



October 21, 2016

Dr. Lauren Zeise, Acting Director
Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment
P.O. Box 2815
Sacramento, CA 95812-2815

RE: Proposed CalEnviroScreen 3.0

Dear Dr. Zeise:

The Rural County Representatives of California (RCRC) is an association of thirty-five rural California counties. RCRC Board of Directors is comprised of an elected supervisor from each of those member counties. Our member counties are tasked with a variety of decision-making responsibilities related to land use and development in rural California communities and are challenged with environmental stewardship, economic vitality, and social equity at the local level. We appreciate this opportunity to comment on the Proposed California Communities Environmental Health Screening Tool (CalEnviroScreen) 3.0.

The stated intent of CalEnviroScreen is to provide state agencies with a means to prioritize and direct its resources and make policy decisions intended to benefit the most environmentally impacted communities. However, CalEnviroScreen is also being used to determine eligibility for certain grant set-asides, particularly for Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund (GGRF) monies earmarked for “disadvantaged communities” (DACs).

Senate Bill 535 (deLeón, 2012) required the California Environmental Protection Agency to identify a specific list of DACs and required state agencies to allocate 25 percent of the available moneys in the GGRF to projects that provide benefits to DACs, with a minimum of 10 percent of the available moneys in the GGRF to projects located within DACs. Section 39711 of the Health and Safety Code specifically states:

These communities shall be identified based on geographic, socioeconomic, public health, and environmental hazard criteria, and may include, but are not limited to, **either** of the following:

(a) Areas disproportionately affected by environmental pollution and other hazards that can lead to negative public health effects, exposure, or environmental degradation.

(b) Areas with concentrations of people that are of low income, high unemployment, low levels of homeownership, high rent burden, sensitive populations, or low levels of educational attainment.

The statute specifies “either” of the following, not “both” of the following. However, CalEnviroScreen multiplies the pollution burdens by population characteristics, thus basically eliminating areas of the State with good air quality from being defined as disadvantaged communities, no matter what the socioeconomic characteristics represent.

Additionally, CalEnviroScreen also does not consider the short-term carbon emissions from catastrophic wildfires in scoring communities. As you know, California’s forested communities are being plagued by pervasive wildfire due to the drought and the bark beetle. These communities are now facing short-term rampant air pollution year-round including greenhouse gases (GHGs) and criteria pollutants. Wildfires are a significant source of GHG emissions, and studies predict that wildfire emissions will increase by as much as 24 percent over 1961-1990 levels in the next thirty years.¹ The 2013 Rim Fire alone burned 257,000 acres and is estimated to have generated 11.3 million metric tons of greenhouse gas emissions in the span of two months. This is equivalent to the annual emissions from 2.3 million cars.² The California Air Resources Board estimates that wildfires contribute more than half of California’s annual black carbon emissions, a number that will continue to increase as the State’s forests continue to burn.³ Despite such dramatic impacts on GHG emissions, episodic emissions from wildfire still are not considered in CalEnviroScreen.

Using CalEnviroScreen 3.0 as the screening tool for DACs in grant solicitations and awards completely eliminates 30 counties (see attached list) as having any areas qualifying as a DAC including counties such as Lake, Modoc, Plumas, and Lassen. RCRC recommends that if CalEnviroScreen is to be used as the sole definition for DACs in programs such as GGRF funding, the pollution burdens should be kept separate from

¹ Matthew D. Hurteau, Anthony L. Westerling, Christine Wiedinmyer, and Benjamin P. Bryant, “Projected Effects of Climate and Development on California Wildfire Emissions through 2100,” *Environmental Science & Technology* 2014, 48, 2298–2304 DOI: dx.doi.org/10.1021/es4050133

² Sierra Nevada Conservancy. (2014). The Rim Fire: Why investing in forest health equals investing in the health of California [Fact Sheet]. Retrieved from <http://www.sierranevada.ca.gov/factsheets/10.31rimfirefactsheet.pdf>.

³ California Air Resources Board. (2015) Draft Short-Lived Climate Pollutant Reduction Strategy, Appendix A: California SLCP Emissions. Retrieved from <http://www.arb.ca.gov/cc/shortlived/2015appendixa.pdf>.

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the population characteristics, allowing the top scores from either category to be considered a DAC.

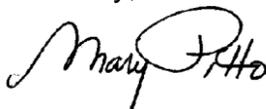
Alternatively, another solution would be to allow other definitions of DACs to qualify, such as the widely-recognized state definition used by many programs, as in Section 75005 of the Public Resources Code which defines a DAC as a community with a median household income less than 80 percent of the statewide average and a “severely disadvantaged community” as a community with a median household income less than 60 percent of the statewide average.

In addition, there should be a mechanism to allow a local jurisdiction to demonstrate how a community, smaller than a census tract, can meet the definition of a disadvantaged community using other measurable and quantifiable options. In rural areas, census tracts are generally larger and often incorporate economically depressed communities with higher income communities, thus eliminating their potential as a DAC. The California Transportation Commission used this approach with their Active Transportation Program Cycle 3 Guidelines, allowing not only CalEnviroScreen, but also the Median Household Income, the National School Lunch Program, or a fourth option that provides small, rural communities the ability to compete as a DAC using other measurable quantitative data.

RCRC asks that you reconsider the method of DAC determination of CalEnviroScreen 3.0 or made it clear that it is not the sole screening tool to be used to define a DAC.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide input into this important process. If you have any questions or wish to have further discussions, please do not hesitate to contact me at (916) 447-4806 or mpitto@rcrcnet.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mary Pitto". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Mary" and the last name "Pitto" clearly legible.

MARY PITTO
Regulatory Affairs Advocate

cc: RCRC Board of Directors

**CALENVIROSCREEN 3.0
LIST OF COUNTIES WITHOUT DACS**

The following 30 counties, many of them members of RCRC, do not have a single census tract identified in the top 25 percent of CalEnviroScreen 3.0:

1. Alpine County
2. Amador County
3. Calaveras County
4. Colusa County
5. Del Norte County
6. El Dorado County
7. Glenn County
8. Humboldt County
9. Inyo County
10. Lake County
11. Lassen County
12. Marin County*
13. Mariposa County
14. Mendocino County
15. Modoc County
16. Mono County
17. Napa County
18. Nevada County
19. Placer County
20. Plumas County
21. San Benito County
22. San Luis Obispo County
23. Santa Barbara County*
24. Shasta County
25. Sierra County
26. Siskiyou County
27. Sonoma County*
28. Tehama County
29. Trinity County
30. Tuolumne County

*Not RCRC County