

Healthy Forest Ad-Hoc Committee Quarterly Update

July to September 2022

Purpose and Scope

The purpose of the Healthy Forest Ad Hoc is to consolidate and coordinate the efforts of County departments/agencies to reach collective goals that protect and improve the conditions of our forests and natural landscapes while reducing the risk of wildfire throughout the county. The Ad Hoc will recommend actions for full Board consideration that can be taken in vegetation management, land protection and ecosystem services to ensure the ecological functions of our forested and natural landscapes are stable and improving over time. The Ad Hoc will provide input on department/agency activities such as the Vegetation Management Grant Program, Federally-funded wildfire resiliency efforts, parcel and landscape level planning tools, and County Tree Ordinance using the best available data to support these goals.

The Ad Hoc Committee will propose specific strategies to leverage and utilize the remaining funds from the PG&E Settlement Funds to best protect our communities and landscapes from large scale wildfires and improve the health of our natural resources. It is the intention of this Ad Hoc to meet monthly and prepare recommendations for full Board review in September or October of 2022.

Ad Hoc Members

Supervisor James Gore
Supervisor Lynda Hopkins

Attendees

County Staff

- Ag + Open Space (lead)
- Permit Sonoma
- Sonoma Water
- Regional Parks
- Climate Action and Resiliency Division
- UC Cooperative Extension
- County Administrator's Office
- County Counsel
- As-needed subject matter support may also be provided by other departments and staff

Meetings Held

7/28/2022 – Agenda topics: Provide update on the progress and focus of the Vegetation Management Technical Advisory Committee meetings. Review proposed strategies and initiatives to support vegetation management, resilience to wildfire and healthy natural landscapes. Define Ad Hoc priorities and expectations.

9/29/2022 – Agenda topics: Provide presentation to Ad Hoc Committee on the progress made across the county to address wildfire resilience, community safety and natural resources health. Report out on advances on all CLEE recommendations and the manner in which County departments and special districts are working together and collaborating with CALFIRE and local non-profit organizations to implement a comprehensive and sustainable effort to reduce the threat of wildfire and improve the health of our natural landscapes.

Status

On July 28, 2022, the Healthy Forest Ad Hoc Committee met with Ag + Open Space staff and County Counsel to focus on clarifying the Committee's priorities and expectations. Ag + Open Space staff presented a proposed strategy of addressing all CLEE Report recommendations and preparing initial recommendations over the course of monthly meetings with the Vegetation Management Technical Advisory Committee (TAC). The Ad Hoc Committee supported this proposed strategy.

On September 29, 2022, the TAC presented an update on current vegetation management efforts across County departments and special districts and initial recommendations based on the CLEE Report thematic areas. The TAC's advances shared with the Ad Hoc Committee include:

- 1) Immediate Vegetation Treatments – 46 approved vegetation management grants across Sonoma County during 2021 and 2022 grant cycles.
- 2) Coordination and collaboration among key County departments, special districts, and state and local partners such as the improvement of the Vegetation Management Grant program and implementation of the FEMA-funded grant activities.
- 3) Outreach and education – hosting over 25 community workshops, webinars and collaborative meetings and site visits to improve community awareness of home-hardening, defensible space, and landscape level vegetation management.
- 4) Data management, technological tools and prioritization of planning and treatments efforts through the work of Sonoma Water, UC Cooperative Extension, Permit Sonoma, and partners.
- 5) Capacity building and workforce development through the efforts of Santa Rosa Junior College, Fire Forward and many partner organizations committed to improving our skilled vegetation professionals.

The Healthy Forest Ad Hoc Committee will be hosting a Community Outreach meeting on October 26, 2022 to share the advances listed above and to help describe the types of vegetation treatments and home-hardening and defensible space programs that are being funded to help protect communities and protect the functional capacity of ecosystems to provide clean water, support wildlife, protect rare plants and sequester carbon.

Then on December 13, 2022, the Ad Hoc, along with County staff, intend to present to the Board of Supervisors a comprehensive approach on how County departments and special districts can work better together with each other and partners to fulfill many of the objectives laid out in the CLEE Report, and propose actions that can enhance collaboration and meet the needs of communities to reduce the threat of wildfire and enhance our natural landscapes. Ag + Open Space staff will also present initial recommendations as to how PG&E settlement funding could be spent in Fiscal Year 2022/23 to accomplish the many vegetation management objectives.

