



VEGETATION MANAGEMENT



Why Are We Here?

- Fire danger seems to be increasing
 - 15 of the largest 20 fires in California have happened since 2000

- Since 2007, the County has seen major fires that have destroyed structures

- With the increase in fire activity we need to think about increasing prevention measures
 - Fire insurance issues



Basis of Work to Date

- Work has been done looking at different local rules and rules in similar counties. Along with other data, many different ideas/issues have been identified through the help of the following:
 - Interviewed different counties and fire districts
 - Discussions with CAL FIRE, county fire districts and fire safe council
 - Public meetings



Rough Draft Ordinance – Contents

- Countywide minimum rules:
 - Have countywide rules that are equivalent or in some areas a little more stringent than CAL FIRE (e.g. some unimproved lot rules and 100 feet fuel reduction)
 - Allow for different areas to adopt own rules as long as it is above the County's baseline standard



Rough Draft Ordinance – Contents

- Improved lots
 - Improved lots should be treated if they are within 100 feet of structures – to the equivalent of CAL FIRE’s 30 foot treatment rules (e.g. must remove all dead plants, grass and weeds and remove dead or dry leaves, pine needles from yard and rain gutters)
 - Good Neighbor and Neighborhood Protection Policy – A one hundred (100) foot wide strip of land* around flammable structure(s) located on an adjacent improved parcel (some or all of this clearance may be required on the adjacent improved parcel or the adjacent unimproved parcel depending upon the location of the structure on the improved parcel). For example, a structure could be within 70 feet of its property line. The adjacent property owner would need to assist its neighbor by completing fuels management on another 30 feet to create a 100 foot strip of treated land.



Rough Draft Ordinance – Contents

- Unimproved lots:
- Good Neighbor and Neighborhood Protection Policy – A one hundred (100) foot wide strip of land around flammable structure(s) located on an adjacent improved parcel (some or all of this clearance may be required on the adjacent improved parcel or the adjacent unimproved parcel depending upon the location of the structure on the improved parcel). For example, a structure could be within 70 feet of its property line. The adjacent property owner would need to assist its neighbor by completing fuels management on another 30 feet to create a 100 foot strip of treated land.



Rough Draft Ordinance – Contents

- Parcels adjacent to the roads:
- Improved and unimproved parcels adjacent to roadways and determined by the county fire inspector (or designee) to be necessary for the safe ingress and egress to the area served by the roadway or fire access easement and the current condition of fuels on the improved or unimproved parcel is assessed by the county fire inspector as an extra hazardous fire condition must be treated or abated.



Rough Draft Ordinance – Contents

- Other contents:
- Any HOA, Lighting & Lamp District, Subdivision Development, Special District, or other entity that has a developed and approved Wildland Fire Safe Plan in accordance with the County's General Plan requirement, shall be granted a reasonable amount of time to comply with this ordinance not to exceed five (5) years from the date which this ordinance was approved and ratified by the Board of Supervisors.
- Prior to the close of any real estate sales transaction within the County, the requirements for property owners to comply with the vegetation management ordinance shall be disclosed to all potential property owners.
- Any new permit request will necessitate a vegetation management inspection and compliance before issuance of the permit.



Rough Draft Ordinance – Contents

- On or before February 15th the enforcement officer will mail written notice to all the owners that such parcel must be cleaned and/or abated by June 1
- Ownership interest shall be determined based on the last equalized assessment roll available on the date of mailing of the Hazard Abatement Notice. Notification may also be accomplished by posting the Hazard Abatement Notice on the property if the owner's mailing address is not available or not current.



Rough Draft Ordinance – Contents

- This is what a timeline for the abatement process could look like:
 - 1) Parcel owner has 15 days (all days are calendar days) after mailing or posting of property of violation to abate or appeal
 - 2) The County hearing officer must notify appellant within 15 days prior to the hearing - 20 days for property owner outside the County.
 - 3) Hearing officer shall give order/ruling with 15 days of the hearing.
 - 4) Property owner has 7 days after hearing notification deadline to abate. If not abated County can abate the parcel. If the owner shows progress with abatement (work or contract date) then inspector can give extension.



Rough Draft Ordinance – Contents

- The County will have the power to abate properties that do not come into compliance.
- The County will have the power to lien properties for the cost of abatement.
- Seasonal Designation - Parcel containing a fire hazard where abatement has occurred in two (2) previous years, if not in compliance then no hearing officer meeting – to abatement.
- The public should be aware of rare plants areas, riparian areas, and raptor nesting trees on their property and try to avoid these sites.



Rough Draft Ordinance – Contents

- Working on the details of cooperation with CAL FIRE
 - County work with CAL FIRE to complete abatement on improved parcels like the Sonoma County model.
 - County employee or representative would complete third inspection at parcel and proceed with abatement if property not cleaned.



Rough Draft Ordinance – Cost of Program

- Option 1 – Match CAL FIRE Defensible Space Inspections in County (approximately 2,500 inspections) - \$624,000
 - County staff – Supervising Inspector and Inspector
 - Conduct complaint inspections and administration
 - Contract inspectors
 - Conduct inspections in target hazard areas
 - Operating
 - Supplies, mailings, advertising, mileage, etc.
 - Abatement of County Properties
 - Abatement Cost Recovery Funds



Rough Draft Ordinance – Cost of Program

- Option 2 – Conduct 75% of CAL FIRE Defensible Space Inspections in County (approximately 1,875 inspections) - \$585,000
 - County staff – Supervising Inspector and Inspector
 - Conduct complaint inspections and administration
 - Contract inspectors
 - Conduct inspections in target hazard areas
 - Operating
 - Supplies, mailings, advertising, mileage, etc.
 - Abatement of County Properties
 - Abatement Cost Recovery Funds



Rough Draft Ordinance – Cost of Program

- Option 3 – Conduct 50% of CAL FIRE Defensible Space Inspections in County (approximately 1,250 inspections) - \$545,000
 - County staff – Supervising Inspector and Inspector
 - Conduct complaint inspections and administration
 - Contract inspectors
 - Conduct inspections in target hazard areas
 - Operating
 - Supplies, mailings, advertising, mileage, etc.
 - Abatement of County Properties
 - Abatement Cost Recovery Funds



Why Start the Program

- The program costs could be small compared to the loss of human life and property
 - If a large amount of property is lost for an extended period of time it could affect County funded services (e.g. public safety, infrastructure, etc.).
 - In FY 2017-18, Sonoma County faced a \$21 million shortfall due to the October fires
 - There was an expected revenue decline of \$10.7 million due to destroyed homes and \$10.3 million on county staff overtime and supplies needed during the fires
 - Losses on the General Fund will continue for several years, peaking in FY 2020-21 at an anticipated \$8 million



Why Start the Program

- Grants are available for fire prevention programs
 - FEMA Hazard Mitigation (defensible space and structural hardening), CAL FIRE, etc.
 - Sonoma County has applied for \$11.75 million in grants to fund vegetation management, fire mitigation planning and structural hardening.
 - It received \$1.7 million fire prevention grant from CAL FIRE for the Northwest Roadway Safety fuels reduction, and community chipper and engagement project.



Operational Issues

- 1) Finding grants to help seniors, veterans and other individuals on fixed income
- 2) Defensible space issues have been discussed to help mobile home parks



Operational Issues

- 3) Cooperate with BLM, Forest Service, tribes, and all County land
- 4) Many counties have had issues with out of county property owners – education
- 5) Education on treatments - do not need to masticate your land
- 6) Working with CAL FIRE on rules for slopes and other situational variables



Rough Draft Ordinance – Contents

Questions?