

# National Fire Plan

## Community Assistance in California

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Everyone agrees that more must be done to protect the hundreds of communities in harm's way from wildfire. That is why community protection is a key goal of the National Fire Plan, in California and across the country. Reaching that goal means enhancing fire management capabilities at the federal, state and local levels, actively managing all forests, and strengthening coordination across organizational boundaries. This is not a short-term effort. Success requires a focused, long-term commitment. With that commitment, communities at risk will be better protected, forests will be healthier, and costly damage from wildfires will decrease.

### **Suite of Local Programs Delivered**

The USDA Forest Service recognizes the need to coordinate with the many partners and stakeholders who share the agency's interests and concerns. More than ever, the National Fire Plan is working to put information, materials and funds in the hands of local organizations and communities.

The State Fire Assistance program, with \$3.6 million for California, helps build an optimal level of state firefighting capability, supports training and equipment for state firefighters, funds hazard mitigation projects on state and local land, and promotes Firewise training so homeowners can create defensible space and reduce fire risk around their homes and in their communities. The Volunteer Fire Assistance program provides almost \$1 million to train and equip 210 local fire departments across the state.



The Economic Action Programs, along with the Community and Private Land Fire Assistance programs, foster sustainable community development, linking community assistance with resource management and enhancing communities' Firesafe planning. The National Fire Plan focuses support on community organizations and planning for fire prevention, development of biomass utilization projects, demonstration of hazardous fuel reduction practices, and development and use of technologies to convert materials removed during fuel reduction treatments into marketable products. Over 300 California communities submitted project proposals this year, far more than the program could support. This year, \$2.9 million in grants will be awarded, helping fund 65 community projects.

### **Long-Term Commitment Emphasized**

The high risk of severe wildfire facing communities in California did not appear overnight. Today's situation has been evolving since the mid 1800s – a complex interaction of aggressive fire suppression, changing weather patterns, shifting demographics, and historic forest management practices. Likewise, success in defusing the danger will not come immediately. That's why the National Fire Plan will require a solid commitment for many years before there are significant gains in reducing fire risk.

There are millions of acres of forest at risk of catastrophic wildland fire, many close or right next to communities. These lands require treatment. It will mean using all the management tools available – including prescribed fire, intensive manual treatment, and mechanical treatment – over many years to reduce the fire danger and bring the lands back to their more natural condition.



### **Community Action Promoted**

Communities are beginning to recognize their individual responsibility to help protect their homes and communities. The National Fire Plan encourages such local action. Through a state-led process, over 700 communities in California were identified this year as being at high risk. Federal forest lands adjacent to these communities, among

others, will be targeted in the work to reduce hazardous fuel. Every opportunity will be made to hire local crews under contract to perform these fuel reduction treatments. Creating Firesafe communities and training community leaders will serve to reduce fire hazards on non-federal lands. The National Fire Plan provides information, education, equipment and funding to support these activities ([www.firewise.org](http://www.firewise.org)). At the same time the Pacific Southwest Experiment Station in California, part of the Forest Service research arm, is conducting research to better understand how to make homes and communities more fire safe.

### **Utilization of Small-Diameter Material Increased**

An important link for communities to the National Fire Plan is the development, establishment, and expansion of local economic enterprises based on wood products. Recognizing that the removal of hazardous fuel and the restoration of healthy ecosystems will generate significant volumes of small-diameter woody materials that are traditionally underutilized, the Forest Service is expanding research into new technology development and funding local business development to increase the processing and market value of the wood removed. National Fire Plan grants support business planning, technology development for engineered wood products, biomass use, and production of marketable goods such as pelletized fuel, compost, heat, electricity, and small log structures.

### **California Fire Alliance Coordination Strengthened**

The National Fire Plan has also served to revitalize the California Fire Alliance, an interagency forum that helps coordinate and integrate state and federal work in wildland fire management. The Alliance institutionalizes the broad spirit of collaboration promoted through the Fire Plan and vital to its success. The Alliance facilitates wildfire protection

planning by local communities, encouraging local leadership and ensuring efficient cooperation among partners.

### **Summary**

In California, the National Fire Plan has helped map out what is needed to protect hundreds of communities in California that are at risk from wildland fire. In cooperation with state agencies, it has identified where the high-risk areas are. It has helped people understand what it takes to have an optimal firefighting force at the federal, state, tribal and local level. Most importantly, it is delivering information, material and money to local communities so they can play an active and necessary role in restoring healthy forests and reducing fire risk to people and their property.

A solid, unfaltering commitment is needed over the coming years to ensure protection of communities and the environment. Without such commitment, threats to public safety will continue, property losses will increase, and billions of dollars will go every year to fight fire. Staying the course over the long-term will provide better protection now and cost savings in the future. It is the only real choice available.

*For additional information on the National Fire Plan, see [www.na.fs.fed.us/nfp](http://www.na.fs.fed.us/nfp)*

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Note to the editors: Individual in the background of the photograph of Secretary Veneman and Ms. Schroeder is Bill Pauli, President of the California Farm Bureau Federation.

For additional information on the National Fire Plan, visit [www.fireplan.gov](http://www.fireplan.gov)