



Legislation Text

File #: 2023-0348, **Version:** 1

To: Board of Supervisors

Department or Agency Name(s): Permit Sonoma Fire Prevention Division

Staff Name and Phone Number: Caerleon Safford, Department Analyst (707) 565-3353

Vote Requirement: Majority

Supervisorial District(s): Countywide

Title:

Sonoma County Community Wildfire Protection Plan 2023 Update

Recommended Action:

Accept a report on and authorize the Chair of the Board of Supervisors to sign the Sonoma County Community Wildfire Protection Plan 2023 Update, and find these activities do not constitute a project or are otherwise exempt under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA Section 15262).

Executive Summary:

Staff recommends that the Sonoma County Community Wildfire Protection Plan 2023 Update (2023 CWPP Update) be signed by the Chair of the Board of Supervisors, as required by CWPP procedures stipulated in the Healthy Forests Restoration Act of 2003 (HFRA). On September 24, 2019, the Board accepted two grants from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Hazard Mitigation Grant Program to create the Sonoma County Multijurisdictional Hazard Mitigation Plan Update 2021 (MJHMP) and to update the 2016 Sonoma County CWPP. On December 7, 2021, The Board adopted the MJHMP.

In accordance with the Board's direction and the requirements of the HFRA, the 2023 CWPP Update reflects collaborative development, identifies wildfire risks and mitigation measures across the County, and lists community-driven Risk Reduction Priorities and specific project recommendations that agencies and community groups can use to develop projects. Projects that are listed in a CWPP often receive additional consideration for grant funding from various federal and state grant programs. The CWPP is a planning document and does not commit the County or other organizations to implement a particular project. Like the MJHMP, it is intended to identify community priorities for reducing wildfire impacts throughout the County. After the 2023 CWPP Update is signed, it will be administratively incorporated into the Sonoma County annex of the MJHMP. The MJHMP and CWPP will also be incorporated by reference into the upcoming update of the General Plan Safety Element.

Discussion:

About the Healthy Forests Restoration Act & Community Wildfire Protection Plans

The Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) process is defined by the Healthy Forests Restoration Act (HFRA), passed by Congress in 2003. The HFRA sets forth three requirements for a CWPP with the intent of enhancing collaboration between stakeholders from federal, state, local agencies, and community groups as they search for solutions to wildfire threats to the built and natural environment. The three CWPP requirements are:

1. It is collaboratively developed with input from agencies and community members;
2. It identifies and prioritizes treatment areas, mitigation strategies and treatments and
3. It recommends measures to reduce the ignitability of structures.

According to federal CWPP preparation guidance, a completed CWPP must include a signature page with at least three signatures: the applicable local government, local fire departments, and the state entity responsible for forestry (CAL FIRE). Through this Board item, staff recommends that the Board Chair sign the 2023 CWPP Update, thereby providing the local government's signature.

The 2023 CWPP Update

In accordance with HFRA requirements and guidelines, Permit Sonoma has completed the 2023 Update to the Sonoma County Community Wildfire Protection Plan (2023 CWPP Update). The 2023 CWPP Update is a thorough revision of the 2016 Sonoma County CWPP, with a robust analysis of current data to reflect changes in the physical and human environment following the 2017 Sonoma Complex and subsequent fires. The 2023 CWPP Update better serves Sonoma County and identifies wildfire risks and community-driven Risk Reduction Priorities to use when designing wildfire risk reduction strategies.

The goals for the 2023 CWPP Update are to:

1. Identify, assess, and coordinate risk-reduction strategies;
2. Prioritize fuel-reduction areas;
3. Promote wildfire awareness, especially information about structural ignitability and defensible space in at-risk communities across the county; and
4. Carry out annual updating of hazardous fuel reduction areas and treatments and evaluate progress and effectiveness to recommend changes as appropriate.

The 2023 CWPP Update contains valuable information about the County and its residents, wildfire history, house outwards risk reduction strategies, wildfire preparedness, local ecosystems, a Wildfire Risk Index, broad goals and objectives for wildfire risk reduction, a community-driven Risk Reduction Priorities list that agencies and community groups can use to develop projects. The Project Entry Portal and CWPP Project List located on the Hub Site allow for groups to list risk reduction projects. After the 2023 CWPP Update is signed, the CWPP will be annexed to the Sonoma County Annex of the Sonoma County Multijurisdictional Hazard Mitigation Plan Update 2021 (MJHMP), and when the Safety Element of the General Plan is updated it will be annexed to that planning document as well.

CWPPs are intended to be "living documents" and as such, can be reviewed and updated by plan developers over the 5-year lifespan. Appendices, including project lists, links to relevant tools and documents, etc., can be amended throughout the life of the document. Smaller community-based CWPPs have been and will continue to be developed across Sonoma County to identify localized threats and targeted solutions. To connect the 2023 CWPP Update to these community-based CWPPs, online links are included in Appendix B and on the CWPP Hub Site. These links will be updated as necessary over the life of the plan. Additionally, projects entered onto the CWPP Project Entry Portal, following screening for basic criteria, will be added to the Sonoma County CWPP Project List and added to Appendix A.

Collaboration and Public Input in the 2023 CWPP Update

The 2023 CWPP Update was developed with Fire Safe Sonoma, Inc. (a non-profit Fire Safe Council), CAL FIRE Sonoma Lake Napa Unit, the Sonoma County Fire Chiefs Association, Sonoma County Ag + Open Space District, University of California Cooperative Extension, members of the CWPP Steering Committee, stakeholders from federal, state and local agencies and community groups, and residents. Extensive input was received from many organizations, and every attempt was made to include divergent points of view.

