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## Research Brief for Resource Managers

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## The Lead-up to California's Clar Plan

*Clar, C.R.1969. Evolution of California's Wildland Fire Protection System. The California State Board of Forestry, Sacramento, CA. 35p.*

Under Governor Ronald Reagan, State Forester C. Raymond Clar defended and explained how the State's Division of Forestry ultimately became responsible for protecting 37.5 million timber and watershed acres (more than 1/3 of the state) under the **Fire Plan of 1940**, commonly referred to as the **Clar Plan**. By describing "[the] sharp historical stepping stones of wildland fire protection" (e.g. Weeks Law, the Clarke McNary Act, and the Great Depression), Clar recounts the patchwork of responsibilities for firefighting leading to political battles and ultimately culminating in the Clar Plan. The Plan was bolstered and expanded in response to Pearl Harbor and WWII, and it was still in place upon the publication of this report, 29 years later.

In defense of federal and state taxes for fire fighting, Clar argued "the availability of timber resources is of concern to the entire nation". As California's population and fire hazard grew over time, there was an increased acceptance of state coordinated fire fighting, but it had not always been that way. Clar explained that the old Board of Forestry was created in 1885, with the dual purpose of suppressing wildfires and controlling wasteful logging, but it had no resources to enforce the goals and it soon fizzled. After the "light burning" controversy during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, fire suppression became the agency endorsed tool for forest protection. Over the years, California's progressive governors tended to increase state budgets for firefighting, while

### Management Implications

- It took many years of relatively haphazard firefighting and political battles to reach the Clar Plan (Fire Plan of 1940), a statewide fire control plan implemented by the California Division of Forestry.
- Because the preservation of timber and watershed resources concerned all American citizens, Clar believed that the state was justified in taxing its citizens to pay for the Division's fire suppression efforts.
- Federal assistance acts, the Great Depression and World War II were all pivotal in assigning state agencies the task of wildland firefighting.

more conservative governors tended to cut these budgets. The Weeks Law was pivotal in 1911 because it provided significant federal assistance for fire suppression, as was the Clarke McNary Act, which increased federal aid to fight fires from 1928 to 1932. The Great Depression brought significant manpower to the fire suppression effort with help from California's state-run unemployment camps (1931-1933) as well as the New Deal, federally backed Civilian Conservation Corps (1933-1940). These workers expanded the Division of Forestry's infrastructure significantly with roads, firebreaks, phone lines, fire towers and ranger stations.