TERRA LAWSON-REMER

VICE-CHAIR

SUPERVISOR, THIRD DISTRICT
SAN DIEGO COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

AGENDA ITEM

DATE: **April 22, 2025** **13**

TO: Board of Supervisors

SUBJECT
CLIMATE CHANGE IS REAL AND SAN DIEGO IS FIGHTING BACK (DISTRICTS: ALL)

OVERVIEW
We all saw what happened in Los Angeles. The climate crisis intensified high winds and prolonged drought into an apocalyptic firestorm that leveled neighborhoods and overwhelmed emergency response. Just a year earlier, San Diego was slammed by the most extreme January rainfall since 1850, triggering a "once in a thousand years" flood that displaced 1,200 people and damaged thousands of homes.

The climate crisis isn't a far-off threat. It's here, it's happening, and San Diegans are paying the price. We're seeing catastrophic floods, deadly heat waves, collapsing infrastructure, and skyrocketing insurance premiums. And the costs don't stop when the headlines fade. Rising seas erode our bluffs, destabilize our coastal ecosystems, strain our power grid, degrade our air and water quality, and accelerate risks for dangerous pathogenic diseases.

At the exact moment we need stronger science and smarter planning, federal leaders are dismantling the very protections we rely on to stay safe, gutting climate science, slashing clean energy funding, and giving polluters a free pass. We must fight back, to protect our homes, our health, and the future of our communities.

The science is clear: 99.9% of peer-reviewed climate research confirms that human-caused climate change is accelerating. The past ten years have been the hottest on record. In 2024, the United States experienced 27 climate disasters that cost at least $1 billion, up from just three such disasters in 1980. Meanwhile, insurance companies are increasingly raising premiums to unaffordable levels to cover these risks and are pulling out of fire-prone and flood-prone areas completely.

San Diego's greatest asset is our natural environment, from beaches and coastlines, mountains, deserts, chaparral, and open spaces that define our quality of life. Our economy depends on it too, with tourism, fishing, agriculture, outdoor recreation all relying on a healthy environment. But the

current administration's slash-and-burn policies are selling out San Diego's health, safety, and future, all to protect the profits of big polluters.

Led by Elon Musk's Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE), the federal government is dismantling San Diego's climate safety infrastructure. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), the agency we rely on for flood forecasts, coastal alerts, and disaster response, is being gutted. Nearly 25% of NOAA's workforce has been fired or forced out. Critical weather labs and cloud data systems have gone dark. Ocean buoys that help us manage fisheries, monitor oil spills, and navigate the coast safely are being neglected or shut down. And research that protects our region — like mapping deep ocean dumpsites off the Southern California coast, which contain thousands of pounds of hazardous pesticides, munitions, and industrial waste — is in jeopardy

The EPA is being decimated too. The administration's budget would slash 65% of the agency's funding and eliminate programs that keep our air, water, and soil safe. Staff working on cleaning up "Superfund" hazardous waste sites are being laid off, jeopardizing remediation at places like Camp Pendleton, and leaving the Tijuana River Valley more vulnerable to environmental collapse. The EPA also announced plans to eliminate all offices focused on tackling elevated pollution in low income and minority neighborhoods, threatening progress in Barrio Logan and other frontline communities with a long history of toxic exposure. Last month, the EPA revoked a $1 million grant with the San Diego County Air Pollution Control District for air quality monitors, gutting efforts to track pollution and protect public health where it's needed most.

These attacks on environmental science will mean more asthma, more cancer, more chemical dumping, and fewer tools to stop it. At the very moment we need stronger protections, polluters will get a free pass, and San Diegans are being left to pay the price. **And the costs are staggering: experts estimate these rollbacks will result in an additional 8,000 premature deaths a year and 10,000 asthma attacks every single day, costing the public $25 billion annually in hospital bills and missed work and school days**.

Meanwhile, our clean energy economy, one of San Diego's fastest-growing sectors, is being threatened. San Diego's cleantech community has already lost $50 million in federal grants funding to scale clean energy technologies. If we let polluters win, San Diego will lose thousands of local jobs, billions in economic output, and the momentum we've built towards energy independence.

