



MEMORANDUM

Background & Talking Points for Your Presentation to the CAC Forums Committee

TO: Commissioner Alex Beltran
FROM: Ecological Workforce Initiative (EWI)
DATE: August 4, 2026
RE: Establishing a Recognized Statewide Training Standard and Worker Card for Ecological Restoration Trade Workers

Purpose

Thank you for taking the time to meet with us this afternoon. As discussed, this memo pulls together the background, data, and talking points from our conversation to support your presentation to the CAC Forums Committee. The immediate ask is for the Forums Committee to approve EWI presenting to the full Council at its October 2026 meeting; the longer-term goal that presentation would build toward is Council recognition of a standardized Worker Card for ecological restoration trade workers. This memo is intended as a working reference you can draw on directly — for framing the opportunity, describing EWI's Ecological Worker Awareness and Compliance (EWAC) Training, and making the case for both the October presentation and the Worker Card concept it would introduce.

The Opportunity

The State's own data show roughly \$500 billion in natural resource projects currently in the pipeline in California. These projects — wetland, forest, river, and coastal restoration; habitat protection; and related civil construction — increasingly require workers who understand not just construction and equipment operation, but the ecological and regulatory context in which the work occurs. Right now, there is no portable, recognized credential for this specialized skillset. That gap creates real costs: for workers who cannot demonstrate their skills across employers or regions, for contractors managing compliance risk, and for state resource agencies trying to move projects forward at pace.

- Opportunity for workers to get ahead of requirements likely to come down from regulatory agencies as this specialty grows.
- A specialty that is expanding rapidly alongside state and federal investment in restoration work.
- Positions going unfilled and a labor market opportunity not currently being met.

Background: EWI and the EWAC Training

EWI grew directly out of the ecological restoration civil construction industry's own need — employers and agencies identified a specialized skill set in the labor market that no existing training or credentialing pathway addressed. EWI's mission is to increase the pace, scale, and quality of ecological restoration by building a highly trained, formalized ecological workforce, and its stated goal is to create recognition and a standardized skillset and training curriculum for this work.

The centerpiece of that work is the Ecological Worker Awareness and Compliance (EWAC) Training — a single-day training that gives workers the ecological concepts and permitting context needed to work appropriately in sensitive habitats, around species of concern, and in proximity to cultural resources. Curriculum examples are publicly available at ecologicalworkforce.org.

This training addresses a gap that exists across the industry today: communication around permitting conditions is almost entirely framed around what workers cannot do and the fines that will follow if they get it wrong. Very little of that communication explains why the regulations and work rules exist. EWAC training fills that gap — giving workers the context to understand and follow permit conditions, not just comply with them under threat of penalty.

Why a Standardized, Recognized Credential Matters

A CAC-recognized Worker Card for this skillset creates value across every party involved:

- Industry: fills a documented labor market need for a specialized ecological trade skillset.
- Workers: establishes a portable credential of real value — something that does not currently exist for this work — that follows them across employers and regions.
- State resource agencies: increases permit compliance, improves project outcomes, and grows the qualified workforce needed to complete restoration projects at the pace the State's climate and resource goals require.

Broadly Applicable — Union, Non-Union, and Apprenticeship Programs

This standard is designed to apply across union and non-union workers alike, and to augment — not replace — existing apprenticeship programs across the State. It is intended as a broadly applicable layer of recognized skill and safety training that any apprenticeship program or employer can build on, similar in spirit to how OSHA safety training created an industry-wide safety culture for people, or how CPR certification became a widely recognized, portable standard of readiness. This proposal extends that same logic to natural resources: a shared, recognized baseline of ecological awareness and compliance competency for the trades.

We were struck by the example you raised on our call this afternoon, and think it's a great one to use in the presentation: painters working on bridge rehabilitation projects also have to interface directly with environmental permitting — containing the particulate generated when removing old paint, and containing spillage from paint and equipment, to keep contamination out of the water and surrounding habitat below. It's a clear illustration that this is not a niche issue confined to restoration crews. Environmental compliance already touches trades work far more broadly than most people realize, and a recognized ecological awareness and compliance standard would have real value well beyond the restoration trades themselves.

Growing the Trades Pipeline

Formal recognition of this skillset also has a workforce-development benefit beyond the individuals directly certified. It raises the visibility and prestige of ecological trade careers, putting them on par with environmental science degree programs in the eyes of prospective workers. Today, many people interested in this kind of work are unaware that ecological trade careers exist at all, and are instead steered toward four-year environmental science degrees. A recognized credential and career pathway can bring new people into the trades, build a new specialty within the trades themselves, and help fill positions that are currently going unmet.

Summary

We truly appreciate your presenting EWI to the Forums Committee and requesting approval for EWI to present to the full CAC at its October 2026 meeting. EWI's October presentation would lay out the case in more detail for the Council — the labor market need, the EWAC curriculum, and the workforce and compliance benefits — with the eventual goal of the Council recognizing a standardized Worker Card for ecological restoration trade workers. EWI is ready to share curriculum materials and program data, and welcomes the opportunity to work with Committee members, member unions, and existing apprenticeship programs to shape a standard that is broadly valuable across the State's trades workforce.