Opportunities for comment included 13 virtual community meetings and 5 CWPP steering committee meetings throughout the planning process. All community meetings were presented in both English and Spanish. Staff used a variety of methods to encourage engagement at community meetings, including outreach through groups such as Fire Safe Sonoma and the Sonoma County Forest Working Group.

The first five community meetings were held to solicit community values and risk reduction priorities, one in each of the Supervisorial Districts. The CWPP Steering Committee met four times to review feedback from the community meetings and develop the first draft CWPP Update. Six community meetings were held to review and receive community input on the first draft CWPP Update; one in each Supervisorial District and one conducted solely in Spanish. More than 134 comments from the public and agencies were received for the first draft. The comments were reviewed and responded to and revisions were incorporated into a second draft CWPP.

The second draft was sent out for internal, agency, and CWPP Steering Committee review. After these revisions were incorporated the second draft CWPP Update was posted for public comment, and two more community meetings were held to review the draft and receive feedback. Again, more than 150 comments were received. Robust engagement by a broad range of community members and interest groups is a part of the CWPP collaborative process. The number of comments and attendance at public meetings is an indication of broad community interest in wildfire risk reduction. The 2023 CWPP Update and the collaboratively developed Risk Reduction Priorities contained therein reflects this strong and beneficial community engagement process.

CWPP Hub Site: Wildfire Risk Index and Other Interactive Tools and Education

In accordance with the Board's direction upon the acceptance of the CWPP grant on September 24, 2019, a Geographic Information System-based Wildfire Risk Index (WRI) was developed for the 2023 CWPP Update. This high-level model predicts relative wildfire risk at a landscape scale using 100-acre hexagons. The WRI can help evaluate areas for wildfire risk reduction projects, but like any landscape scale analysis using remote sensing data it is not to be considered definitive at scales finer than its source data allows. At the local- or parcel-scale, these indices should be used as one information source among many to evaluate risk. The WRI and interactive mapping tools are located on the CWPP Hub Site (<https://sonoma-county-cwpp-hub-site-sonomacounty.hub.arcgis.com/>).

The Sonoma County CWPP Project Entry Portal, located on the CWPP Hub Site (<https://arcg.is/1vSPb10>), provides a central place where wildfire resilience project proponents and stakeholders, including agencies, non-governmental organizations, landowners, etc., can enter information about proposed wildfire resilience projects. After entry, projects will be screened for alignment with CWPP risk reduction priorities and factors, such as landowner agreement to list the project. Screened projects will be added to the Sonoma County CWPP Project List (Appendix A of the CWPP) and will be viewable on the County-wide map of prospective projects. The Sonoma County CWPP Project List also allows for trend and gap analyses that can identify project areas and project types that are underrepresented or where collaborative efforts might increase efficiency. Over

time, this will help to increase local and regional government capacity to build and maintain forest health and fire prevention projects as recommended by the Governor's Forest Management Task force.

CEQA Compliance

The CWPP is not subject to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15060(b) and (c), because adopting the CWPP will not result in a direct or reasonably foreseeable indirect physical change in the environment, and because it is not a project as defined in CEQA Guidelines section 15378, as it has no potential for resulting in physical change to the environment, directly or indirectly. Additionally, or alternatively, the CWPP is exempt from CEQA pursuant to the CEQA Guidelines Sections 15262, which exempts feasibility and planning studies for possible future actions that have not been approved, adopted, or funded from the requirement to prepare an environmental impact report or negative declaration provided environmental factors are considered. The CWPP provides recommendations for potential future actions and information to plan, assess, and prioritize wildfire prevention and preparation activities, including public education and fuel reduction projects, and enables such activities to be eligible for State and federal funding. The CWPP does not commit the County or any other entity to any particular course of action. Future activities are contingent upon motivated project proponents, available funding, and review and approval by the authorizing jurisdiction. Any activities that are recommended or included in the CWPP Project Entry Portal or Project List may be modified or denied in their entirety. If any wildfire prevention and preparation activities are later undertaken, the public agencies authorizing such activities will be required to comply with CEQA, as applicable

Strategic Plan:

This item directly supports the County's Five-year Strategic Plan and is aligned with the following pillar, goal, and objective.

Pillar: Climate Action and Resiliency

Goal: Goal 1: Continue to invest in wildfire preparedness and resiliency strategies

Objective: Objective 1: Provide educational resources to the community that promote and facilitate carbon neutral and fire hardening construction for new and existing homes. Objective 2: Expand outreach and education on vegetation management and provide additional resources to landowners to help mitigate fire risk.

Prior Board Actions:

12/7/2021 Board of Supervisors adopted the 2021 Sonoma County MJHMP.

9/24/2019 Board of Supervisors authorized the County to accept the CWPP and MJHMP grants with the FEMA HMGP program, administered by CalOES.

9/20/2016 Board of Supervisors signed the 2016 Sonoma County CWPP.

FISCAL SUMMARY

Narrative Explanation of Fiscal Impacts:

There are no fiscal impacts from the requested action, which is to have the Chair of the Board of Supervisors sign the 2023 CWPP Update. The planning process was funded by a \$200,000 grant from the FEMA Hazard Mitigation Grant Program, which provided 75% federal funding and required a 25% local match. On 9/24/2019 the Board authorized acceptance of this award and set aside the 25% local match from the General Fund Reserve Recovery and Resiliency set aside fund.

Narrative Explanation of Staffing Impacts (If Required):

N/A

Attachments:

Att 1 Sonoma County Community Wildfire Protection Plan 2023 Update

Att 2 Staff PowerPoint

Related Items "On File" with the Clerk of the Board:

N/A