We cannot let that happen. Today's item calls on the County to speak out with moral clarity, to reaffirm that climate change is real, and that protecting our environment is not optional, it is essential. It calls on the County to join the "America is All in" coalition, a nationwide alliance of local government and private institutions driving to meet the goals identified in the Paris Climate Agreement, halving US emissions by 2030 and reaching net zero emissions by 2050, while guarding against the impacts of climate disruption. And we're sending a clear message to federal leaders: San Diego will not stay silent while climate science is being dismantled, and our region is put at risk. I urge my colleagues to join me in standing up for science, for clean air and water, and for the future of our region.

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RECOMMENDATION(S)
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1. Direct the Chief Administrative Officer to amend the County's 2025 Legislative Program to include advocacy for sustained or increased federal funding for NOAA and EPA programs critical to San Diego's public safety and climate resilience, and opposition to efforts to dismantle federal environmental science and regulatory infrastructure.
2. Direct the Chief Administrative Officer to take bold local action to affirm our commitment to addressing the climate crisis by joining the "America is All In" coalition and return to the Board with a strategic assessment of the best ways to utilize America is All In to advance the County's environmental and climate priorities within 90 days.
3. Direct the Chief Administrative Officer to send a climate and environmental action advocacy letter to federal leadership, including the Special Government Employee for DOGE Elon Musk, the NOAA Administrator, the EPA Administrator, and ranking members of relevant Congressional committees. The letter should document the full range of negative impacts of the current administration's environmental and climate policies on San Diego and advocate for robust corrective action.

EQUITY IMPACT STATEMENT
The burdens of climate change, pollution, and toxins fall on all of us but disproportionately impact those least able to bear them. Not only are environmental health hazards concentrated in low income and minority communities, but, as we saw in Hurricane Katrina, those communities struggle to evacuate during natural disasters. Many low income and minority people lack the means to rebuild after a disaster and end up permanently displaced. Today's action will speak out against the disproportionate harms enabled by the destruction of environmental science and regulation.

SUSTAINABILITY IMPACT STATEMENT
Robust support for climate action and environmental protection is essential to achieving the County's sustainability goals. Today's action supports those goals by documenting the climate and environmental challenges facing the County due to changes in federal policy and taking proactive steps to address them.

FISCAL IMPACT
There is no fiscal impact associated with today's recommendations. There will be no change in net General Fund cost and limited additional staff time.

BUSINESS IMPACT STATEMENT
San Diego businesses already struggle with environmental disasters and disruptions and the increased costs they entail. They realize these costs in terms of lost business, property damage, higher insurance premiums for property and health, worker sick days and more. Businesses that rely on our oceans and beaches such as tourism and fishing face long term threats from sea level rise, coastal ecosystem destabilization and heat, not to mention the increased risk of chemical dumping and oil spills. San Diego agriculture faces threats from heat and drought. San Diego's outdoor sports and entertainment industries rely on good air quality and moderate temperatures. San Diego cleantech faces the shrinking of market opportunities. Today's action warns about the

impacts of these harms to San Diego's business community and reaffirms out commitment to continue addressing them going forward.

ADVISORY BOARD STATEMENT
N/A

BACKGROUND
Right now, federal leaders are dismantling climate change research, mitigation and resilience efforts, leaving San Diego exposed and vulnerable in the face of disaster. Their actions disregard the preponderance of scientific evidence and recent local experience. A scientific literature review found that 99.9% of peer-reviewed English-language climate-related papers agreed that climate change caused by carbon-intensive human activities ("anthropogenic climate change") is occurring. Dozens of leading scientific associations around the world have issued corroborating public statements. Last year was the hottest in Earth's recorded history, easily surpassing the previous record set the year prior. The last ten years have been the hottest in 200 years of recordkeeping. The Earth is now over 1.5° Celsius warmer than its average in the 1850-1900 period, an internationally-recognized tipping point for catastrophic biosphere destabilization. The most salient manifestation of climate change is larger and more frequent natural disasters, with escalating costs in terms of life, property, and disruption. In 2024, the United States experienced 27 natural disasters that each cost at least $1 billion, compared to just three billion-dollar events in 1980, adjusted for inflation. The annual average for billion-dollar events between 1980–2024 was nine, but the last five years averaged 23 billion-dollar events. Ask the property insurance industry about the economic costs of climate change and they'll point to their bottom line—insurance companies lost money on home insurance coverage in 18 states in 2023, up from 12 states five years prior, and eight states in 2013.