Vegetation Management Grant Program – Ag + Open Space has 46 grant agreements with a wide variety of fuel treatments including roadside treatments, chipper programs, prescribed grazing, prescribed fire, shaded fuel breaks, and educational programs throughout the county. Together with Permit Sonoma and CALFIRE, Ag + Open Space has worked with grantees to maximize the long-term sustainable efforts of community groups that may have been adversely affected by wildfire, in areas of high wildfire potential, or in the process of developing promising collaborative projects to enhance community safety and the health of our natural landscapes.

Ag + Open Space has developed self-reporting, monitoring program whereby each grantee is required to submit fiscal and narrative reports every 6 months to describe the progress they have

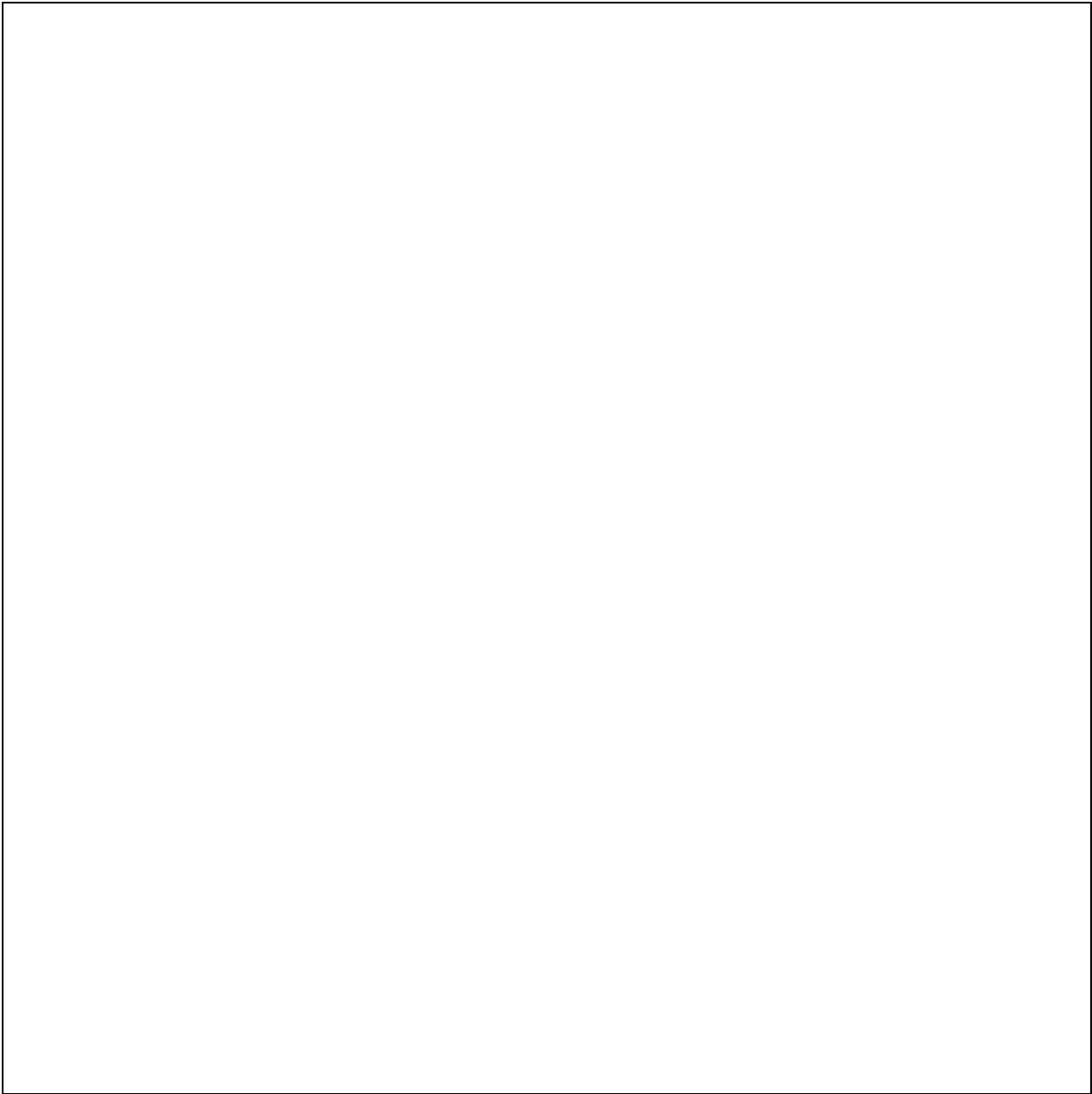
made and to ensure each grant project will be completed in a timely manner. Also, the Vegetation Management Coordinator is completely site visits to each of the 2021 and 2022 grant projects to ensure compliance with the grant conditions and look for opportunities to host cross training and sharing of experiences among grantees and neighboring landowners. The Wildlands Conservancy hosted the first technical workshop at Jenner Headlands Preserve on Shaded Fuel Breaks in August.

