



## Legislation Text

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**File #:** 22-0491, **Version:** 1

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Chief Administrative Office recommending the Board of Supervisors:

- 1) Receive and file a presentation from the Vegetation Management and Wildfire Resiliency Working Group;
- 2) Approve in concept the establishment of an "Office of Wildfire Resilience" in the Chief Administrative Office; and
- 3) Designate \$3,375,000 of excess contingency funds as the local matching funds for a federal Hazard Mitigation Grant to conduct defensible space, home hardening work, and hazardous fuels reduction in the County.

**FUNDING:** General Fund.

### **DISCUSSION / BACKGROUND**

The Board of Supervisors established the Vegetation Management and Wildfire Resiliency Working Group (group) on September 21, 2021 (file #21-1515). The CAO convened a core group, consisting of representatives from the U.S. Forest Service (USFS), CAL FIRE, the El Dorado County Fire Safe Council, the El Dorado County and Georgetown Divide Resource Conservation Districts (RCDs), the El Dorado County Fire Chiefs' Association, and the El Dorado County Fire Prevention Officers' Association in November 2021.

The group has been meeting at least monthly since November 2021, primarily to establish goals for the group and recommendations for the future. The group is supported by an Extra-Help Principal Management Analyst in the CAO's Office, along with assistance of staff from the Vegetation Management Program and Surveyor's Office. In addition, the County has contracted with the RCDs for a fire safe coordinator, funded through a California Fire Safe Council grant.

An opportunity arose to apply for a Hazard Mitigation Grant (HMGP) through the California Office of Emergency Services (Cal OES), to conduct a demonstration project focusing on defensible space, home hardening, and hazardous vegetation removal activities in a high-risk area of the County. The group has submitted a Notice of Interest (NOI) for a \$10 million grant. If accepted, the next step would be to submit a sub-application, which requires identification of the required 25% matching funds.

The group, through its discussions and research, has found that El Dorado County lacks an organized and unified approach to addressing wildfire hazard and risk. Although many valuable efforts are taking place, there is no single process for establishing priorities, coordinating projects and allocating resources. In addition, public outreach regarding vegetation management projects and related activities occurs mostly independently by each of the agencies and organizations without a shared information and messaging strategy.

El Dorado County is responsible for updating and implementing plans, statutes and programs that play a critical role in protecting people, homes, businesses, and infrastructure from wildfire. These include the Hazard Mitigation Plan, General Plan Safety Element, wildland/urban interface building

codes and the vegetation management ordinance.

The Caldor Fire demonstrated that cooperative and strategic vegetation management projects can be successful when there is coordination and engagement of stakeholders across jurisdictional boundaries. The work completed through the efforts of the Fire Adapted 50 and Myers Fuels Treatment projects were instrumental in protecting communities and slowing the Caldor fire spread in those areas. The fire also revealed the challenges fire fighters faced when defensible space was not completed around homes, forcing them to divert their efforts to complete the work ahead of the advancing fire.

Based on the information learned, the group has established a number of goals to be implemented over the next 12 to 18 months. These include establishing one data hub/collection point and standardized tracking process for projects and activities, developing a coordinated approach to public messaging, completing a countywide risk assessment, identifying a broad stakeholder based organizational structure and evaluating the existing vegetation management ordinance.

The group recommends that El Dorado County establish an Office of Wildfire Resilience (Office) within the Chief Administrative Office to provide a governance structure that prioritizes and coordinates efforts throughout the county based on a comprehensive wildfire protection strategy. Led by a program manager, the Office should include the Fire Safe Coordinator, HMGP grant staff and continued support from the Surveyor and Vegetation Management Programs.

The Office will develop and implement a countywide wildfire protection strategy that utilizes assessments at the watershed level; aligns with state and federal plans and priorities; emphasizes large multi-stakeholder efforts, including South Fork American River Collaborative (SOFAR); and facilitates the prioritization of scarce and limited resources. The Office responsibilities will include preparing wildfire and vegetation management updates to the Hazard Mitigation Plan and General Plan, engaging on building code changes related to wildland/Urban interface building standards, managing the HMGP grant, facilitating program priorities and stakeholder coordination for the County Vegetation Management Ordinance and convening a broad countywide wildfire resiliency stakeholder group.

## **ALTERNATIVES**

The Board could choose to accept or reject any of the recommendations discussed here and in the presentation, and provide alternate direction.

## **PRIOR BOARD ACTION**

September 21, 2021: Establishment of the Vegetation Management and Wildfire Resiliency Group.

## **OTHER DEPARTMENT / AGENCY INVOLVEMENT**

U.S. Forest Service, CAL FIRE, the El Dorado County Fire Safe Council, the El Dorado County and Georgetown Divide Resource Conservation Districts, the El Dorado County Fire Chiefs' Association, and the El Dorado County Fire Prevention Officers' Association

## **FINANCIAL IMPACT**

The approval of the new office will have no impact in the current fiscal year, as the personnel and costs will be added during the Fiscal Year (FY) 2022-23 Recommended Budget process. The specific allocation and salary to be added will have to be determined by Human Resources; however, an

initial rough estimate to establish the office is \$300,000.

During the FY 2021-22 Adopted Budget, the Board appropriated approximately \$13.5 million in carryover fund balance from the prior fiscal year in Contingency to address needs related to the Caldor Fire and to provide for future economic uncertainty. The Board is asked to designate \$3.375 million of this excess Contingency as matching funds for the Hazard Mitigation Grant. This would leave just over \$10 million in contingency, in addition to the amount required by Board Policy (3% of adjusted General Fund appropriations, or approximately \$6 million). The funding would not be needed if the grant is not received. If the grant is received, the expenditures would occur over the term of the grant, estimated at three years.

**CLERK OF THE BOARD FOLLOW UP ACTIONS**

N/A

**STRATEGIC PLAN COMPONENT**

Healthy Communities

**CONTACT**

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