**Utility Wildfire Mitigation Symposium**

**All BIOS**

**California’s Innovative Model for Proactive Wildfire Investment**

**Assembly Bill 1054 (Holden, 2019)**

Facilitator: Caroline Thomas Jacobs, Director, California Energy Safety

Panelists:

* Ana Matosantos, Public Policy Institute of California, (former) Cabinet Secretary Governor Newsom
* Chris Holden, (former) California Assemblymember District 41 (Pasadena)
* Marybel Batjer, Wildfire Safety Advisory Board and (former) President, California Public Utilities Commission

**Caroline Thomas Jacobs** was appointed by Governor Gavin Newsom in July 2021 as the first Director of the new Office of Energy Infrastructure Safety under the California Natural Resources Agency. The Office was created by the Legislature to address the growing threat of utility-caused wildfires in California. Prior to standing up the new Office, Director Thomas Jacobs held leadership roles at the California Public Utilities Commission and the California Office of Emergency Services where she worked on disaster response and utility-related wildfire issues, including the initial implementation of Public Safety Power Shutoffs by California utilities. Prior to public service, Director Thomas Jacobs worked in the technology sector in Silicon Valley.

**Ana J. Matosantos** is a former cabinet secretary in the Office of Governor Gavin Newsom. Previously, she was a budget and policy consultant, focusing primarily on issues relating to the state budget, education finance, health care, income inequality, and local government. She served as director of the California Department of Finance in both the Brown and Schwarzenegger administrations, helping the state deal with the impact of the Great Recession. She was Governor Brown’s chief fiscal advisor as the state closed a $27 billion shortfall and transitioned from years of recurring budget deficits to multibillion dollar surpluses. She played a key role in the enactment of California’s new school financing and accountability system, the state’s financing and implementation of the Affordable Care Act, and the implementation of corrections realignment. Before joining the California Department of Finance in 2008, she served as deputy legislative secretary for Health and Human Services and Veterans Affairs in the Office of the Governor, working on the administration’s comprehensive health care reform proposal. She was a member of the Health and Human Services Agency staff from 2004 to 2007, serving as assistant secretary for programs and fiscal affairs as well as associate secretary for legislative affairs. Prior to her executive branch service, she worked in the state senate as a consultant to the Senate Committee on Health and Human Services and as the human services consultant of the Senate Committee on Budget and Fiscal Review. In August 2016, she was appointed by President Obama to serve on the seven member Puerto Rico Oversight, Management and Economic Stability Board, charged with working with the government of Puerto Rico to achieve structural budget balance, restructure massive debts and obligations, and rebuild opportunity for the people of Puerto Rico after a decade of economic contraction and population decline. She serves on the Public Policy Institute of California’s board of directors; previously she was a member of PPIC’s Statewide Leadership Council. She holds a bachelor’s degree with a major in political science from Stanford University.

**Chris Holden**, former Assemblymember and current CEO for LA Fire Justice.  During his tenure in the Assembly, he served as chair of the Utilities & Energy Committee and authored Assembly Bill 1054, landmark legislation that established the Office of Energy Infrastructure Safety and a wildfire fund to provide financial stability for the electric utilities and ensure timely compensation for wildfire victims.

**Marybel Batjer** is a partner at California Strategies, LLC, a public policy and advocacy firm. Among her clients are investor-owned utilities, telecommunication companies, and professional services corporations.

In 2019, Marybel was appointed as President of the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC). During her tenure at CPUC, President Batjer led the Commission through landmark clean energy, safety, and consumer protection initiatives by ordering procurement of unprecedented amounts of carbon-free resources. And lead the Commissions expansion of electric vehicle charging infrastructure, improvement of the investor-owned utilities public safety power shutoff (PSPS), as well as advancing broadband deployment, and establishing consumer protections during Covid-19 pandemic.

In 2013, Marybel became the first Secretary of the newly created California Government Operations Agency, covering eleven departments. Secretary Batjer streamlined the IT procurement processes; restructured the Board of Equalization by creating two new state entities and created the Civil Service Improvement project to modernize civil service policies and processes. In addition, she restructured and initiated the modernization of the California Department of Motor Vehicles.

