

**Attachment 2**  
**Progress Update: CAR Goal 1**  
**Wildfire Preparedness & Resiliency**

Climate Action and Resiliency Goal 1 “Continue to invest in wildfire preparedness and resiliency strategies” has three objectives:

1. Provide educational resources to the community that promote and facilitate carbon neutral and fire hardening construction for new and existing homes.
2. Expand outreach and education on vegetation management and provide additional resources to landowners to help mitigate fire risk.
3. Leverage grant funding to support sustainable vegetation management program.

With important leadership from your Board, staff from the Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District (Ag+OS), Climate Action and Resiliency, Permit Sonoma, Sonoma Water, and the UC Cooperative Extension (UCCE) have advanced wildfire preparedness and resiliency in Sonoma County. Achievements include:

1. Integrated strategy and planning for wildfire prevention: In 2022 your Board approved Sonoma County’s first Multi-Jurisdictional Hazard Mitigation Plan, and the Climate Resilient Lands Strategy. In 2023 your Board approved the Community Wildfire Protection Plan. The plans are accompanied by a public-facing Hub Site and Portal that provides access to project planning and tracking as well as tools and supporting information.
2. Rigorous tools and decision-making framework: With funding dedicated by your Board, in 2022 UCCE developed and launched the Wildfire Fuel Mapper which is a parcel-scale, GIS-based planning tool that supports property owners and managers as they determine the most effective treatments for their properties and how to implement them. In 2023 Sonoma Water launched the Sonoma County Wildfire Resilience Planner, also funded by your Board, which is another GIS-based tool but focused at the landscape scale to prioritize where to invest funding for different types of wildfire resilience treatments, and to support outreach and engagement about those approaches.
3. Substantive, strategic investments: In addition to policy leadership, your Board has supported substantive, strategic investment in wildfire resilience building from County funds and grants from other agencies. These funds are providing grants to partner agencies, non-profits, and private individuals for vegetation management and structure hardening.
  - a. *Vegetation Management*: Between 2021 and 2023, your Board awarded to community partners \$11 million of the \$25 million allocated for vegetation management investments. These grants have funded projects addressing defensible space, Prescribed Fire, prescribed grazing, shaded fuel breaks, streamlining planning (a.k.a “VTPs”), and outreach & education. In addition, the

Hazardous Fuels Reduction Grant Program is investing \$7 million in fuels treatments, funded in part through FEMA.

- b. *Structure Hardening*: Staff is implementing two community-focused wildfire resilience grants: Wildfire Adapted (funded through the FEMA Hazard Mitigation Grant Program) and Wildfire Resilient Sonoma County (funded through the FEMA Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities Program). These grants, totaling roughly \$60 million, support community-wide wildfire resilience through outreach, evaluating individual properties to identify defensible space and home hardening needs, and providing rebates and incentives to property owners to complete the improvements.

### **As of July 2023...**

- Vegetation Management Grant program
  - The program has successfully awarded 65 grants worth \$11.5 million dollars to create: 82 miles of shaded fuel breaks, 64 miles of roadside treatments, long-term environmental compliance for large-scale projects (45,600 acres under California Vegetation Treatment Program), prescribed fire and grazing programs for fuels treatments (3045 acres), 630 homes with defensible space treatments, and a variety of educational programs to improve awareness and technical skills in wildfire prevention and preparedness.
  - These grants have supported homeowner associations, resource conservation districts, non-profit organizations, at-risk youth crews, fire professionals, Fire Safe Sonoma, Firewise communities and Local Community Wildfire Prevention Plan implementation, Communities Organized to Prepare for Emergencies, Tribal communities, private land preserves, and multiple landowners.
  - This work was coordinated by Ag + Open Space in collaboration with Permit Sonoma, CALFIRE, and many partners associated with the Vegetation Management Technical Advisory Committee.
    - Ag + Open Space staff worked with Permit Sonoma – Fire Prevention staff to sync the data entry and spatial data tools of the Sonoma County Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP).
    - This tool and website will be critical in tracking the treatments across the county, identifying gaps that need further support, and providing comprehensive information to landowners and communities on what they can do to proactively address wildfire resilience in collaboration with the County.
- **Hazardous Fuels Reduction Project, FEMA Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP) funding**
  - Project purpose is to conduct large-scale vegetation management, e.g., roadside fuel reduction or ridge-top shaded fuel breaks in 4 large project areas across the County.
  - Currently implementing Phase 1, which consists of project planning, identifying sites for fuels reduction projects, and environmental review.

