, who pays and at what levels must be addressed regarding EMAC."
— Director Dallas Jones, Governor's Office of Emergency Services

Interstate Mutual Aid compacts provide liability and reimbursement clauses, but these compacts are not completely detailed and have not been regularly updated.

Finding 2

States vary as to their process for allocating resources.

Finding 3

California has a variety of mutual aid and cooperative agreements through which public entities may be reimbursed.

Finding 4

The Southern California Tribal Emergency Management Consortium consists of Native American tribes in San Diego, San Bernardino and Riverside counties, and has developed the same firefighting capabilities as any other local or state government fire department.

"If we are to survive and continue living in a fire prone environment, we must all work together and form effective working teams among communities and emergency services as never before. This will happen again."
— Chief Ray Quintanar, Director, Fire and Aviation Management, USFS

Finding 5

Emergency Medical Services Authority (EMSA) is important to a unified and coordinated emergency response to WUI fires.

Finding 6

California's mutual aid system is recommended by the federal government as a national model.

Local Building, Planning and Land Use Regulations; Brush Clearance and Fuel Modification

Finding 1

The protection of life and property from wildfire cannot simply rely on the availability of firefighting resources. Until the removal of thousands of acres of dead bark beetle infested trees and sound forest stewardship is achieved, Southern California and other forested areas of the state will continue to have hazardous standing fuel just waiting to become the next conflagration. Fuel reduction and fuel modification programs are essential to reducing the potential threat of major WUI fires.

"Fire has no respect for boundaries. The only way to effectively protect our communities is to universally improve our ability to construct fire safe communities. We believe this can be done with the proper balance so that native habitats are protected, as well as other sensitive environmental concerns, while simultaneously thinning brush so that it provides the correct safety to structures." — P. Lamont Ewell, San Diego Assistant City Manager

Finding 2

Community involvement is essential to helping implement necessary fire prevention and fire safety programs at the local level.

Finding 3

Currently, appropriate minimum building standards and fire safety requirements are neither mandated nor consistently enforced in all communities in High and Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zones.

Finding 4

The insurance industry must be an intimate and integral part of the solution to addressing the WUI problem.

"We estimate that there will be around 1.9 million claims from these fires and it will probably reach an estimated total of over $2.03 billion." — Jerry Davies, Director of Communications, Personal Insurance Federation of California

Finding 5

Vegetation has not been adequately managed to mitigate wildfire risks. The most destructive, costly and dangerous wildfires occurred in older, dense vegetation burning under extreme conditions.

Finding 6

Most structural losses occurred where homes had little or no vegetation clearance or were built using combustible building materials, and were thus vulnerable to wildfires.

Communications Interoperability, Information Technology and public outreach

Finding 1

"Let's improve on what we have rather than going out and trying to sink a tremendous amount of money into something new."
— Assembly Member Jay La Suer

Communications interoperability is essential in the effective command and control of personnel and resources during multi-agency, multi-discipline responses to major incidents.

Finding 2

Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) provides long loiter time surveillance, reconnaissance and intelligence.

Finding 3

"Many challenges made fighting these fires extremely difficult, such as tracking and anticipating the wind driven path of the raging inferno."
— Congresswoman Susan Davis

Geographic Information System (GIS) technology is an effective tool for quickly providing a visual representation of critical information, such as the status and potential impact of complex incidents during a major wildfire.

Finding 4

It is important that the public, elected officials and the media have accurate, timely information.

Summary of Recommendations

The Commission recommends the following solutions, which involve not only the cooperation of the federal, state and local governments, but also that of the local community and individual property owners. The Commission has categorized each recommendation as a *Policy* or *Fiscal* recommendation, and numerically prioritized its importance as: (1) must implement; (2) should implement; or (3) should be studied further.

