

## **Alameda County Community Wildfire Protection Plan Summary Working Session #3 – May 26, 2011**

1. **Introduction.** Attendees introduced themselves, where they live or work and their perspective, interest or experience with wildfire

- James Art, Fire Protection Engineer
- Gil Bendix, Diablo Fire Safe Council
- Fred Booker, Alameda Master Gardeners
- Mary Ellen Carroll, Emergency Coordination, San Francisco Public Utilities Commission (SF PUC) - Calaveras and San Antonio Reservoirs
- Robin Freeman, Merritt Community College Environmental Management Technology Program
- Barbara Goldenberg, Shepherd Canyon
- Marilyn Goldhaler, Claremont Canyon Conservancy
- Assistant Fire Marshal Leroy Griffin, Oakland Fire Department
- Jerry Kent, Claremont Canyon Conservancy
- Battalion Chief Mike Martin, CALFIRE
- Cheryl Miller, Diablo Fire Safe Council
- Joe Naras, SFPUC (Calaveras and San Antonio Reservoirs)
- Jeanne Perkins, Natural Hazard Mitigation and Recovery Consultant
- Tim Ramirez, CCSF/ SFPUC (Calaveras and San Antonio Reservoirs)
- Jean Robertson, California Native Plant Society
- Judy Thomas, Merritt College Horticultural Program, Sequoyah Heights
- Penny Spear, East Bay Municipal Utility District Ranger Supervisor
- Assistant Fire Chief John Swanson, East Bay Regional Park District
- Jay Swardenski, Fremont Fire Department
- Ciara Wood, Diablo Fire Safe Council

### **2. Recap of CWPP Planning process to date**

Cheryl Miller, Executive Coordinator, Diablo Fire Safe Council provided an overview of a Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP). The PowerPoint and notes from the previous meeting with additional detail is available at [http://www.diablofiresafe.org/ala\\_co\\_CWPP.html](http://www.diablofiresafe.org/ala_co_CWPP.html)

A CWPP is a written document, mutually agreed upon by local, state and federal representatives and stakeholders that identifies how a community will reduce its risks from wildland fire. CWPPs are authorized and defined in Title I of the Healthy Forest Restoration Act (HFRA). This Act was passed by Congress on November 21, 2003 and signed into law on December 3, 2003. The HFRA established unprecedented financial incentives for communities to take the lead role in community wildfire protection planning. As an example, the group reviewed the contents of the Contra Costa CWPP, approved in 2009. (The document is available for download at <http://www.diablofiresafe.org/publications.html> - CWPP). In order to be federally recognized the CWPP must be signed by three entities: applicable local government (i.e., counties or cities); local fire department(s) and the state entity responsible for forest management – CAL FIRE. Three minimum requirements that also must be met: collaboration; prioritized fuel reduction and treatment of structural ignitability.

At the second meeting the group also brainstormed what the Alameda County CWPP should include and why is the plan is of value to us. The ideas can be grouped around several themes: Fire in Alameda County; Fire Suppression; Access and Traffic management; Socio-Political/ Neighborhood Issues; Awareness, Outreach and Education; Fuel Reduction; Structure ignitability. See meeting summary for a full list of ideas.

The eight step planning process, anticipated timeframe, key outcomes, results and deliverables were also reviewed (see [http://www.diablofiresafe.org/pdf/Planning\\_Overview.pdf](http://www.diablofiresafe.org/pdf/Planning_Overview.pdf) for the Overview).

### 3. Existing Risk and Hazard Assessments

The group reviewed existing risk and hazard assessments. A list of the resources and references and their web links was provided. Many of these resources are part of larger documents such as General Plans, Long Range Development Plans, Safety Elements, local or regional Multi-hazard Mitigation Plans, or environmental documents. A draft “Homeowner Survey” was also distributed and suggestions made for revisions and its use. The survey will be used at community workshops and available online to help gather participant’s concerns, opinions and awareness of wildfire. It was also recommended by participants that the survey be made available for homeowner associations to share with their members.

CWPPs identify and prioritize areas based on determined levels of risk and exiting hazards. Several assessments were reviewed. Existing risk and hazard assessments were grouped into three categories with 5 factors:

