



Legislation Text

File #: 23-0078, **Version:** 1

Chief Administrative Office recommending the Board receive and file an update from the Office of Wildfire Preparedness and Resilience.

FUNDING: N/A

DISCUSSION / BACKGROUND

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.

On March 22, 2022, based on the recommendation of the working group, the Board took the following actions:

- Add a new theme to the County Strategic Plan, to “Lead and facilitate the creation and maintenance of fire-adapted communities,” with an associated task to “Prepare countywide wildfire protection strategy.”
- Establish a process/governance structure led by El Dorado County through a dedicated Wildfire Resilience Office to prioritize and coordinate efforts on a countywide level based on a comprehensive wildfire protection strategy.
- Designate \$3,375,000 of excess contingency funds for a federal Hazard Mitigation Grant to conduct defensible space, home hardening, and hazardous fuels reduction in the County.

Advisory Committee and OWPR

Following the Board’s approval of the working group’s recommendations on March 22nd and the direction to establish the Office of Wildfire Preparedness and Resilience (OWPR), the working group has established a governance model and structure (attached) in which the working group has been formalized into a standing advisory committee to the OWPR and recommends to the CAO an annual workplan for the OWPR. In addition, a representative from the Tahoe Fire and Fuels Team (TFFT) has been added. The TFFT has been active on in the Tahoe Basin for many years, and serves as a great model for expanding these efforts countywide through the OWPR and Advisory Committee. The advisory committee may form sub-committees and working groups as needed. This structure has been implemented successfully as described in the following examples:

California Wildfire Mitigation Program (CWMP) Grant

In March, 2022, following the Board's approval of matching funds, the OWPR applied through the California Office of Emergency Services (Cal OES) for a Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA) Hazard Mitigation Grant to conduct defensible space, home hardening, and hazardous fuels reduction in the County. A section of the Weber Creek drainage south of Highway 50 was identified as the project area, based on risk assessment criteria determined by the Advisory Committee. The total project cost was \$13.3 million, with a County match of 25%, or \$3.3 million.

In September, 2022, Cal OES invited the County to participate in the California Wildfire Mitigation Program Pilot Project in lieu of the FEMA Hazard Mitigation Grant. The California Wildfire Mitigation Program is a pilot program put together by CAL OES and CAL FIRE, and is funded in part by FEMA to support California homeowners

with protecting their property from wildfire damage through defensible space and home retrofitting. This new grant would expand the County's funding for the Weber Creek project to approximately \$25 million dollars and reduce the County's match to between 5% and 7%, or up to \$1.5 million. The application has been submitted and was approved by the California Wildfire Mitigation Joint Powers Authority. It is currently awaiting final approval by the Cal OES Director and FEMA.

Greater Placerville Multi-Project Coordination

One of the objectives of the OWPR is to coordinate and prioritize efforts on a countywide level. Several initiative and projects were already in progress before the office was established. The OWPR's role in these instances is to bring a countywide perspective and assist with coordination among the participating entities and stakeholders as needed. One example is Greater Placerville Multi-Project working group. The El Dorado County Transportation Commission, El Dorado Resource Conservation District, El Dorado County Fire Safe Council and El Dorado County all have grant funding or grant requests for projects around the greater Placerville area. The OWPR brings all these entities together monthly to discuss how resources can be leveraged and to coordinate consistent messaging about the projects.

Plan Coordination

Alignment of the various local, state, and federal plans that relate to wildfire planning, preparedness, and mitigation is another objective of the OWPR. These efforts will be ongoing, as the various plans come due for update. In the past few months, the office has been working with the Planning and Building Department on its efforts to update the General Plan Safety Element to ensure appropriate incorporation of wildfire planning and mitigation provisions. In addition, the office will work with the Sheriff's Office of Emergency Services on its upcoming update to the Local Hazard Mitigation Plan, with CAL FIRE on its update to the Unit Fire Plan, and with the El Dorado County Fire Safe Council on an update to the West Slope Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP).

Defensible Space Working Group

When the Board created the original working group, one of its charges was to, "...initiate a robust, community-based resiliency and vegetation management program that would accelerate the current County efforts." To this end the advisory committee established a working group to evaluate the County's current vegetation management ordinance and program. The advisory committee will bring recommendations to the Board based on this group's work this Spring.

Geographic Information Systems (GIS) Working Group

The El Dorado County GIS Program is leading a working group comprised of GIS specialists from multiple partners and is serving as the hub for collecting and displaying data related fire prevention, hazardous fuels reduction and other related project and program activities. The GIS program is currently building an online mapping and data sharing tool that will provide access to project information and the ability to prepare maps and project proposals.

Public Outreach Working Group

CAL FIRE is leading the public outreach working group and has completed an initial Program update to various stakeholders, including the El Dorado County Fire Chiefs Association, El Dorado County Fire Safe Council and the City of Placerville. The CAL FIRE public information officer provided coordination between advisory committee members resulting in a collaborative display and coordinated message at the 2022 El Dorado County Fair. The working group will continue to work toward a common messaging strategy across agencies and organizations related to wildfire mitigation planning and implementation.

CAL FIRE Fire Hazard Severity Zone Mapping

The OWPR coordinated with CAL FIRE to roll out the mapping update at the beginning of the public hearing process. OWPR has established a dedicated website to provide information on the updated maps, background information and assistance with questions.

OWPR Outlook

While the OWPR is part of the Chief Administrative Office, the work of the OWPR could not be done without the leadership of the Advisory Committee and the engagement of the many stakeholders in the County. After an unsuccessful recruitment for a Deputy CAO to be dedicated to the program, the CAO and the Advisory Committee have determined to hire a Principal Management Analyst to work with one of the current Deputy CAOs to staff the OWPR. The OWPR will staff the Advisory Committee, acting as a liaison between the Committee and the CAO and Board of Supervisors, working to ensure information exchange between the stakeholders, County Departments, the Board of Supervisors, and the public. In addition, there is a possibility that funding for the Fire Safe Coordinator, a position funded by a grant from the California Fire Safe Council and hired by the El Dorado and Georgetown Resource Conservation Districts, may be extended. If that is the case, the Committee will consider how this position could be better integrated into the OWPR. The CAO will continue to evaluate staffing needs, and if the CWMP grant is received, additional grant-funded staff will be requested to implement the project.

Priorities for the coming year include finalizing the Wildfire Protection Strategy and implementing updates to the Vegetation Management Program, and the CWMP Pilot Project if the grant is received. These tasks are in addition to the ongoing efforts of the Office to participate in regional efforts to facilitate funding opportunities, coordinate project activities and leverage partnerships. The Public Outreach, Defensible Space, and GIS working groups will continue their work, as well.

ALTERNATIVES

N/A

PRIOR BOARD ACTION

21-1515 On September 21, 2021, the Board of Supervisors established the Vegetation Management and Wildfire Resiliency Working Group.

22-0491 On March 22, 2022, the Board of Supervisors received an update from the working group.

OTHER DEPARTMENT / AGENCY INVOLVEMENT

N/A

FINANCIAL IMPACT

N/A

CLERK OF THE BOARD FOLLOW UP ACTIONS

N/A

STRATEGIC PLAN COMPONENT

Healthy Communities

CONTACT

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