"The Economy Act is often cited and discussed but rarely understood. We do not view this legislation as a limiting law, but rather as an enabling law which allows DOD to support other federal agencies."
— Colonel Thomas LaCrosse, U.S. Army, Director, Civil Support, Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Homeland Defense

Jurisdictional And Operational Barriers

Multi-jurisdictional Recommendations

Multi-Jurisdictional Recommendation 1

The Commission recommends that OES arrange a meeting of federal, state and local partners to further clarify and improve the process of utilizing federal resources and access to military assets. (Policy-1)

Multi-Jurisdictional Recommendation 2

The Commission recommends that federal (U.S. Department of the Interior [DOI] and USFS), state (CDF and OES) and local fire agencies work in conjunction with the military to jointly develop and adopt agreements, regulations and operating policies for the employment of aerial assets during WUI firefighting efforts. In addition, FIRESCOPE should develop a statewide plan to increase local agency capacity to provide additional air resources for combating WUI fires. (Policy-1)

"No force of nature was as remarkable as the spirit of those men and women on those front lines. I saw firefighters running on nothing more than guts and adrenaline refusing to sleep, refusing to eat, refusing to think about anything except how to save one more home or one more life. They came from everywhere, from large departments like Los Angeles and San Francisco and from smaller departments like Davis, Modesto and Novato. These are the people who stood the ground against this force of nature."
— Dan Terry, President, CA Professional Fire Fighters

Multi-Jurisdictional Recommendation 3

The Commission recommends that a task force be established to review the social, political, economic and scientific issues relating to conflicts between environmental and ecosystem values and land management planning, and their impact on the use of proven fire prevention and fire safety measures to protect lives and property in our WUI areas.
(Policy-1)

"The National Guard Bureau needs to amend its mission and add firefighting to its mission. By doing this, it would provide additional funds and training opportunities."
— Kim Zagaris, Chief, Fire and Rescue Branch, Governor's Office of Emergency Services

Multi-Jurisdictional Recommendation 4

The Commission recommends that federal and state statutes be clarified, where necessary, to reaffirm the status of the fire service as a public safety entity and to recognize the integrated responsibilities for fuel management as reflected in the National Fire Plan, Healthy Forests Restoration Act and existing agreements between the Wildland Fire Leadership Council (WFLC) and federal, state and local fire agencies. (Policy-1)

"We need to identify the disparity between the current status of a fire crew staffing versus what the actual need is because it is such an important part of local mitigation issues, as well as statewide response."
— Jeff Sedivic, President, CA State Firefighters Assn

Multi-Jurisdictional Recommendation 5

The Commission recommends that all federal, state and local forest firefighting agencies review their aircraft operations cut-off times and determine if there can be a window of flexibility to expand incident operations times, while at the same time taking into consideration flight crew safety. Additionally, these agencies should review available and emerging technologies to extend available aerial emergency response capabilities. (Policy-1)

Multi-Jurisdictional Recommendation 6

The Commission recommends that federal, state and local fire agencies implement 4-0 staffing for all fire engine companies responding to OES Mutual Aid calls for immediate, planned response, and set a goal of 4-0 staffing for WUI initial attack response. (Policy/Fiscal-1)

"Senator Dianne Feinstein and I were successful in securing $725 million for California. Monies will go to FEMA to use for disaster relief for individuals and communities, to the U.S. Forest Service and Emergency Watershed Protection program to remove dead and dying trees from federal lands and for erosion control, to U.S. Department of Agriculture to assist farmers in rebuilding their farms, to ranchers to replace livestock, and to replace lost tree crops."
— Congressman Jerry Lewis

Multi-Jurisdictional Recommendation 7

The Commission recommends that all firefighters responding to WUI fires be provided with the necessary wildland personal protective gear, safety and communications equipment. (Policy/Fiscal-1)

Multi-Jurisdictional Recommendation 8

The Commission recommends that sufficient funds be allocated to state and local fire agencies to address California's fire prevention and suppression needs. (Fiscal-1)

Multi-Jurisdictional Recommendation 9

The Commission recommends that federal, state and local policymakers consider creating a stable funding infrastructure for the California Fire Alliance and Fire Safe Councils. (Fiscal-2)

Federal Recommendations

Federal Recommendation 1

The Commission recommends that the federal government (DOD, USDOI, USFS, etc.) investigate whether the successful MAFFS program concept of operation and emerging technologies can be applied to other aerial firefighting systems. (Policy-1)

"Federal funding for firefighting is very minimal, and that's one of the areas that we'll have to look at." — Marilyn Delgado, Director, Governor's Office of Indian Affairs

Federal Recommendation 2

The Commission recommends that Congress support and fund a single source database that enhances real-time and nighttime WUI intelligence. (Fiscal-1)