Phase 1 will continue into early FY 24-25. Phase 1 spending will total \$1.5 million.

- Project has completed:
  - Extensive outreach to fire professionals and natural resource managers. Continuous participation at community meetings across the project areas.
  - Consolidated and reviewed 150+ community and partner-identified projects from fire professionals and local community plans.
  - 17 fuels reduction sites have been identified, with broad stakeholder support

All of Permit Sonoma's FEMA grant programs include a focus on education and providing resources to landowners about vegetation management, for both defensible space (within 100' of structures) and landscape-scale vegetation management.

- **Wildfire Adapted Sonoma County Project (SoCo Adapts), FEMA Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP) funding.**

- Approximately 7,400 parcels in 14 project areas across the County.
- All parcels in the project areas (7,400) have received a free defensible space assessment. This includes Improved and Unimproved (bare lot) parcels. All assessments have an educational focus on vegetation management within the defensible space zone.
- Project has funded mailers, postcards, and emails to residents in all project areas regarding the defensible space assessments and educational materials. Project has also funded staff attendance at community events in the project areas to provide educational resources.
- Phase 1 of the project consists of structure hardening and defensible space assessments in all project areas, and rebate program planning. Phase 1 will conclude in FY23-24.
- Project has planned a rebate program that will assist landowners with the cost of implementing defensible space and/or structure hardening activities suggested by the assessments. The rebate program is Phase 2 of the project, and has not yet been launched. Phase 2 will begin once FEMA completes environmental review under NEPA and releases Phase 2 funding to the County.

- **Wildfire Resilient Sonoma County, FEMA Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC) funding**

- Project activities taking place in three (3) project areas with 10,000 parcels.
- Current activities are focused on project planning, hiring, and initiating project procurements. During FY 23-24 the project will launch the other Phase 1 project activities, including:
  - Engagement with Subject Matter Experts from a wide variety of disciplines whose focus is on Wildfire Risk Reduction, including social scientists working on effective means to encourage behavioral

change, and experts in structure hardening, defensible space, large-scale fuels management, community fuel breaks.

- Defensible Space and curbside and/or whole-home Structure Hardening Assessments on all accessible parcels within the nearly 10,000 Improved and Unimproved parcels in the project footprint. All assessments have an educational focus.
- Planning for the Phase 2 rebate program which will assist landowners with the cost of implementing structure hardening activities suggested by assessments.
- Phase 1 budget for this project is \$7.2 million to be spent between FY23-24 to FY25-26
- **Hazardous Fuels Reduction Project, FEMA Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP) funding**
  - Project purpose is to conduct large-scale vegetation management, e.g., roadside fuel reduction or ridge-top shaded fuel breaks in 4 large project areas across the County.
  - Currently implementing Phase 1, which consists of project planning, identifying sites for fuels reduction projects, and environmental review. Phase 1 will continue into early FY 24-25. Phase 1 spending will total \$1.5 million.
  - Project has completed:
    - Extensive outreach to fire professionals and natural resource managers. Continuous participation at community meetings across the project areas.
    - Consolidated and reviewed 150+ community and partner-identified projects from fire professionals and local community plans.
    - 17 fuels reduction sites have been identified, with broad stakeholder support

**In FY24-25 and FY25-26, we expect...**

- **Hazardous Fuels Reduction Project**
  - In FY24-25 the project will close out Phase 1 and apply to FEMA for Phase 2 implementation funding. It is anticipated that Phase 2 will launch by the end of FY24-25, with an award of \$4.5 million.
  - Phase 2 implementation will occur from late FY24-25 to FY25-26, implementing vegetation management on 6-9 sites that were selected from Phase 1.
- Chipper Program annually operates typically between April and November, with an annual budget estimate of \$485,000.  
Defensible Space Inspection Program: Typically operates between May and November Current and expected continuing budget, \$600,000.
- **Wildfire Adapted Sonoma County Project (SoCo Adapts)**
  - In FY24-25 and FY25-26 we expect to launch and implement Phase 2, which will include a rebate program to assist landowners with the cost of

