Governing Wildfire Risk Reduction in California: Priorities for a ‘Policy, People and Places’ approach

**POLICY**
Develop a whole-of-government approach to wildfire risk reduction, based on a systemic understanding of underlying risk drivers and cascading impacts exacerbated by climate change.

1.1 **Prioritize spending on mitigation, risk reduction and adaptation.** Every dollar invested in mitigation saves six. Mobilize philanthropy to go beyond silos and commit multi-year direct funding to communities at risk, and still recovering, from recent wildfires.

1.2 **Address the accountability gap.** Create a citizen-led Wildfire Risk Reduction Task Force to regularly review state-funded programs, impacts and outcomes. Create regular opportunities for community-based grantees to provide feedback on policy focus areas, funding priorities and program outcomes.

1.3 **Invest in disaster-resilient infrastructure.** Build smarter - where and how matters. Weatherize building codes to account for increasing smoke impacts. Enforce zoning and building codes. Embed wildfire risk in development costs. Invest in micro-grids.

1.4 **Strengthen local governance to enable community-centered wildfire risk reduction.** Facilitate peer learning and mutual aid networks. Share best practices, including the process of developing Community Wildfire Protection Plans. Enable inclusive community-wide evacuation drills.

**PEOPLE**
Adopt a person-centered approach to public health and well-being, informed by an intersectional understanding of people’s unique experiences, needs and capacities for wildfire risk reduction.

2.1 **Develop diverse capacities.** Create an inclusive workforce for wildfire risk reduction. Train and certify more forestry staff each year. Develop robust indigenous partnerships. Design opportunities for co-learning wildfire risk reduction with people from diverse asylum-seeking, refugee and migrant backgrounds.

2.2 **Prioritize funding for outreach, mitigation and risk reduction work** with people who are generally left out of community mitigation efforts, including people with disabilities, older adults, people who live on low-income, on the streets, and in rural and remote areas.

2.3 **Empower community-based organizations and social services** working to reduce food insecurity, housing instability and racial injustice to understand people’s experiences, needs and capacities for wildfire risk reduction.

2.4 **Integrate wildfire awareness and preparedness in school curriculum** and project-based learning at par with the ‘Drop, Cover and Hold on’ campaign for earthquake safety.

**PLACES**
Implement a place-based approach to wildfire risk reduction, steeped in a historical understanding and informed by a longitudinal monitoring of how habitats are changing across California.

3.1 **Facilitate the implementation of a state-wide prescribed burning program for private forest and landowners.** Enable private forest owners to conduct safe, effective and regular prescribed burns at scale. Learn from indigenous knowledge and develop robust partnerships.

3.2 **Restore forests and watersheds by enabling community-centered stewardship practices and partnerships.** Land use planning must look beyond structural mitigation in the ‘WUI’, to also protect and restore ecosystem services, especially for rural and resource-dependent communities.

3.3 **Provide a framework to enable networks of universities and community-based groups to develop citizen-science initiatives** for the longitudinal monitoring of habitat health, including air, soil and water quality.

3.4 **Expand current outreach initiatives to also include youth-centered stewardship campaigns,** such as, ‘Adopt an acre’ and ‘Good fire’ to concretely outline how youth can care for country and contribute to state conservation and restoration goals by 2030.

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Wonder Labs
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Questions or suggestions? Write to: shefali@lakhina.com