Federal Recommendation 3

The Commission recommends that Congress consider authorizing additional federal grant funds for wildland fire mitigation, including the establishment of a National Fire Science Research Institute to compile, evaluate and fund technological advances related to fire prevention and suppression at the federal level. (Fiscal-1)

"If we're trying to understand the impacts of fire on the environment and mitigate those impacts, it's important to know about measuring fires." — Dr. Philip Riggan, Scientist, Forest Fire Laboratory, USFS

Federal Recommendation 4

The Commission recommends that the federal government reduce or eliminate "match" requirements for federal grant funds for hazard mitigation programs in areas where there has been a state declaration of emergency. (Fiscal-3)

State Recommendations

State Recommendation 1

The Commission recommends development of a permanent Joint Legislative Committee on Emergency Services and Homeland Security. As part of the Committee's mandate, it will have responsibility, in so far as possible, to implement the recommendations of the Blue Ribbon Fire Commission. The Committee will oversee all relevant rules and regulations to resolve conflicting issues. Additionally, the Committee will have technical advisory committees to help evaluate strategies and shall periodically report its progress to the Governor and the Legislature. (Policy-1)

"We just went through the worst fires in California. As Chief of the San Diego Fire Department, we tried to implement several local building code and brush management changes. If you can imagine, the very people that came forward to fight us on those proposed changes were the ones that lost their homes, almost to a person." — Chief Jeff Bowman, San Diego City Fire Department

State Recommendation 2

The Commission recommends that the Blue Ribbon Fire Commission reconvene six months after the submission of this report, and again six months later, to assess progress in implementing the Commission's recommendations. (Policy-1)

State Recommendation 3

The Commission recommends that FIRESCOPE research and pursue efforts so mutual aid deployed engines have the capability to utilize newer technologies, such as foams and gels. (Policy-2)

"The Cedar Fire was the worst fire in San Diego history -- 280,000 acres were burned countywide, 10 percent of that was in the City of San Diego and the eastern part of the city. The city lost more than 400 structures, many of them completely destroyed. While we lost over 400 structures, thousands were saved and not one life was lost in the City of San Diego."
— Mayor Dick Murphy, City of San Diego

State Recommendation 4

The Commission recommends establishing a secure year round operational capability for CDF, where appropriate, including the implementation of 4-0 staffing for all CDF state funded engine companies. (Fiscal-1)

State Recommendation 5

The Commission recommends that the state examine alternatives for replacement and diversification of CDF's aging helicopter fleet and fire engine apparatus, and begin a replacement planning cycle. (Fiscal-1)

State Recommendation 6

The Commission recommends that the state develop a program to fund the acquisition of 150 additional OES fire engines and the requisite logistical support necessary to address California's fire suppression needs. (Fiscal-1)

Training

Multi-Jurisdictional Recommendations

Multi-Jurisdictional Recommendation 1

The Commission recommends that nationwide training agreements be expanded. (Policy-2)

"We believe that we need to train 600-800 entry level firefighters to replace the attrition we face."
— Ron Raley, Deputy Director, Fire and Aviation Management, USFS

Federal Recommendations

Federal Recommendation 1

The Commission recommends that Congress increase efforts to provide training for local fire departments through federal grant programs and expand the Rural Fire Assistance (RFA) grant program. (Fiscal-1)

State Recommendations

State Recommendation 1

The Commission recommends that the state create a multi-layered public education outreach campaign for residents living in WUI areas. (Policy/Fiscal-1)

State Recommendation 2

The Commission recommends that CDF/Office of State Fire Marshal (OSFM) develop and maintain an adequately funded standards, training and education program, similar to the Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST) program to ensure that trained and qualified personnel are prepared to respond. The training plan should support the use of the California Incident Command Certification System (CICCS) and incorporate the Fire Officer Certification process approved by the State Board of Fire Services. (Fiscal-1)

"Unfortunately, training, drills, exercises are one of the first areas the fire service must cut back when budget reductions are forced upon them."
— State Senator Bill Campbell (Ret.)