- implementing defensible space and/or structure hardening activities suggested by the assessments.
  - The rebate program will be implemented in partnership with Sonoma County Energy Independence Program. Residents will be able to apply for a rebate, and once their application is approved, they can complete the applicable structure hardening and/or defensible space activities and then receive partial reimbursement from the rebate program.
  - Launching Phase 2 of SoCo Adapts is dependent on FEMA's release of funds to the County.
  - Phase 2 of SoCo Adapts consists of two grants with combined future spending of \$6.5 million.
  - **Wildfire Resilient Sonoma County**
    - In FY24-25 the project's Phase 1 activities will continue, consisting of the same activities noted above.
    - Phase 1 budget for this project is \$7.2 million, and this will be spent between FY23-24 to FY25-26
    - In FY25-26 the project may close Phase 1 and launch Phase 2.
    - Phase 2 will be dependent on FEMA's release of funding, and it will consist of implementing a rebate program to assist landowners in completing defensible space and structure hardening activities, as well as landscape-scale vegetation management projects. Phase 2 grant award will be approximately \$40 million.
4. Non-traditional financing for structure hardening: In 2020, your Board approved the addition of wildfire hardening projects to the list of allowable improvements for the Sonoma County Energy Independence Program (SCEIP). Through SCEIP, residential and commercial property owners can finance allowable improvements with funds from the County that are repaid through a voluntary tax assessment on the property where the improvements are made. The improvements must be permanently affixed to the property. Since wildfire hardening projects have been allowed they have grown to account for over 30% of the projects funded each year through SCEIP.
5. Wildfire Risk Reduction & Insurance Pilot: Beginning in Spring of 2022, staff engaged the insurance industry and other stakeholders in the development of a pilot program to leverage the resulting reduced wildfire risk and have it be certified and factored into wildfire insurance decisions. Although the pilot program is on hold while disruption in the insurance sector in California settles out, staff continues to advocate for opportunities to advance this approach to further incentivize wildfire risk reduction by property owners and to help address challenges property owners in Sonoma County are facing securing wildfire insurance.

Community outreach and education on wildfire preparedness and resiliency. On June 23-24, 2023, Ag + Open Space, Gold Ridge Resource Conservation District (RCD), UC Cooperative Extension in collaboration with the Sonoma County Forest Conservation Working Group hosted

the 2023 *Living with Fire: Sonoma County Forest Conservation Conference*. This event was hosted at Shone Farm, Santa Rosa Junior College's (SRJC) property northwest of Santa Rosa. 137 participants were provided a wide variety of learning platforms to engage with professional foresters, fire fighters, resource managers, non-profit organizations and county agencies and departments. Day 1 activities included a Resource Fair with 25 organizations and vendors, Plenary sessions featuring landowner experiences with fire and recovery, classroom sessions with CALFIRE and SRJC wildfire resilience experts, Permit Sonoma staff and RCD foresters, and outdoor sessions with forest practitioners and SRJC management professionals. Day 2 consisted of field trips to sites like Pepperwood Preserve, Saddle Mountain Open Space Preserve, Coast Ridge Community Forests, and Green Valley Mill and Farm where participants enjoyed guided tours of fuel treatments on the ground and engaged with resource managers and landowners on best management practices.

The *Living with Fire* Conference launched the next phase of technical assistance and capacity building in wildfire resilience, watershed protection, forest management, carbon sequestration and resource management to landowners. Starting in September, Ag + Open Space will be working with Gold Ridge and Sonoma Resource Conservation Districts to conduct a series of landowner-focused, local workshops in high priority areas along the Russian River watershed and replicated to other critical areas within the County. These workshops will provide good facetime between forest landowners and community organizations with experts in vegetation management and wildfire resilience, soil erosion prevention, watershed protection, carbon sequestration and forest resource management. In addition, landowners will be given the opportunity to host site visits to their own property by RCD staff and partner organizations to strategize and plan for fuel treatments and best management practices specific to their property. One of the many goals is to improve the technical capacity of landowners and communities to manage their resources and connect them with the appropriate funding sources such as the Vegetation Management Grant program, CALFIRE fire prevention or forest healthy grants, US Forest Service Community Wildfire Defense Grant program, and others.

In addition, staff has provided educational materials and webinars to Sonoma County communities, including the Home Resilience Guide, released in 2022 in English, and in 2023 in a dual English/Spanish format. Webinars have focused on home hardening improvements and landscaping that is both drought and wildfire resilient. Staff is developing a consolidated web access for grants and financing, that may will also include certification of wildfire risk reduction when that program is available.

In 2023 your Board approved a program coordination structure to integrate input from topic-focused advisory groups with a goal of advancing wildfire resilience in each topic area, and developing an integrated, sustainable program to promote and maintain wildfire resilience in the future. Staff is currently launching that effort.