Anthropogenic climate change is here and harming San Diegans now. We all witnessed what just happened in Los Angeles. Climate change increased the risk of extreme conditions—high winds in the context of prolonged drought—that led to an apocalyptic conflagration. Almost exactly one year prior, San Diego experienced the wettest January since 1850, culminating in an "unprecedented" "once in a thousand years" flood that displaced 1,200 people and damaged thousands of homes. Climate change costs San Diegans not only when disaster strikes but also in the form of higher home insurance premiums, costly taxpayer-funded recovery efforts, and the long-run cumulative costs of heat exposure, erosion and bluff collapse due to rising sea levels, destabilization of our coastal ecosystems, challenges to agricultural production, poor air and water quality after disasters (including disasters many hundreds of miles away), and heightened risk of epidemics as climate change creates conditions conducive to vector-borne and pathogenic disease and forces displaced species into novel cohabitation.

San Diego relies on responsible environmental stewardship to preserve our rich and vibrant natural environment. Our natural environment is the great asset of our region and provides the quality of life that makes San Diego such a desirable place to live. Our coastlines offer some of the best recreational areas and most sought-after real estate in the country. Regionally-significant industries such as tourism, fishing, agriculture, outdoor sports/entertainment depend on a healthy natural environment to make a living. The current administration's slash-and-burn environmental policies not only expose San Diegans' lives and property to increasing risks of climate disasters but

sacrifices San Diego's health, safety, and quality of life to the business interests of carbon-intensive, environmentally-destructive industries headquartered in other states.

Led by Elon Musk's Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE), the current administration is decimating San Diego's environmental monitoring, prediction, and early warning capabilities by going after the workforce and contracts of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). Since taking office, the current administration eliminated nearly 25% of the jobs at NOAA through firings, early retirements, and the termination of over a thousand new employees. The current administration's 2026 budget proposal seeks to cut $1.33 billion from NOAA overall, including a $500 million cut to research efforts through eliminating all funding for climate, weather, and ocean laboratories and cooperative institutes as well as academic climate research grants.

San Diego's residents and first responders rely on NOAA's weather forecasts and early warning systems for disaster preparedness and emergency response, including around floods, hurricanes, and tsunamis. NOAA's network of weather balloons and satellites helps planes carrying travelers to and from our airports navigate the skies safely. NOAA's ocean monitoring and deep-water buoys help San Diego with maritime navigation, fishery management, and tracking chemical dumping and oil spills and their effects on local ecosystems. Key NOAA data portals that feed into the National Integrated Drought Information System and other weather observational data and forecasting websites have gone dark due to non-payment for cloud services. By degrading San Diego's access to robust, accurate and timely information and communication about our oceans and atmosphere, the dismantling of NOAA puts San Diego at risk.

NOAA participates in and funds a number of important research initiatives in partnership with local institutions. NOAA is a key partner with the California Cooperative Oceanic Fisheries Investigation (CalCOFI), an oceanographic and marine ecosystem monitoring and research program established in 1949 which surveys the marine environment off the coast of California to support sustainable marine resource management. The productivity and health of our seafood and seafood products depend upon timely information provided by CalCOFI and the NOAA Fisheries Laboratory hosted on UC San Diego campus. Three NOAA employees slated to participate in the quarterly CalCOFI cruise were abruptly fired without cause, jeopardizing the cruise. NOAA also granted the Scripps Oceanography Institute nearly $12 million to assess the extent and scope of contaminant impacts and mitigation strategies for deep ocean dumpsites off the Southern California coast which contain thousands of pounds of hazardous pesticides, munitions, and industrial waste.

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is undergoing a similar demolition of research and regulatory capabilities that San Diego relies upon. The EPA oversees air and water quality, Superfund site cleanups, and many other programs that safeguard our environment and health. EPA Administrator Lee Zeldin intends to eliminate 65% of the EPA's budget and fire over a thousand chemists, biologists, toxicologists, physicians, hydrologists, ecologists, and plant and soil scientists who study the risks and impacts of various pollutants and chemicals, including carbon. Camp Pendleton is undergoing EPA superfund site remediation and relies on EPA funding and staff to address the environmental health risks to people on the base and in surrounding areas. In addition, the EPA announced plans to eliminate all offices responsible for tackling elevated

environmental hazard levels in low income and minority neighborhoods which contribute to health inequities in asthma rates, heart disease and other serious conditions. The closure of these offices will undermine our efforts to address the environmental health crisis in the Tijuana River Valley and tackle Barrio Logan's exposure to environmental hazards due to rising sea levels in an area with a history of toxic pollution.

