



Code Enforcement ad hoc Advisory Committee
9/25/18
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 should we think about increasing prevention measures
 - Fire insurance issues

The Process to Date

- As part of agenda item 18-0033, on January 23rd, the Board of Supervisors directed staff to study different aspects of code enforcement. In addition, it created an ad hoc code enforcement committee
- Ad hoc Code Enforcement committee saw the issue being broad in nature decided to study each code enforcement issue separately
- Today's information is regarding vegetation management

What is CAL FIRE Doing?

- California Public Resources Code 4291 requires homeowners living in State Responsibility Area (SRA) to maintain 100 feet of Defensible Space around structures (improved lots).
- Here are its tips:
 - Maintain 100 feet defensible space around all structures
 - Clear all needles and leaves from roofs, eaves and rain gutters
 - Trim branches 6 feet from the ground
 - Using trimming, mowing and power equip before 10 AM
 - Landscape with fire resistant and drought tolerant plants
 - Remove branches away from roofs and 10 feet from the chimney
 - Keep wood piles and flammable materials at least 30 feet from the home
 - Use fire ignition resistant building material



Current Vegetation Management Rules in El Dorado County

- **Sec. 8.08.020. - Hazard removal required.**
 - Every person, copartnership, firm, corporation and company owning, controlling, renting or operating any cabin, tent, residence, store, hotel or other like structure or improvement in any unincorporated territory in the County shall, at all times, do all the following:
 - A. Maintain a fire break or clearing around the cabin, tent, residence, store, hotel or other like structure or improvement free from all inflammable material for a distance of 30 feet from any portion of the structure, or to his or her property line, whichever is the lesser distance; and
 - B. Keep the roofs of all such cabins, tents, residences, stores, hotels or other like structures or improvements free from leaves, needles or other debris.



Current Vegetation Management Rules in El Dorado County

- El Dorado Hills – Unimproved Property Hazard Reduction Ordinance (Vacant Lot Program)
 - The intent of this program is to establish a defensible space of 100 feet around all homes, buildings, and combustible fences that abut to unimproved property. The defensible space that is created by cutting and/or clearing flammable vegetation improves the ability to survive a wildland fire and increases the safety margin and working room for Firefighters.
- Cameron Park CDS – Have Rules for Improved and Unimproved Properties
 - Cultivated and useful grasses and pastures – Shall not be considered a public nuisance unless determined necessary to protect adjacent improved property from fire exposure
 - Unimproved parcel of less than 2 acres – Cleared of all waste, hazardous vegetation and combustible material prior to May 1. Weeds, dry grass, non-cultivated pastures, or other hazardous vegetation, shall be mowed or cut to a max height of 2 inches
 - Unimproved parcels of more than 2 acres (can be contiguous parcels) – Should either follow the above rules or construct and maintain a minimum 30 foot wide firebreak around perimeter of the property
 - Official may require a firebreak of more than 30 feet in width to a max of 100 feet width for public health and safety



What Are Other Counties Doing

- Looked at 10 California counties and two CSDs
 - 8 counties selected have similar populations in the unincorporated area
 - 2 are adjacent to El Dorado County
 - 2 CSDs
- Who Has Defined Vegetation Management Rules with Defined Timelines Throughout the Process
 - El Dorado County – Does not have complete deadlines
 - Yes – 10
 - No – 2
- Any countywide resources deployed?
 - Yes - 9
 - No – 1

What Are Other Counties Doing

- Centralization of administration functions?
 - Centralization – 5
 - Districts – 4
 - Not sure – 1
- Length of the process w/ appeal to abatement – earliest
 - From 19 days to 65 days
 - 6 counties process is under 30 days
- Time to abate after first notice
 - From 7 days 30 days
 - 7 counties under 20 days w/ 3 at 10 or under

What Are Other Counties Doing

- Most counties abate and lien the property
 - One county said it did not abate or contract out abatement – fine until work is done
- Most counties do more aggressive complaint process
 - Take complaint and respond
 - Will ticket other violators on the way to the complaint
 - Some do proactive sweeps

What Are Other Counties Doing

- Many send out letters to either all parcel owners or problem parcels and remind them of rules.
 - Example – send letters out in April and give until June 15th to abate or ticket
 - For places where abatement has occurred in past get designation as “seasonal or recurring” – weeds and rubbish shall be abated without the necessity of an appeal hearing

What Are Other Counties Doing

- Difference in standards:
 - Coordinated inspections in SRA and LRA
 - Parcel 5 acres or smaller and standards for parcels larger (Sacramento line is 1 acre)
 - Different rules for agriculture and grazing land
 - Improved and unimproved parcels
 - Fuel breaks along roadways
 - Many give discretion to fire personnel to increase clearance area

What Are Other Counties Doing

- Sonoma County program – Partnership with CAL FIRE in SRA
 - CAL FIRE will inspect “improved parcels” – parcels with homes or structures on them
 - Sonoma County Fire Prevention will be inspecting unimproved parcels that are 5 acres or less in size
 - Sonoma County will conduct first, second and third inspections on unimproved parcels and third inspections on improved parcels
 - Sonoma County is looking to add parcels over 5 acres

Decision Points Moving Forward

- Should there be coordinated rules in the LRA and SRA?
- Should there be rules for improved and unimproved parcels?
- Should there be different rules for different acre sizes for unimproved parcels?
- Should there be coordinated support?
- Who should do the inspections?
- Other logistical questions...