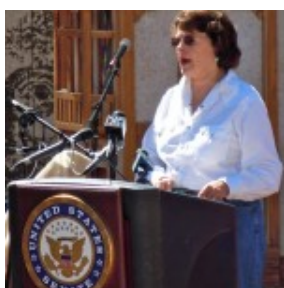# Opinion: Raising alarm about dead trees

By Dianne Feinstein

Next year's fire season will be far more severe if we fail to remove the growing number of dead trees in our forests. California has already experienced how extreme drought conditions and unprecedented tree mortality heighten the strength and severity of wildfires.

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According to the U.S. Forest Service, the mortality rate for trees in California has grown exponentially since the start of the drought.

· In 2014, the number of dead trees throughout the state was 11 million.

· In 2015, that number grew to 40 million.

· In 2016, the number of dead trees is 102 million.

This number is alarming and serves as an urgent call for swift action. The forest cannot naturally handle so many dead trees, which serve only to increase the fire risk. We need to remove these dead trees, particularly in high-hazard areas that pose a high risk to homes, roads and critical infrastructure.

I have requested from the USDA an additional $38 million to fund 19 projects in high-hazard areas identified by the Forest Service and the governor's Tree Mortality Task Force. In response to that request, Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack allocated only $11 million for 10 projects. I will call on Secretary Vilsack to provide the additional $27 million as soon as possible and if necessary will call on the White House to help provide supplemental funding for these vital projects.

The majority of the 102 million dead trees are located in 10 counties in the southern and central Sierra Nevada region. The Forest Service also identified increasing mortality in the northern part of the state, including Siskiyou, Modoc, Plumas and Lassen counties.

Several years of severe drought, a dramatic rise in bark beetle infestation and warmer temperatures are leading to the increasing rate of tree mortality. In 2015, Gov. Jerry Brown declared a state of emergency due to the unprecedented number of dead and dying trees.

Dianne Feinstein is a Democratic senator from California.