San Diego's Environmental Health Coalition (EHC) and the San Diego Community Foundation partnered with the EPA to do just that. The EPA awarded the coalition $22 million to undertake a number of projects around Bario Logan and south county. Projects included a zero-emission bus line through the historic barrio district, a program for helping low-income homeowners improve the health and climate resilience of their homes, and the Via Verde free electric shuttle system and charging infrastructure. The status of these programs has been put in question. And last year, the San Diego County Air Pollution Control District (SDAPCD) won a $1 million grant to lead a new regional collaboration aimed at improving air quality in communities most impacted by air pollution throughout San Diego County. The EPA terminated SDAPCD's grant in March jeopardizing the deployment of air quality resources, such as educational materials, air purifiers, and sensor-based air quality monitors in the community, as well as community engagement efforts. However, San Diego remains committed to environmental justice and, with sustained state and local support, continue to improve the air quality, tree canopy, and public transit stops in south county, install solar and EV charging stations at the Chicano Park Museum, and undertake many other projects that build healthy environments for all San Diegans.

In addition to eliminating dedicated efforts to address environmental injustice, EPA Administrator Zeldin plans to rescind a wide swath of environmental protections to give irresponsible actors more latitude to foul our environment. The regulations targeted for repeal include limits on tailpipe and smokestack pollution, protection of wetlands, and restrictions on mercury and carbon dioxide emissions from power plants. Cuts and environmental deregulation will increase air and water pollution; exposure to carcinogens and toxins; chemical dumping, oil spills, and greenhouse gases; and delay the identification and mitigation of hazards. The Environmental Protection Network estimates the cumulative damage to environmental health over the next 25 years will include an additional 8,000 premature deaths annually and 10,000 additional asthma attacks each day at a total cost to the public of nearly $25 billion a year in terms of hospital and health care bills, missed school and work days, worsened quality of life, and premature deaths.

The current administration's attack on climate science and environmental regulation helps carbon-intensive, environmentally-destructive industries headquartered in other states at the expense of the vibrant cleantech industry right here in San Diego. Local cleantech businesses sustain 21,305 direct jobs, contribute $6 billion in direct economic output, and help achieve the national energy goal of delivering more affordable energy. The emergence of San Diego's cleantech industry as a world leader is under threat from federal officials aligned with polluters who seek to repeal cleantech incentives and funding that expand the market for San Diego's cleantech products. San Diego's cleantech community has already lost $50 million in grant funding from the federal Office of Clean Energy Technology to help scale and commercialize clean energy technologies.

Given the enormity of the climate challenge we face, San Diego must communicate to federal leaders the critical importance to San Diego of climate and environmental science and regulation,

including of greenhouse gases. And we must continue doing our part to address anthropogenic climate change through participation in the America is All In coalition.

America is All In brings together state and local governments and private sector institutions to driving transformational climate action and advocacy to meet the United States' goals under the Paris Climate Agreement, halving US emissions by 2030 and reaching net zero emissions by 2050, while guarding against the impacts of climate disruption. Many California governments have already signed on, including the cities of Encinitas, Imperial Beach, San Diego, and Chula Vista as well as Alameda County, Contra Costa County, Los Angeles County, San Francisco County, Santa Barbara County, Sonoma County, and Ventura County. San Diego County's participation in America is All In will help identify best practices to adopt in County operations and foster opportunities for intergovernmental collaboration on advocacy, policy, and cooperative agreements.

Given federal policy change, we must take a fresh critical look at our efforts to protect county constituents and staff from environmental health hazards and climate change-related risks at county facilities. The threat posed by federal opposition to climate and environmental science and regulation is real so we must do our part to safeguard the people who entrust us with their health and safety in our facilities every day.

LINKAGE TO THE COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO STRATEGIC PLAN
By affirming the reality of climate change and calling for upholding environmental protection, today's action aligns with the Sustainability, Equity, and Community Initiatives in the County's 2025-2029 Strategic Plan.

Respectfully submitted,

TERRA LAWSON-REMER
Supervisor, Third District

ATTACHMENT(S)
N/A