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November 16, 2021

Dear Natural Resources Agency:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the 2021 Draft California Climate Adaptation Strategy. I am making these comments on behalf of the Calaveras Planning Coalition (CPC). The CPC is a group of community organizations and individuals who want a healthy and sustainable future for Calaveras County. We believe that public participation is critical to a successful planning process. United behind eleven land use and development principles, we seek to balance the conservation of local agricultural, natural and historic resources with the need to provide jobs, housing, safety, and services. My name is Tom Infusino. I am a planner and attorney who has served non-profit conservation groups in the Sierra Nevada for thirty years.

Members and staff of the CPC lived through the four-year drought that preceded the 60,000 acre Butte Fire that burned across Amador and Calaveras counties in 2015. We have evacuated from fires along poorly maintained local routes. Because we live on or near rangeland and forest land, we see firsthand the ongoing effects of climate change on the vegetation. Because we live near the rivers and reservoirs that provide water for millions of people, we see firsthand the effects of climate change on water supplies. Because climate change adaptation is so important to us, we thank you for your planning efforts.

**Please follow the general principles listed below to make your strategy more effective in the Sierra Nevada and the Cascades.**

**1) Avoid linking otherwise useful programs with the politically toxic label of climate change adaptation.**

Many individuals will enthusiastically participate in programs to harden their homes and businesses against wildfire, to clear evacuation routes of overhanging vegetation, and to improve defensible space around their homes if you call it a fire safety program. (See Community

Protections, Goal C, Action 1: Defensible Space and Home Hardening, p. 12.) Many farmers and ranchers may accept assistance to improve water use efficiency and reduce costs if it is presented as a program to make agricultural profits more reliable from year to year. (See Resilient Economy, Goal C, Action 1: Agricultural Incentives, p. 30.)

Unfortunately, many people may refuse to participate in such programs if to do so involves them admitting that climate change is happening, is a problem, is caused by human activities, or creates a responsibility for them to act. In the Sierra and the Cascades, please do not cover otherwise attractive programs in a politically charged climate change adaptation wrapper. The forest, watershed, and wildlife resources at stake in these regions are too valuable to sacrifice on the altar of political divisiveness. Only fools fight in a burning house.

## **2) Focus on providing state funds directly to willing individuals to implement climate change adaptation at their home or business.**

To be effective, climate adaptation in California must reach the forests and watersheds of the Sierra Nevada and the Cascades that provide water for the rest of California. These relatively sparsely populated areas will not have or develop new non-profit organizations to successfully compete for grant funds against other parts of the state. They will not be able to qualify for large grants that require service to hundreds of people annually. Political majorities will not be formed to get local governments to seek and administer that money. If the State wants climate adaptation in its most important watersheds, then the State is going to have to make funds directly available to individuals willing to do the work on their own property. (Fortunately, rural conservatives still believe that such individuals have the right to do what they wish with their land.) Please be satisfied that there are individuals in conservative-dominated rural areas who are still willing to do their part.

## **3) Remove barriers to climate adaptation.**

Please do not require individuals in a local community to form a non-profit organization or a new organ of government to participate in climate change adaptation programs (See Protect Communities, Goal C, Action 2: Increase Local Government Capacity, p. 12.) Powerful conservative majorities oppose more government and are hostile to “environmental” non-profits.

Please do not make a local community prepare a plan before they are eligible to receive funds. (See Protect Communities, Goal A, Action 1: Expand Planning Capabilities, p. 7; Public Health, Goal A, Action 1: Local Planning, p. 18.) Powerful conservative majorities oppose government planning. In Calaveras County we have yet to complete the Greenhouse Gas Reduction Plan the Supervisors have been talking about doing since 2008. It took us thirteen years just to complete a general plan. Even that general plan defers action on the ground indefinitely on over 100

implementation measures. If climate change adaptation requires local planning, it will not happen where communities are hostile to government planning.

Please do not require local governments to collaborate with the state before funds become available locally for climate change adaptation. (See Partner and Collaborate, pp. 50-52.) Powerful conservative majorities are not interested in arriving at a consensus on climate change or climate change adaptation. Do not make a community get approval from the City Council, or Board of Supervisors, or other local government before individuals can benefit from state programs. (See Protect Communities, Goal C, Action 5: Protection for the Homeless, p. 13; Public Health Goal C, Action 7: Water Recycling, p. 24.) Powerful conservative majorities prevent such approvals.

Please do not restrict programs to the “socially disadvantaged” unless you are willing to acknowledge that everybody who is trying to do climate adaptation work in the Sierra and the Cascades is “socially disadvantaged.” (See Protect Communities, Goal A, Action 4: Farmer and Rancher Incentives, p. 8.)

#### **4) Set quantified expectations and clear timelines.**

One of the weakest aspects of our local general plan in Calaveras County is that it does not establish quantified objectives to achieve, and it does not specify a timeframe for their achievement. This makes it impossible to properly budget to achieve critical tasks in a timely fashion. As a result, many things get promised, and few things get done.

Your draft plan is similarly flawed. Far too many of the action items in your draft plan include the phrase “**Timeline:** Under review.” (See Protect Communities, Goal C, Action 1: Defensible Space and Home Hardening, p. 12.) In addition, too often the so called “**Success Metric**” only identifies the type of quantity you intend to track (e.g. number of homes, number of acres, number of plans). It does not identify the actual number you aspire to achieve. In some cases, your plan includes neither a timeframe nor a success metric. (See Public Health, Goal B, Action 2: Energy Infrastructure Resilience; p. 21; Resilient Economy Goal B, Action 3: Sierra Nevada Recreation; p. 29; Nature-Based Solutions, Goal B, Action 3: Conserve Agricultural Lands, p. 36.) This suggests that the State does not take climate change adaptation seriously enough to set achievement targets and deadlines. It sounds like this is just another plan that will have lots of lofty goals but will be short on deliverables. In the rural Sierra we are far too familiar with these sorts of plans. More of your plan should have quantified targets and timeframes. (See Nature-Based Solutions, Goal A, Action 2: Prescribed Fire, p. 32.)

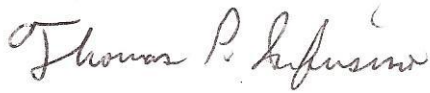
#### **5) Commit resources adequate to this emergency.**

We agree with approach number three on page three of your draft report, “Help all Californians understand and contribute to California’s climate resilience.” Climate change adaptation needs to

reach every corner of California. This is especially true in the forests and watersheds of the Sierra and the Cascades, where invaluable natural resources and precious human lives are at risk. The adaptations need to be made quickly, as the threats are mounting rapidly. Addressing wildfire emergencies, enduring water shortages, and losing fish and game will cost Californians billions of dollars. Please allocate sufficient resources to meet the challenge.

Thank you for considering the **constructive** criticism in these comments. Others will criticize your plan because they do not value your work. We criticize your plan because we want you to improve it so that it will be successful where we live. We are all too aware of the fact that our lives and our livelihoods depend upon that success.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Thomas P. Infusino". The ink is dark and the signature is fluid, with a large loop at the end of the last name.

Thomas P. Infusino, Facilitator

Calaveras Planning Coalition