Before heading the Government Operations Agency, Marybel was Vice President for Public Policy and Corporate Social Responsibility at Caesars Entertainment Inc., where she developed and promoted corporate social responsibility policy and initiatives and counseled the senior executive team during a public merger on issues pertaining to reputation management and public policy.

Marybel also served as Cabinet Secretary to Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger from 2003 to 2005, Chief of Staff to Nevada Governor Kenny Guinn from 2000 to 2003 and Undersecretary at the California Business, Transportation and Housing Agency from 1997 to 1998.

Marybel’s successful and collaborative management style has gained her the respect of leaders in both the public and private sectors, where she has served on several boards and commissions, including as the former Vice Chair of the State of Nevada Colorado River Commission. In addition, Marybel has served on the National Judicial College Board of Trustees, and the Board of Directors for the Nevada Museum of Art. Currently she serves on the boards of the Climate and Wildfire Institute, the Guinn Center for Policy Priorities, and the Desert Research Institute Foundation. She has a Bachelor of Arts in Administration Legal Processes from Mills College.

**Emerging Approaches to Address Escalating Costs**

Facilitator: Commissioner Ann Rendahl, Washington Utilities and Transportation Commission

Panelists:

* Tony Marino, Deputy Director, Electrical Infrastructure Directorate, California Energy Safety
* Tom Welsh, CEO, California Earthquake Authority
* Forest Kaser, Deputy Executive Director, Safety & Enforcement Division, California Public Utilities Commission

**Ann Rendahl** was first appointed to serve as a commissioner of the Washington Utilities and Transportation Commission by Gov. Inslee in December 2014 for a six-year term that ended Jan. 1, 2021. Ann has been reappointed and confirmed to a second six-year term ending Jan. 1, 2027.

Ann serves as the First Vice President of the National Association of Regulatory Utility Commissioners, or NARUC, and serves as a member of the Executive Committee and the Board of Directors. Ann is also member of the Committees on Water and Critical Infrastructure and was a prior chair of the Committee on Electricity.

Ann serves as a member of the Southwest Power Pool’s Markets+ States Committee and has served on the Body of State Regulators for the California ISO's Energy Imbalance Market. Ann also serves as a member of the Electric Power Research Institute's Advisory Council, the Advisory Council of the Center for Public Utilities at New Mexico State University, and the Advisory Board of the University of Missouri’s Financial Research Institute.

Prior to being appointed as a commissioner, Ann served as the Director of Policy and Legislation for the UTC. Prior to leading the UTC’s Policy and Legislative Affairs Section, she served as the Director of the Administrative Law Division, as an administrative law judge for the UTC, and as an assistant attorney general representing the UTC.

Ann is a graduate of Wellesley College. She received a Master’s degree in Public Policy from the Goldman School of Public Policy at the University of California, Berkeley, and her law degree from UC Law San Francisco.

**Tony Marino** has served as the deputy Director of the Electrical Infrastructure Directorate since March 2025. Before that he had been executive officer for the Underground Safety Board since it was created through legislation (SB 661) in July 2017. The Underground Safety Board facilitates communication and education to enhance safety among excavators and operators who work in and around subsurface infrastructure.

From 2011 to 2017, Marino served as a legislative aide to California Assemblymember and then State Senator Jerry Hill and consultant for the Senate Subcommittee on Gas, Electric, and Transportation Safety. Marino staffed the development of legislation and organized hearings on excavation safety, power line-initiated wildfires, and regulatory models for improving safety.

From 2010 to 2011, Marino received a science policy fellowship from 2010 to 2011 with the California Council on Science and Technology. In 2010, he was awarded a Christine Mirzayan Fellow with National Academy of Sciences in Washington, D.C.

Tony holds a Ph.D. in chemistry from the University of Chicago and a Bachelor of Arts degree from Davidson College.