#### I. Potential for Fire to Occur

##### I. Risk of Fire Occurrence

- a. Fire History Locations: Alameda County has a history of fire; the Tunnel Fire in 1991 being the most damaging. A fire history map shows many fires throughout the county over the past century. Three areas show clusters of fire: 1) East Bay Hills – Berkeley, Oakland, San Leandro; 2) East part of county along 580, 3) Southeast part of county in remote areas southeast of Del Valle reservoir.
- b. Fire History Patterns: A look at the 15 fires in the vicinity of the Caldecott Tunnel from 1923 – 1991 shows a common pattern of ignitions during critical Diablo Wind conditions in the Fall; occurring every 10 – 20 years.
- c. Cause of Fire: As a part of their management plan, East Bay Municipal Utilities District looked at causative agents for fires on their watershed from 1980-1997. Many ignitions were “unknown,” but known causes were primarily human and included arson, camp and picnic activities, powerlines, fireworks, fuel reduction activities, smoking, children, auto, rekindles. With only 2 out of the 174 fires analyzed caused by lighting. EBMUD used this information to help identify high fire risk areas including:
  - All interface or intermix areas
  - High use or recreational areas
  - High travel transportation corridors with roadside grasslands
  - They also include areas with clusters  $\geq$  ignitions 1980 -1997 and clusters 3-5 fire ignitions in 10 years.

AC Swanson, East Bay Regional Parks District, shared that they have recently completed an analysis of over 1,900 fires in Contra Costa and Alameda Counties with similar findings on cause of ignition. There was general consensus among the group that the first three findings could be extrapolated to address causes throughout Alameda County. However, they felt the last item about specific numbers of fires may not apply everywhere.

- d. Fire Weather: Another factor that has been assessed is fire weather or periods of “Diablo winds” from the east with low relative humidity (rH) and higher temperatures. Alameda and Contra Costa Counties have 11 remote automated weather stations (RAWS) that provide us localized information on the weather. In addition NOAA provides “red flag warnings” and “Fire Weather Watch” of periods of high fire danger. [www.wrh.noaa.gov/firewx/cfw/](http://www.wrh.noaa.gov/firewx/cfw/)
- e. Communities at Risk: In association with the development of the National Fire Plan the Federal Register published a list of Communities at Risk in 2001. Eleven cities in Alameda

County were identified. This lists provides a starting point to identify high priority areas: Berkeley, Castro Valley, Dublin, Fairview, Fremont, Hayward, Livermore, Oakland, Pleasanton, San Leandro and Union City.

## 2. Fuel Hazards

- a. CAL FIRE Statewide Hazard Assessment for State Responsibility Area (SRA) and Local Responsibility Area (LRA) Maps. Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zones are identified on these maps based on:

- Flame length modeled based on vegetation, topography and weather.
- Crown fire potential, ember production and ember movement
- Likelihood of burning based on fire history and other factors.

See [www.fire.ca.gov/fire\\_prevention/downloads/FHSZ\\_model\\_primer.pdf](http://www.fire.ca.gov/fire_prevention/downloads/FHSZ_model_primer.pdf) for more information on model used.

Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zones are clustered in three areas in State Responsibility Areas (SRA):

- East Bay Hills (Oakland Berkeley); San Leandro – Castro Valley Hills;
- Hayward Hills; Union City- Fremont hills; Pleasanton Ridge – Kilcare Woods; Palomares- Niles Canyon. East county wind generating area; and
- Mines Road drainages including Del Valle recreation area.

Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zones in Local Responsibility Areas (LRA) include: Cities of Berkeley, Piedmont, Oakland; San Leandro; Castro Valley; Pleasanton: Sunol/ Scotts Corner/ Kilcare Woods

- b. More detailed wildfire hazard assessments have been done in some areas of the county such as the East Bay Regional Park District's Wildfire Hazard Reduction and Resource Management Plan. The plan for portions of the east bay hills identifies vegetation and modeled potential fire behavior (using the model FLAMMAP). The plan identifies treatment areas located within 200' of homes with flame length greater than 8 feet; high potential for torching and spotting (ember production) or strategic fire route or safety zone; or areas that are currently maintained that would have flame length greater than 8 feet if not maintained.

## II. What to Protect

3. Homes, businesses and critical infrastructure to protect: In addition to looking at fuel hazards it is also important to identify things that should be protected from the hazards. Some of the things to protect include:

- Homes and businesses
- Watersheds: The San Francisco Water Alameda Watershed Plan (in Sunol) around Calaveras and San Antonio reservoirs identified areas of potential high fire severity on watershed. EBMUD also has identified their watersheds.
- Other things to consider: transportation and utilities

In recognition of things to protect several cities have locally designated areas that further refine CAL FIRE's very high fire hazard severity zones:

- Both Berkeley and Oakland have special requirements for property owners to maintain defensible space. They also send out annual notices and inspect properties in this area.
- Fremont, Dublin and Hayward have special requirements for new construction in specific areas.
- In 2005 Berkeley got a FEMA grant for an even more detail assessment of Fire Risk. They looked at 5 categories of factors and rated each home. Results can be viewed on their web page [map.ci.berkeley.ca.us/home\\_fire\\_risk/](http://map.ci.berkeley.ca.us/home_fire_risk/).

