



## Vegetation Management Grant Program Update

(May 2023)

The Vegetation Management Grant Program was initiated in March of 2021 as part of the recommended actions of the Center for Law, Energy and the Environment (CLEE) report: Priorities for Sonoma County's Wildfire Settlement Vegetation Management Funds. Specifically, "a substantial portion of the settlement funds should be directed to high priority, near-term vegetation management activities in high-risk areas." Since the first grant agreements were executed in June of 2021, the program has monitored the performance of all 46 grant-funded projects through 6-month monitoring reports to track fiscal and project management objectives of all projects. Below is a summary of the most relevant data obtained from monitoring reports, field site visits, and communications with all of the grantees and supporting organizations.

### A. Grant Funding Distribution 2021 to 2023

Based on the data collected for each grant year, here is a summary of how the Vegetation Management Grant Program is supporting each of the supervisorial districts. With the approved grant projects for 2023, the fund will have distributed approximately \$12 million to 65 community driven projects. Approximately 48% of the 151 applicants have received funding since the program began in 2021. While several approved projects provide support to multiple districts and some were designed to be county-wide, District 1 has received 22% of the funding, District 4 has received 28% and District 5 has received 38% of all of the grant funding (see Figure 1). Neither Districts 2 or 3 have received project-specific grants but have been beneficiaries of the county-wide efforts to improve defensible space and wildfire resilience training and capacity building.

The Vegetation Management Coordinator will be working on the project scopes of work for the 2023 grant agreements so that projects are targetting the most essential parts of their proposed projects and those that are working county-wide have specific strategies to address prescribed burning and grazing efforts in Districts 2 and 3 where limited grant funded projects have been developed.

Figure 1: Distribution of Grant Funding per District (2021-2023)

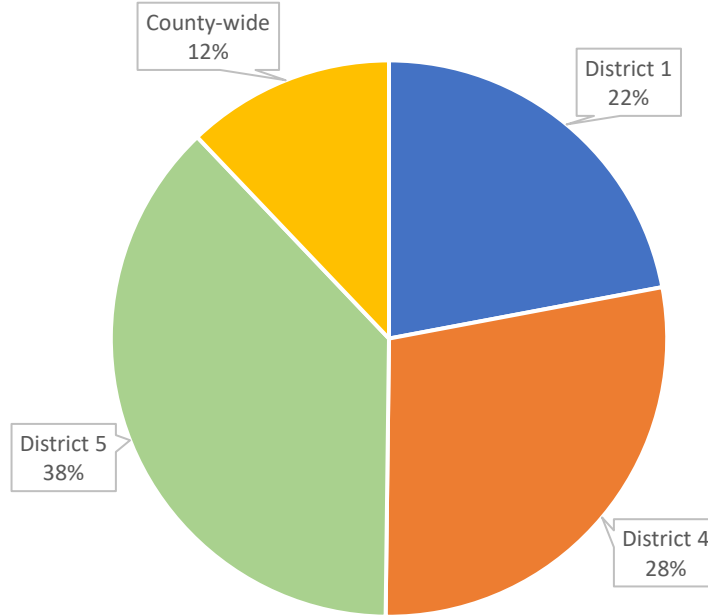


Table 1: Summary of Grant Funding per District:

**Distribution of Grant Funding (2021-2023)**

	2021	2022	2023*	Total Distribution	%
<b>District 1</b>	\$1,045,274	\$896,769	\$701,805	\$2,643,848	22%
<b>District 4</b>	\$1,003,723	\$1,441,817	\$932,180	\$3,377,720	28%
<b>District 5</b>	\$1,222,480	\$2,157,681	\$1,142,517	\$4,522,678	38%
<b>County-wide</b>	\$454,017	\$113,321	\$885,000	\$1,452,338	12%
<b>Total:</b>	<b>\$3,725,494</b>	<b>\$4,609,588</b>	<b>\$3,661,502</b>	<b>\$11,996,584</b>	

\* - Pending approval of the Board of Supervisors on June 12, 2023 and includes \$500,000 pending allocation to CAL VTP projects in District 5.