**Tom Welsh** joined the California Earthquake Authority in 2019, initially as General Counsel, quickly taking on additional roles as Chief Operating Officer and Chief Legal & Compliance Officer. Tom was appointed Chief Executive Officer in 2024. As CEO, Tom oversees both the operation of California’s largest privately funded residential earthquake insurance business, which protects around one million California homes against the peril of earthquake damage, and CEA’s activities as the appointed Administrator of the California Wildfire Fund. The Wildfire Fund, created in 2019 under AB 1054, ensures California’s three largest investor-owned electric utility companies for liabilities arising from utility-caused wildfires.

Prior to joining CEA, Tom was a partner at Orrick, Herrington & Sutcliffe LLP, an international law firm. His insurance regulatory practice focused on providing compliance advice and solutions to a wide array of clients, including emerging technology companies bringing innovative solutions to the insurance marketplace. He also worked for financial sector clients on public finance transactions, insurance related investments, the insurance components of complex securitization transactions, as well as autonomous vehicle development and regulation. For nearly 30 years, Tom served as the primary outside counsel to the California Insurance Commissioner’s Conservation & Liquidation Office, leading efforts to protect

consumers when California insurance companies are financially impaired or fail.

**Disaster Resilience Across the West**

Facilitator: Caroline Thomas Jacobs, Director, California Energy Safety

Panelists:

* Letha Tawney, Commissioner, Oregon Public Utilities Commission
* Leo Asuncion, Commissioner, Hawaii Public Utilities Commission
* Jon Axtman, Director of Wildfire Mitigation & T&D Engineering, Idaho Power

**Caroline Thomas Jacobs** was appointed by Governor Gavin Newsom in July 2021 as the first Director of the new Office of Energy Infrastructure Safety under the California Natural Resources Agency. The Office was created by the Legislature to address the growing threat of utility-caused wildfires in California. Prior to standing up the new Office, Director Thomas Jacobs held leadership roles at the California Public Utilities Commission and the California Office of Emergency Services where she worked on disaster response and utility-related wildfire issues, including the initial implementation of Public Safety Power Shutoffs by California utilities. Prior to public service, Director Thomas Jacobs worked in the technology sector in Silicon Valley.

**Letha Tawney** was appointed to the Oregon Public Utility Commission by Governor Kate Brown in June 2018. Commissioner Tawney represents Oregon on the Electricity and the Critical Infrastructure committees for the National Association of Regulatory Utility Commissioners (NARUC). She also serves on Western Energy Market Board of State Regulators (WEM-BOSR), engaging closely on Western electricity market development in several forums. Prior to her appointment, Commissioner Tawney was World Resources Institute Polsky Chair for Renewable Energy, working on a range of utility business model issues. Commissioner Tawney holds a Master of Public Administration from the Harvard Kennedy School.

**Leo R. Asuncion, Jr.** was appointed to the Hawaii Public Utilities Commission in April 2019 and currently serves as its Chair since July 1, 2022. His current term ends on June 30, 2026.

Prior to his appointment to the HPUC, Commissioner Asuncion was a Planning Program Administrator II at the Office of Planning, Department of Business, Economic Development and Tourism, and from 2013 to 2018 served as Director of the Office. As Director, he was responsible for the overall management, development, and implementation of state policy, and coordination and planning support to state and county agencies. He also served as Planning Program Manager of the Hawaii Coastal Zone Management Program from 2011 to 2013.

Commissioner Asuncion has over 30 years of extensive experience in planning, policy analysis, and management throughout Hawaii and the Pacific Region, in both the public and private sectors, through previous positions with Hawaiian Electric Company, Inc., SSFM International, Inc. the Hawaii State Judiciary, and the State Land Use Commission. He has also chaired or been a member of several governmental boards, commissions, task forces and councils during his professional career, currently serving on the NARUC Board of Directors and the American Flood Coalition’s Executive Advisory Board and recently serving as President of the American Planning Association, and Chair of the Coastal States Organization.

Commissioner Asuncion holds a Master’s in Business Administration from Hawaii Pacific University, and a Master’s in Urban and Regional Planning and Bachelor of Arts in Political Science degrees from the University of Hawaii at Manoa.