4. Other values to protect
    - Critical wildlife habitat. The East Alameda County Conservation Plan identifies critical habitat in the eastern part of the county.
    - Significant recreation and scenic areas
    - Areas of historical, economic or cultural value
- III. Protection Capabilities
5. Local Preparedness and Fire Fighting Capabilities  
 Local preparedness and firefighting capabilities include community preparedness & emergency personnel response. For example, the City of Pleasanton not only identifies “Special Fire Protection” areas but also identifies areas outside of its response zones and requires new development includes sprinklers, special construction etc. to respond to these conditions.

**Discussion of Existing Assessments:**

After reviewing the Existing Risk and Hazard Assessments the group discussed if there were:

- Other factors not mentioned that increase risk of fire occurrence
- Other areas that should be identified as high hazard
- Other locations where homes business & critical infrastructure should be identified for protection
- Other things to protect
- Other preparedness or capabilities to improve

Discussion by participants included recognizing location of earthquake fault lines and location of utilities, bridges and how these could impact access, reliability of water mains and potential ignition sources (such as gas lines and fuel lines). It was pointed out that earthquake vulnerability is a regional issue, rather than local or countywide. Some of the damaging earthquakes, such as the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake, impacted areas far away from the epicenter not just adjacent to the fault line. General consensus was that it is more appropriate that Public Utilities Commission look at this issue.

The group discussed that anticipated response time or ISO rating might be criteria to consider. Local fire department representatives pointed out that most areas of the county have a good response time/ ISO ratings, except for a very few places. This may not be a helpful criteria to identify hazardous areas.

The group also discussed that more general risk or hazard criteria might be helpful, rather than geographic locations. Criteria might include homes located near wildlands, on ridges, in areas of high fuel loads, or with certain construction characteristics.

Other things to protect should include:

- Community colleges
- Schools (public schools) – some of the group felt private schools should be classified as businesses
- Hospital and other health related facilities
- Other facilities sensitive to smoke from wildfire or potential negative health consequences
- General discussion over need for further legislation to require changes versus community based changes.

It was generally agreed to use the existing assessments as a starting point for the workshops and CWPP. Some felt it was more important to use available information to more forward and refine assessments as we practical.

**4. Ranking and Prioritizing Overall Risk and Values**

A draft “Risk Assessment” chart was distributed to get feedback on its usefulness for the upcoming public workshops. The chart identified some of the places from the existing assessments and left room

to fill in whether the various factors were high, medium or low to reflect the overall risk and values. The group had the following recommendations:

- The chart would be more helpful if examples were given – e.g. the boxes were filled in or there were images shown explaining what a high fuel hazard might look like versus a medium or low.
- Using a list instead of the little boxes would be less frustrating. Members felt that in most people do not have enough information to fill in the boxes, but would be able to list their main concerns around their neighborhoods. Similarly for the preliminary priority ratings – being able to list instead of trying to rank high medium or low would be preferable.
- The presentation also needs to show how these assessments help identify potential treatment techniques, projects and mitigation measures to avoid undesired impacts. The various risk and hazards and priority ratings will be matched with programs/ projects - what to do and where - to reduce damage from wildfire. These could be projects aimed at ignition reduction, hazardous vegetative fuel, structure ignitability, fire fighting capabilities or access/ egress improvements.
- The existing best management practices, mitigation measures, areas to avoid, things to protect and management techniques that have already been identified by the past planning efforts need to be incorporated into the process.

**NOTE:** Additional input to Cheryl Miller [DFSCMiller@comcast.net](mailto:DFSCMiller@comcast.net) by June 15<sup>th</sup> to incorporate information into the Preliminary Community Risk Assessment to be shared at Community Workshops

## 5. Community Workshops

Three community workshops are proposed in various parts of the county:

Northwest – Trudeau Center, Oakland.

Southwest – Fremont.

East – Pleasanton or Dublin.

Target dates: Saturday mornings - June 25; July 16; July 23

### Proposed community workshop agenda:

What is a CWPP and why have one

Existing Risk and Hazard Assessments

- Overview of existing assessments and things to protect
- Small group discussion to identify additional local knowledge and priority areas
- Large group brainstorm other ideas for identifying and dealing with risk and hazards

Next steps:

- *Risk and Fuel Reductions recommendations*
- *Community priorities*
- *2<sup>nd</sup> Workshop Series Target Dates – November*

Stakeholder group members were asked to spread the word to their groups. Additional outreach for the workshops will include: email “Updates”, information on web-sites, presentations, media releases

### **Next Steps**

Community workshops – June and July, dates and places to be determined

Stakeholder Project Meeting #4: August date and time to be determined.

Topic: Recommendations and priorities.

For More Information Contact: Cheryl Miller, Diablo Fire Safe Council [DFSCMiller@comcast.net](mailto:DFSCMiller@comcast.net)

Phone 877-725-6803