

Plumas County Board of Supervisors

520 Main Street

Quincy California

Honorable Supervisors:

We are asking for your support and direction to enhance improvements and expansions at our airports, including an extension of the runway at Nervino Airport in Beckwourth, an extension that will allow for larger fixed-wing aircraft for initial attack on fire starts throughout the eastern portion of the county as well as starts in southern Lassen and eastern Sierra counties.

Plumas County needs a much stronger first response to the devastating mega-fires that have destroyed or damaged much of our wildlands and altered forever some of our most viable communities. In order to keep from repeating the horrific destruction, a system of air attack capability must be established or fortified within our county at Rogers Field in Chester and Nervino Airport in Beckwourth. Immediate response to fire starts in our current extreme drought conditions is a major part of the answer to giving ground crews and other resources time to follow and have hopes of keeping fire starts from becoming devastating, life-changing conflagrations.

When the 2018 Camp Fire started in Plumas County and pushed westward at astonishing speed, burning to the ground much of Paradise in Butte County and becoming the worst wildfire disaster in California history, we were shocked, but viewed it as an anomaly; a bitter confluence of drought weather, unusually high winds, and inaccessible terrain. Then, in 2020, the Claremont Fire threatened Quincy and the surrounding communities, followed by the Bear fire which burned through even more hundreds of thousands of acres and communities on our western slope and into Butte County. More anomalies?

Last year, very near the origin of the Camp Fire, the Dixie Fire found a toehold in a steep canyon and began a northeastward march that would not stop for months, burning down whole communities of Greenville and Canyon Dam and running unabated into neighboring counties. Anomalies no more: this is a draught-progressive pattern that may plague our mountains and foothills for years to come.

We have to build a response system that can put an aerial attack over these fires while they are small enough to combat. That response system should include in-county air readiness at Rogers Field in Chester and Nervino Airport in Beckwourth. Rogers Field can support most older air tankers except larger jets. Nervino Airport can support smaller initial attack tankers, and with an expansion of its runway, and expansion of the U.S. Forest facility located there,

could equal Rogers. Each community must continue and accelerate its commitment to home hardening, defensible space construction, and fuels reduction.

The forest service, CalFire, and all public agencies and utilities must continue and accelerate their efforts in fuels reduction centered on the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI). What we've witnessed is that, in these extreme drought conditions, prescribed burning as a fuels reduction tool is becoming more and more challenged by seasonal changes, with less snowpack and extended summers now reaching deep into November. Over the past three years, we've lost viable communities to these conditions. It will take a tremendous effort and a multitude of methods to keep us from losing more.

In addition to improving our readiness to attack forest fires, extending the length of Nervino Airport runway will allow more aviators with larger aircraft to visit our county, and hopefully add to our economy through tourism and eventual occupancy.

### **Suggestions**

- Add to the Plumas County Airport Land Use Commission an agenda item to address improvements to Rogers Field and extending the runway at Nervino Airport
- Attend Plumas Fire Safe Council meeting to align intent and missions of the Board with those of the Council.
- Encourage county supervisors and Portola City Council to seek additional funding for fuels reduction equipment and manpower on private and county/city land.

For the reasons stated above, we urge you, our county supervisors to address immediately the urgency for improvements to our airfields and a cohesive collective effort between public agencies, Plumas County Fire Safe Council, and your general public.

Thank you for your attention to this urgent matter.

Sincerely,

John Williamson, Beckwourth (former Plumas NF Helitac crew foreman)

Bill Powers, Portola (former Plumas NF wildland firefighter and R5 Office of Information)

and those named on the attendant signatories and letters of support

## Signature Page