**Jon Axtman** is the Director of Wildfire Mitigation and Transmission and Distribution Engineering with Idaho Power Company in Boise, Idaho. His responsibilities include management and oversight of a variety of engineering, maintenance, and design departments as well as the company’s Wildfire Mitigation program. Wildfire Mitigation has become a critical part of Idaho Power’s operations and Jon is passionate about implementing new practices and technology to decrease wildfire risk. He has been with Idaho Power for 19 years and has held positions in Power Quality and Methods and Materials departments. He received a Bachelor of Science degree in Electrical Engineering from Boise State University and is a licensed professional engineer in the state of Idaho. He is also a veteran of the United States Air Force.

**California Led Wildfire Mitigation and Forest Resilience Initiatives**

Facilitator: Kimberly Carr, Senior Policy Advisor, Energy Safety

Panelists:

* John Morgan, Staff Chief, CAL FIRE Wildfire Risk Reduction
* Lisa Lien-Majer, Deputy Director of Forest & Wildfire Resilience*,* California Natural Resources Agency
* Nick Wobbrock, Co-Founder, Blue Forest

**Kimberly Carr** joined Energy Safety in the fall of 2024 as the Senior Policy Advisor. She has 30 years of experience in program and policy development and project management, focusing on natural resource planning, forestry and wildfire prevention, workforce development, and local economic development. She has held several management positions with the State of California – CALFIRE, Sierra Nevada Conservancy, and California Tahoe Conservancy, served as California Director for the National Forest Foundation, and worked with private consulting firms, non-profit organizations, and as an independent consultant.

**John Morgan** is the Staff Chief of Wildfire Risk Reduction within the Office of the State Fire Marshal. His experience and education as a firefighter with CAL FIRE gives him a unique perspective and ample insight into the issues we face in the wildland today. Chief Morgan specializes in defensible space, home hardening, utility wildfire mitigation, and post-fire damage inspection.

**Lisa Lien-Mager** serves as Deputy Secretary for Forest and Wildfire Resilience, leading the Agency’s initiatives to improve the health of California’s forests and landscapes while building resilience to wildfire. She also serves as the Agency’s lead in implementing California’s Wildfire and Forest Resilience Action Plan and aligning policies, programs and investments to help achieve the Action Plan’s goals. Prior to being appointed to the role in September 2023, Lisa served in key communications role at the Agency from 2017 to 2023. Before joining the Agency, Lisa served as Director of Communications for the Association of California Water Agencies.

**Nick Wobbrock** is the co-founder and Chief Conservation Officer of Blue Forest. He started his career in water resources engineering, serving as a US Peace Corps volunteer in Honduras, and as a consultant at Brown and Caldwell in Portland, OR working for utilities on drinking water and wastewater projects. In 2015 he co-founded Blue Forest, a 501c3 nonprofit organization, to extend public infrastructure finance to reduce catastrophic wildfire, protect watershed health, and support community and climate resilience. The result was Blue Forest’s flagship financial project, the Forest Resilience Bond, which advances low-interest debt to landscape-scale restoration projects. Through the resilience Bond, projects can be larger, and contractors can be paid promptly. Blue Forest has seven active projects with more in the pipeline across California, Oregon, and Washington. Nick is a licensed civil engineer and attended Cornell, Stanford, and UC Berkeley. He is eager to speak with you about ecosystem services, project finance, and how a business case can be made that results in investible natural infrastructure projects.

**Wildfire Investments & the Modern Grid**

Facilitator: Darcie Houck*,* Commissioner, California Public Utilities Commission

Panelists:

* Larry Bekkedahl, Senior Vice President of Advanced Energy, Portland General Electric
* Curt Mansfield, Senior Vice President of Power Delivery, PacifiCorp
* Sumeet Singh, COO, Pacific Gas & Electric

**Commissioner Darcie L. Houck** was appointed to the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) by Governor Gavin Newsom on Feb. 9, 2021. She formerly served as Chief Counsel for the California Energy Commission since 2019.

Commissioner Houck was an Administrative Law Judge at the CPUC from 2016 to 2019, a Partner at Fredericks Peebles & Morgan from 2005 to 2016, and Staff Counsel and Policy Advisor at the California Energy Commission from 2000 to 2005.