State Recommendation 3

The Commission recommends that state funds be made available to each Operational Area to support annual WUI fire suppression training exercises that include National Guard and federal military resources. Funding should also be made available by the state to improve the training level of smaller fire departments. (Fiscal-1)

Interstate/Regional Mutual Aid Systems

Multi-jurisdictional Recommendations

"More than 70 agencies participated in the worst wildland fires in California's history, and they did so unselfishly. At its peak, there were more than 15,600 firefighters battling these devastating blazes. They came from all over California, from many of our western states, and even as far away as Canada. These firefighters did not hesitate. They put on their uniforms, got in their trucks and sometimes drove hundreds of miles in order to protect the property of people they had never met." — former Governor Gray Davis

Multi-Jurisdictional Recommendation 1

The Commission recommends that all federal, state and local fire agencies in California review their various assistance for hire agreements for appropriateness and their potential to undermine California's Master Agreement and Master Mutual Aid System. (Policy-1)

Multi-Jurisdictional Recommendation 2

The Commission recommends that FIRESCOPE facilitate federal, state and local fire service agencies working together to reach consensus on the definition of structure protection versus perimeter control, and address the release of mutual aid companies back to their jurisdictions of origin when immediate needs dictate such return. (Policy-1)

Multi-Jurisdictional Recommendation 3

The Commission recommends that forest agencies integrate local incident command team members within their respective incident management teams when local agencies are in unified command on major WUI fires, and that a module relating to interfacing with local Emergency Operations Centers (EOC) be included in USFS Type 1 and 2 team training programs. (Policy-2)

Multi-Jurisdictional Recommendation 4

The Commission recommends that all federal, state and local agencies continuously maintain and update their mutual aid and cooperative agreements to reflect contemporary needs and costs. (Policy-2)

State Recommendations

State Recommendation 1

The Commission recommends that OES and FIRESCOPE incorporate the Emergency Medical Services Authority (EMSA) into the Master Mutual Aid Agreement. (Policy-1)

Local Building, Planning and Land Use Regulations; Brush Clearance and Fuel Modification

Multi-Jurisdictional Recommendations

Multi-Jurisdictional Recommendation 1

The Commission recommends that the Joint Legislative Committee on Emergency Services and Homeland Security convene with appropriate representatives of federal, state and local governments to build upon existing governmental efforts to develop a comprehensive interagency, intergovernmental wildland vegetation management plan for California, and integrate the plan's direction into revised or amended federal, state and local land management, land use plans. (Policy-1)

"We need to look at the laws, regulations and the land use policies that dominate this problem. It's not so much a fire management issue at this point, as it is a public lands policy issue."
— Director Jerry Williams, Office of Fire and Aviation, USFS

Multi-Jurisdictional Recommendation 2

The Commission recommends that in WUI areas, the Statewide Fire Safe Council promotes the establishment of local Fire Safe Councils and encourages federal, state and local governments to assist in this effort. (Policy-1)

"The perfect house that would survive a wildland fire in the Santa Ana wind conditions would be a concrete bunker, but I'm not sure the public is willing to live in a structure of that nature."
— Jim Wright, Deputy Director for Fire Protection, CDF

Multi-Jurisdictional Recommendation 3

The Commission recommends that all federal, state and local agencies and officials give serious consideration to fostering and advancing citizen involvement in the establishment and operation of disaster prevention, recovery and rebuilding groups. Furthermore, the state should develop a disaster recovery model based on the collective input of OES, FEMA, faith-based and community groups, victim advocates and other relevant organizations. (Policy-2)

Multi-Jurisdictional Recommendation 4

The Commission recommends that USDOI, FEMA, USFS, CDF and OES identify ways to assist, including financially, local governments with WUI fire preparation and mitigation efforts. (Fiscal-2)

Federal Recommendations

Federal Recommendation 1

The Commission recommends the Wildland Fire Leadership Council address issues of Wildland Fire Prevention and Control and inconsistencies in the interpretation and implementation of the National Fire Plan, Wildland Fire Policy, Structure Protection, and Cost Apportionment process. (Policy-1)

"There's a certain sense of responsibility that people must assume if they choose to live in a high hazard area."
— Supervisor Judy Mikels, Ventura County

"I am incredibly proud of the work that was done and very appreciative of the communities that were involved in the MAST concept that was used in our mountain areas."
— Supervisor Dennis Hansberger, San Bernardino County