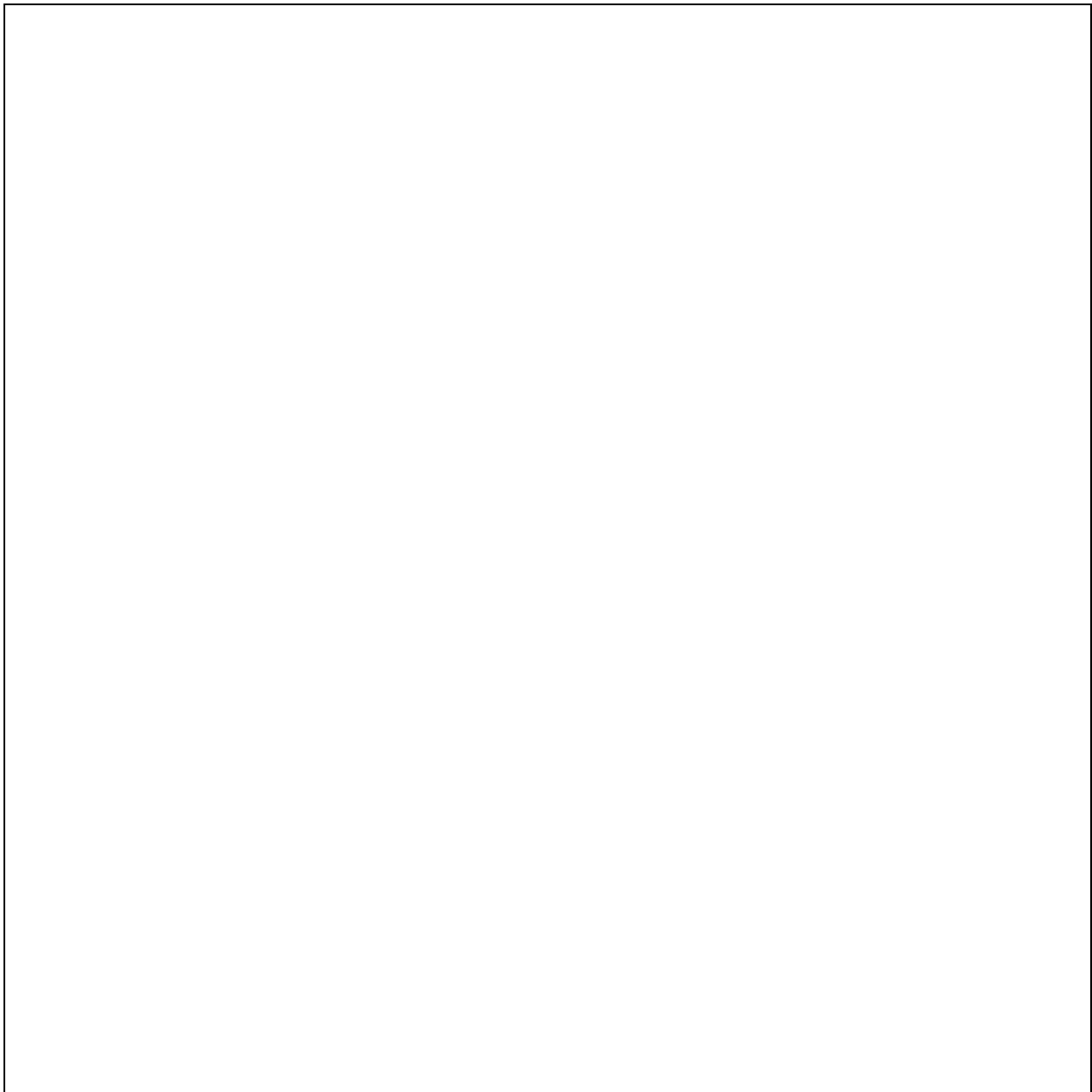
Ag + Open Space is working with Permit Sonoma to better define roles and responsibilities for appropriate fuel treatments and structure hardening efforts close to population centers while identifying areas with critical ecosystem services or ecological functionality that need to be protected or technical prescriptions adjusted to protect watershed health, wildlife corridors, or threatened or rare species.