Commissioner Houck is an expert in nuclear decommissioning, environmental equity, and safety policy. She has an extensive background representing Native American tribes throughout the country on matters involving energy, natural resources, land claims, and water rights, among others.

Commissioner Houck is a member of the California Indian Law Association, California Lawyers Association, Schwartz-Levi Inn of Court, Women Lead and the Association of Women in Water, Energy, and Environment. She earned a law degree from the University of California, where she also earned a Master of Science in community development.

**Larry Bekkedahl** is responsible for advancing PGE’s strategy to build the grid of the future — one that is resilient, smart, and delivers a clean energy future.

He oversees PGE’s strategic system architecture and system upgrades, which will serve as the foundation for the smart grid of the future. This includes initiatives related to system integration and operations, smart cities, enabling distributed energy resources, energy storage, dispatchable standby generation, transmission system performance and development, market interfaces, as well as innovation, and

R & D.

Bekkedahl joined PGE in 2014 as vice president of Transmission & Distribution. He has more than four decades of leadership experience in the energy industry. Before joining PGE, he was senior vice president for transmission services at the Bonneville Power Administration and held leadership positions at Clark Public Utilities, PacifiCorp, and Montana Power Company.

He has a Bachelor of Science degree in electrical engineering from Montana State University and serves on the Electric Power Research Institute (EPRI) Research Advisory Committee, the Stanford University Bits and Watts Advisory Council, the Department of Energy Electricity Advisory Committee, GridWise Alliance Board, Pacific Northwest National Labs Advisory Board, and the All Hands Raised Educational Council.

**Curt Mansfield** is Senior Vice President, Power Delivery at PacifiCorp. He oversees operations, maintenance, construction, engineering, asset management and support organizations for Rocky Mountain Power and Pacific Power operating divisions with PacifiCorp, which serves approximately 2 million customers in Utah, Wyoming, southeastern Idaho, Oregon, northern California and Washington. He has held this position since May 2021.

Mansfield has over 40 years of experience in the electric utility business. He has held a variety of craft, line, staff, supervisory and senior leadership positions. Mansfield began his career in 1981 with Utah Power & Light, which later merged with PacifiCorp in 1989 and is currently a holding company under Berkshire Hathaway Energy.

He currently serves on the board of directors of NeighborWorks-Salt Lake City and previously was on the board of directors of Utah Clean Cities Coalition and a member of the Utah governor’s Alternative Transportation & Fuels Advisory Group. He is a graduate of the University of Idaho’s Utility Executive Course and currently is a trustee of the IBEW Western Utilities Health & Welfare Trust Fund.

**Sumeet Singh** is the Executive Vice President, Operations and Chief Operating Officer (COO) of Pacific Gas and Electric Company. He is responsible for the Utility’s operations, including Electric, Gas, Generation, Wildfire, Emergency & Operations, Vegetation Management and Workforce and Public Safety. As COO, Sumeet led the Operations team in reducing the risk associated with PG&E-caused wildfires and delivering the company’s second full year without major wildfires. Prior to being the COO, Singh held various leadership roles within PG&E, including Senior Vice President, Chief Risk Officer, and Vice President, Asset Management and Community Wildfire Safety Program.

**Climate and Wildfire Risk Modeling**

Facilitator: Mark Wenzel, Program and Project Supervisor, California Wildfire Safety Advisory Board

Panelists:

* Sandeep Aujla, Director, Fire Science and Climate Adaptation, San Diego Gas & Electric
* Jessica Block, Chair, California Wildfire Safety Advisory Board and UC San Diego FireLab
* Dave Sapsis, Research Manager, CALFIRE Fire & Resource Assessment Program

**Mark Wenzel** is a Supervisor of the Wildfire Safety Advisory Board (WSAB) Branch in the Office of Energy Infrastructure Safety, where he leads staff support for WSAB. Prior to joining Energy Safety, Mark led the State’s investments in light-duty electric vehicle charging and analytical work on infrastructure at the California Energy Commission. He has worked on a variety of climate policy issues at the California Environmental Protection Agency, for the California Air Resources Board’s Office of Climate Change, and as an American Geophysical Union/American Association for the Advancement of Science Congressional Science Fellow. Mark earned a PhD in Earth and Planetary Science from the University of California, Berkeley in 2006.