Table 2 highlights the number of proposals received over the past three years per District and number of approved projects and percent approval rate. Averaging across all three years since 2021, the average percent is consistently around 40-50% per District. The exception are those proposals seeking to support county-wide initiatives which did generate a much higher approval rate (82%).

Table 2: Number of Proposals Submitted and Approved:

	Total # of Applicants	Total Funded	Approval %
District 1	43	17	40%
District 4	36	18	50%
District 5	61	29	48%
County-wide	11	9	82%
<b>Total</b>	<b>151</b>	<b>73**</b>	<b>48%</b>

\*\* - Note: There are a total of 65 approved grant agreements – several projects served more than one supervisorial district and funding was allocated to reflect that split. (ex. LandSmart prescribed grazing and the North Bay Forest Improvement Program).

### B. Program Summary of Completed and Proposed Treatments County-wide

The Vegetation Management Grant Program continues to make advances and modifications to support a wide variety of projects and organizations and strives to obtain “generational change” in the County’s collective efforts to become more wildfire resilient. There has been a concentrated effort to support projects that were multi-faceted such as including fuel treatments at scale and engaging local landowners. Many of the projects recommended in 2023 focused on developing shaded fuel breaks as indicated by the proposed 30 miles of additional fuel breaks proposed for 2023/24 (see Table 3 below).

Also, in 2023 we will begin to see the results of our efforts to invest in long-term environmental compliance through the California Vegetation Treatment Program – Environmental Impact Report (CAL VTP) whereby multiple landowners will be allowed to complete a series of fuel treatments across ridgelines to protect communities along the Russian River and implement wide-scale prescribed burn programs and grazing over the next 10 years. In July 2023, Permit Sonoma will be presenting the Project Specific Analysis (PSA) for the Southside Russian River Shaded Fuel Break project along the ridgeline above Odd Fellows Recreation Club, Summer Home Park, Hollydale, Terrace, and Canyon Road communities.

The Geysers VTP will encompass 26,411 acres along the Mayacama range east of Cloverdale and highlight a collaborative effort between private landownerships (Calpine Energy corporation), easement protected lands, and lands within Lake and Sonoma County.

Table 3: Summary of Treatments since 2021:

	Defensible Space	Shaded Fuel Breaks (miles)	Roadside Treatments (miles)	CAL VTP (acres for fuel treatments)	Prescribed grazing/burns (acres)
<b>2021-2022</b>	630	52	55	19,210	615
<b>2023</b>	0	30	8.7	26,411	2430

### C. Technical Assistance and Capacity Building Efforts

In April 2022, Ag + Open Space recommended setting aside \$500,000 for technical assistance to organizations that did not have the technical expertise to design and implement a project in strategically important areas. The intent was to design a similar program as the North Coast Resource Partnership

that provides resource professionals to a wide variety of projects. The problem was in the capacity to create an equitable program that was available to all landowners or interested parties. However, with the development of the County's Community Wildfire Protection Plan Project Entry Portal – we now have the mechanism to receive a wide range of projects from across the county and apply tools like the Wildfire Resilience Planner, the Wildfire Fuel Mapper, and do our gap analysis to zero in on the geographic areas and communities that need direct technical assistance that complements the work being accomplished by the FEMA grants and uses a sound methodology to support these groups that have been unsuccessful in obtaining grant funding.

In addition, with the funding from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF), we can begin to offer technical assistance and capacity building workshops – first within the Russian River watershed then extend the model out to the rest of the county to address regionally and habitat specific approaches county-wide. Once the NFWF grant agreement is finalized, Ag + Open Space will coordinate with Gold Ridge and Sonoma Resource Conservation Districts to lay out a series of workshops with local partners that have already established good contacts with landowners in geographically critical areas. This funding offers a good example of how to best leverage the PG&E funding to support technically sound projects in the most vulnerable areas and engage communities and landowners and work together for common goals.

We anticipate having a workshop schedule ready by the end of July and help prepare communities to design, fund and implement critical fuel management projects to bolster our collective wildfire resilience. As Chief Nicholls has stated many times, "It has taken over 100 years to create the conditions we are now facing, the solution will not happen overnight". However, we are making steady progress as indicated above.