



Legislation Text

File #: 21-1515, **Version:** 1

Supervisors Thomas and Hidahl recommending the Board direct the Chief Administrative Office to convene an El Dorado County Vegetation Management and Resiliency Working Group. The working group would ideally include public, private, faith-based and non-profit organizations to collaborate on lessons learned from the Caldor Fire in order to define funding streams and initiate a robust, community-based resiliency and vegetation management program that would accelerate the current County efforts. Resiliency measures to improve public safety on both public and private lands from wildfire in El Dorado County could be a key component of the resultant recommendations.

DISCUSSION / BACKGROUND

On August 14, 2021, the Caldor Fire erupted at 6:54 p.m. east of Omo Ranch and south of Grizzly Flats. On the night of August 16, 2021, extreme fire behavior overnight caused an immediate, mandatory evacuation of the Grizzly Flats/Somerset and Happy Valley area as the incident grew to 6500 acres and devastated the community of Grizzly Flats. By September 13, 2021, the Caldor Fire had swept eastward through El Dorado County, consumed 219,267 acres, ravaged 1003 structures, and had threatened to destroy the Lake Tahoe basin.

While fire has historically been part of the natural landscape, decades of failed policies and mismanagement has resulted in unprecedented catastrophic fires in both the wildland urban interface as well as in the national forest itself. Consequently, 2021 was the first year in the state's history that wildfires crossed the Sierra Nevada with both the Dixie and the Caldor Fires. Cal Fire Director Thom Porter reiterated that the fire behavior in California is unlike any we have seen before.

As El Dorado County residents closely monitored the Caldor Fire's aggressive assault, it became evident that structural damage was greatly minimized by the extreme vegetation management and defense efforts that fire crews enacted on private and public property. Measures included pulling furniture and flammable debris away from homes and structures, clearing underbrush and limbing trees to appropriate levels. These efforts stopped the fire from consuming many populated areas including Pollock Pines, Camino, and the communities in South Lake Tahoe.

While El Dorado County enacted a Vegetation Management Ordinance in 2019 to inform residents of appropriate vegetation management standards that can create fire-adapted communities, the program remains unfunded. That said, there continues to be diligent efforts to create defensible space through a variety of independent entities, like the Fire Safe Councils and the El Dorado & Georgetown Divide Resource Conservation District. Recognizing that fire crews did the work on private and public lands that the County, other public agencies, and private landowners should have done themselves, it is the intent of this board action to pull together an effective coalition of both the public and private sector to provide the expertise and funding necessary to implement a more collaborative and comprehensive defensible space and vegetation/forest management program on both public and private lands. Focus may also include creating safe routes in neighborhoods, which could be vital in achieving a safer, fire-adapted county where fire can burn around our communities without consuming them.

As we move deeper into a recovery and restoration phase, new levels of funding resources are being made available. Now is the time to put bold actions in place to enhance current fuel reduction programs, initiate measures to expand vegetation management through our communities and public lands and coordinate siloed efforts to maximize funding opportunities so that we may mitigate future disaster by building a more resilient, fire-adapted landscape in El Dorado County.

ALTERNATIVES

The Board could choose not to convene this working group and this very important collaboration would not be coordinated.

PRIOR BOARD ACTION

N/A

OTHER DEPARTMENT / AGENCY INVOLVEMENT

Chief Administrative Office

FINANCIAL IMPACT

N/A

CLERK OF THE BOARD FOLLOW UP ACTIONS

N/A

STRATEGIC PLAN COMPONENT

Public Safety and Good Governance

CONTACT

Supervisors Thomas and Hidahl