**Sandeep Aujla** is Director of fire science and climate adaptation, at San Diego Gas & Electric (SDG&E). She joined SDG&E’s Parent Company, Sempra Energy in 2013 as a Senior Strategist and prior to her current role where she leads fire coordination, meteorology, and climate adaptation teams, she led the development of SDG&E’s sustainability strategy and sustainable financing framework.

In addition to the Energy sector where Sandeep has spent over a decade, she has experience in Technology, Telecom and Financial Services sectors, focusing on matters related to long-term portfolio strategy, cost optimization, organizational design, and strategic planning.

Her formal training is in Finance and Economics. Sandeep is an active CFA charter holder and serves as the Strategic Planning Advisor on the Board of San Diego Canyonlands.

**Jessica Block** is the Associate Director for the WIFIRE Lab at the San Diego Supercomputer Center at UCSD. Her work aims to mitigate natural disasters using emerging technologies including simulations, satellites, sensor networks, machine learning tools, and virtual reality, with the goal of enabling scalable and adaptable predictive wildfire tools for the fire response community.  She oversees the wildfire modeling team for the Cal OES FIRIS program. Her work in fire response began in Australia with the University of Melbourne and the University of Ballarat, from 2008 to 2010.

In October of 2019, she was appointed by Governor Newsom to the California Wildfire Safety Advisory Board, and became Chair in 2022. She holds a bachelor's degree from UCLA and a master's degree from ASU in Geology with a focus in sustainability and urban ecology.

**Dave Sapsis** is the Research Manager at CAL FIRE's Fire and Resource Assessment Program (FRAP) where he has worked for 30 years. Dave's work has focused on characterizing fire hazard and fire impacts and designing strategies to support risk mitigation policies promoting ecosystem resilience and community protection. Notable for the context of this symposium, Dave led a team of scientists who developed a Utility Fire Threat Model for the Cal CPUC under its rulemaking authority. Dave holds an BS degree in Forestry, an MS in Fire Ecology, and is a PhD Candidate in Fire Science at UC Berkeley.

**Wildfire Risk, Insurance, and Other Sources of Funding**

Facilitator: Letha Tawney, Commissioner, Oregon Public Utilities Commission

Panelists:

* Michael Wara, Director, Climate & Energy Policy Program, Woods Institute for Environment, Stanford University
* Deborah Halberstadt, Special Advisor on Biodiversity and Inclusive Insurance, California Department of Insurance
* Nancy Watkins*,* Principal, Milliman Inc.

**Letha Tawney** was appointed to the Oregon Public Utility Commission by Governor Kate Brown in June 2018. Commissioner Tawney represents Oregon on the Electricity and the Critical Infrastructure committees for the National Association of Regulatory Utility Commissioners (NARUC). She also serves on Western Energy Market Board of State Regulators (WEM-BOSR), engaging closely on Western electricity market development in several forums. Prior to her appointment, Commissioner Tawney was World Resources Institute Polsky Chair for Renewable Energy, working on a range of utility business model issues. Commissioner Tawney holds a Master of Public Administration from the Harvard Kennedy School.

**Nancy Watkins** is a principal and consulting actuary with Milliman in San Francisco. At the forefront of innovation in catastrophic risk, Nancy and her team serve insurers, trade groups, regulators, community/government entities and NGOs. Currently she is supporting the CA Department of Insurance for the implementation of its Sustainable Insurance Strategy.

Widely known as a thought leader in property insurance availability and affordability, Nancy leads the global Milliman Climate Resilience Initiative and serves on the Insurance for Good - Private Market Insights Advisory Group. She has served on the California Office of the State Fire Marshal Risk Modeling Advisory Workgroup and the U.S. Treasury Financial Stability Oversight Council’s Climate-related Financial Risk Advisory Committee.