One of the promising grant agreements joins Sonoma Ecology Center, UC Cooperative Extension, Occidental Center for Arts & Ecology, and Ag + Open Space to develop a Sonoma County-specific Vegetation Management Handbook to describe best management practices and articulate how to best accomplish landowner objectives.

Hazardous Fuels Management Project –Permit Sonoma has hired key personnel to assist in the development of the FEMA-funded Hazardous Fuels Management Project including two senior environmental specialists, grant coordinator, and administrative support. Based on the experience of working with the Vegetation Management Grant program, they have adopted some of the strategies and integrating the Vegetation Management Technical Advisory Committee to form geographically specific Coordination Teams to help in Phase I of this grant.

Wildfire Resilience Planner –Sonoma Water has continued to make excellent progress on the Wildfire Resilience Planner tool by presenting to the Technical Advisory Committee and subsequently with County departments and special districts to ground-truth and improve the tool to best meet expectations and use the best science to prioritize the work of each of these organizations and ideally the general public's efforts to reduce the threat of wildfire and improve the health of our natural systems.





Upcoming Meetings

- October 20, 2022 – Healthy Forest Ad Hoc Committee – Review of initial recommendations to support vegetation management, resilience to wildfire and healthy natural landscapes presented on 9/29/2022. Discuss key messages and suggested agenda for the Community Outreach meeting on 10/26/2022. (Ag + Open Space – lead)
- October 26, 2022 – Community Outreach meeting – Healthy Forest Ad Hoc Committee to present an update on county-wide progress and seek input from local communities for wildfire resilience support (Ag + Open Space – lead)
- November 4, 2022 – Healthy Forest Ad Hoc Committee – Finalize initial recommendations to support vegetation management, resilience to wildfire and healthy natural landscapes for full Board consideration and discussion. Discuss feedback from Community Outreach meeting on 10/26/2022. (Ag + Open Space – lead)

- December 13, 2022 – Board of Supervisors – Present initial recommendations for supporting vegetation management, wildfire resilience and healthy natural landscapes for consideration and discussion.
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Fiscal Update		
Project	Board Date	Amount
Allocate \$25M PGE Settlement Funds to Vegetation Management	10/6/2020	\$25,000,000
2021 Community Grants for Vegetation Management	3/23/2021	-\$3,725,494
Santa Rosa Junior College Funding – Professional Development program	3/23/2021	-\$500,000
Vegetation Management Coordinator Salary & Benefits (3 years)	3/23/2021	-\$660,000
Permit Sonoma staffing for CEQA support	7/13/2021	-\$300,000
Conditionally Approved Projects (\$3,000,000 set aside only \$2,000,000 needed to fund Grant Agreements)	7/13/2021; updated 4/19/22	-\$2,000,000
Community grants for Vegetation Management - 2022	4/19/2022	-\$3,300,000
Technical & Planning Assistance for community grants	4/19/2022	-\$500,000
<i>Vegetation Management Allocations To Date:</i>		<i>-\$10,985,494</i>
<i>Remaining Balance:</i>		<i>\$14,014,506</i>