Federal Recommendation 2

The Commission recommends that Congress considers establishing a National Wildland Fire Insurance Program (NWFIP), with appropriate eligibility criteria, under the direction of FEMA. (Fiscal-3)

State Recommendations

State Recommendation 1

The Commission recommends that OSFM continues to conduct fire research, including development of fire test protocols for vents, radiant heat exposure for windows and other applicable areas to improve ignition resistant construction techniques. The research process should include implementation of a comprehensive damage assessment process to collect data on efficiency and effectiveness of mitigation practices. (Policy-1)

State Recommendation 2

The Commission recommends that Mountain Area Safety Taskforce (MAST) type programs be considered as a model for fire safe council efforts in target areas. (Policy-1)

State Recommendation 3

The Commission endorses SB 1855 by Senator Deirdre Alpert. (Policy-1)

Communications Interoperability, Information Technology and Public Outreach

Multi-jurisdictional Recommendations

Multi-Jurisdictional Recommendation 1

The Commission recommends that all EOCs dedicate a Public Information Officer (PIO) or establish a Joint Information Center (JIC) to inform and respond to questions from the media, the public and elected officials. The PIO or JIC should be stationed in or near the EOC and have timely access to the latest information. All available technologies should be explored to expedite the timely dissemination of information. (Policy-1)

"Sometimes the major obstacles, the political turf, are far greater than the technology to overcome the human and institutional limitations, because there are a lot of people very comfortable with what they have. They don't want to change. They don't want to learn a new system. They don't want to adjust."
— Glen Craig, Executive Director, CA Alliance For Public Safety Communications

Federal Recommendations

Federal Recommendation 1

The Commission recommends that sufficient standardized frequencies be issued by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to meet the interoperable communication needs of fire and emergency personnel. (Policy-1)

State Recommendations

State Recommendation 1

The Commission recommends integration of the Multi-Agency Incident Resource Processing System (MIRPS) with the California Fire and Rescue Mutual Aid System. (Policy-1)

"We had no eyes in the sky. It was very frustrating. Questions were asked: Where is this fire? How do we get in? How do we get out? Can we get in? What are we going to do?"
— Chief Ray Quintanar, Director, Fire and Aviation Management, USFS

State Recommendation 2

The Commission recommends that the state implement a research and development working group within FIRESCOPE to explore emerging technologies for firefighting purposes (e.g., military technology, GPS, UAVs, Operational Area Satellite Information System (OASIS)). (Policy/Fiscal-1)

State Recommendation 3

The Commission recommends that each engine crew and chief officer have the capability to communicate effectively across multiple frequency bands. (Policy/Fiscal-1)

"No one should suffer harm or lose their property simply because public safety personnel from different agencies or jurisdictions cannot communicate with each other."
— Curt Munro, Manager, San Diego/ Imperial County Regional Communications System

"During the Cedar Fire, they could not communicate with anyone else other than the San Francisco firefighters because the radio system didn't interface. So when they were on a long dirt road with a lot of houses on it and the fire was coming at them, they had to devise a system that when they blast the air horn four times, that means everybody run for your life. Because they didn't have a radio system, that's how desperate it is."
— Bob Wolf, President, CA Professional Firefighters

"We must not fall prey to bureaucratic foot-dragging or interagency turf battles when confronted with the need for new radio systems."
— Senator Bruce McPherson

State Recommendation 4

The Commission recommends that local governments improve public outreach and emergency evacuation education. (Policy/ Fiscal-1)

State Recommendation 5

The Commission recommends that state agencies take advantage of the work that has been done locally to create regional communication systems and join with the local agencies on a regional basis to enhance those systems. (Policy-2)

State Recommendation 6

The Commission recommends that the state update and expand current handheld and mobile radios to be utilized on major mutual aid incidents as a short-term, temporary solution to the interoperability problem. (Fiscal-1)

State Recommendation 7

The Commission recommends that OES Fire and Rescue Command Networks be expanded. (Fiscal-1)

Local Recommendations

Local Recommendation 1

The Commission recognizes the critical role of timely emergency notification of the public of imminent threats and recommends that local governments prioritize the development of appropriate early warning systems to address the needs of their communities. (Policy-1)