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November 10, 2021

The Honorable Anna Eshoo
CA-18th Congressional District
US House of Representatives
272 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

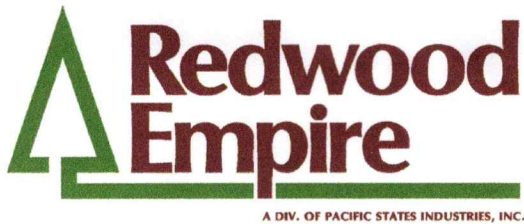
Dear Congresswoman Eshoo,

On the slopes above Gazos Creek in southern San Mateo County, approximately five miles from the Pacific Ocean, a small mountain community lives along Barranca Knolls Road surrounded by redwood forests. Redwood Empire Sawmills has managed forestlands in this community for over 25 years. We rely on a Barranca Knolls Road for access to our managed lands. In cooperation with our neighbors and the San Mateo County Resource Conservation District, considerable efforts have been spent over decades to improve and maintain our roads. The Barranca Knolls community was devastated by the CZU Lightning Complex Fire in August 2020. Of the multiple residences on the hill, only one home survived the fire. The forested landscape of the Gazos Creek Watershed was catastrophically charred.

In January of 2021 Anvil Construction entered the neighborhood to remove debris remaining from the fire. Under normal conditions, the use of heavy trucks and equipment along the Barranca Knolls road systems is restricted to dry conditions. Representatives from Anvil Construction and the California Office of Emergency Services (CALOES) repeatedly stressed that the use of the roads during wet weather was necessary due to the limited timeline allowed under the contract. It was stated by Anvil and CalOES that contractually, the clean-up operations needed to be completed by May of 2021.

In order facilitate Anvil Construction's clean-up efforts, the road was bladed, removing surface rock and drainage structures. A berm, exceeding twelve inches in places, was established along the steeper sections of the road. Segments of road that were outsloped to promote drainage prior to the fire, were insloped, presumably out of safety concerns. Effectively, the road drainage was altered to a condition that no longer functions during wet weather. At the time, multiple promises were made by Anvil and CalOES that the road drainage would be restored, surface rock would be replaced, erosion control devices installed, and the road would be returned to a state resembling before the initiation of clean-up efforts. Such efforts were to follow the California Forest Practice Rules as guiding road use.

Overrunning the projected May deadline, the ensuing clean-up operations continued until October 1st. Upon completion of operations, no significant efforts were conducted to restore the road drainage. Erosion control measures installed in February of 2021 were no longer functional by October. Some surface rock was brought in during operations to assist their heavy trucks, however no rock was brought in after operations to address damage from blading the running surface. No attempt was made to outslope the road or clean out the inlets of buried and plugged ditch relief culverts. Adding to the problem, the berm was left along the outside road edge, preventing functional drainage. The road was not returned to a Forest Practice Rules standard as promised. We were not aware that Anvil considered their operations complete until early October after they had left the area.



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The middle of October brought substantial rains to the Santa Cruz Mountains. While our equipment operators were able to install drainage features and erosion control devices on Redwood Empire managed lands, the condition of the Association's shared road after Anvil's use made installing sufficient drainage features infeasible. We did not have the proper equipment available nor the funds to purchase adequate rock to repair the damage. Had we attempted to pull the berms and outslope the road, there would have been no way to compact the soft native material. Our community is currently left with a poorly draining road with significant potential for sediment delivery into the watershed. Access to parcels is limited during wet weather due to the lack of stable road surface. After the loss of property and damage to the ecosystem resulting from the fire, we are now facing estimates in excess of \$175,000 to repair damage from the clean-up operations conducted by Anvil Construction.

While the broken promises of a private contractor such as Anvil Construction are disappointing, they were not entirely unforeseeable in this circumstance. Such hollow commitments echoing across California's fire-scarred landscapes have become commonplace. The truly unfortunate experience has been the failure of a State Agency such as CalOES to follow through on their promises of oversight and adherence to Best Management Practices. We have been accustomed to taking the State at their word when assurances were made. Such faith has left our community in a precarious place as we progress into winter.

In an ideal world, conscientious contractors would resolve issues such as these without additional government intervention. Our world frequently falls well short of ideal. We are left to accept that neither Anvil, nor CalOES, will be extending any attempts to remediate our concerns. We are requesting that the State or Federal governments provide funding to the San Mateo County RCD to assist with our efforts to repair the damaged road. Our community's close ties with the Resource Conservation District would allow for an efficient allocation of resources to best resolve the issue. While we bristle at the notion of having to request government funds after decades of self-sufficiency, we do so with the understanding that it was Government operations through FEMA and CalOES that have left us in our predicament.

In addition to resolving our specific road issues, it would be beneficial for the State and Federal Government to better understand the supervisory relationship of Cal OES over disaster clean-up projects. While the contractor's operation led to the road damage, it was the lack of ability or willingness by CALOES to effectively supervise the operations that is of significant concern. We sincerely hope that this does not become a pattern of practice for the agency.

Thank you for your consideration of our concerns regarding the post fire debris removal operations in the Barranca Knolls community. We hope that you are able to find a constructive and positive resolution to this problem.

Sincerely,



Michael J. Duffy
Redwood Empire Sawmills