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9. Facilitating Lake County Fire Safety in the Long Term

A Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) is only as good as the community who is charged with implementing it. Lake County is fortunate to have many people and resources committed to fire safety over the long term. Creating fire-safe communities is a long-term commitment.

“Communities across the country have invested countless hours and significant funds to develop CWPPs. Communities now have an opportunity to consider how these plans have helped reduce their wildfire risk, while also meeting state and national goals for wildfire risk reduction. Effective monitoring and evaluation of wildfire planning efforts at the local, state, and national level will provide important opportunities to evaluate the overall strategy of CWPPs in reducing wildfire risk and improving planning processes...

A CWPP does not end when it is adopted; a thorough process should involve a continuous cycle of collaborative planning, implementation, monitoring, and adapting strategies based on lessons learned. As communities learn from successes and challenges during the development and implementation of their CWPP, stakeholders may identify new actions, propose a shift in how decisions are made or actions are accomplished, and evaluate the resources necessary for successful CWPP implementation.”¹

9.1. Monitoring

Monitoring the success of the actions identified in this Plan is important to the ongoing success of fire safety and prevention efforts in the county. Based on the collective experience of Plan Partners, lessons learned from Fire Safe Councils around the state, local Lake County knowledge, and the best available science, an action plan (*See Chapter 8*) was set forth in this document to reduce the impacts of wildfire to Lake County and its residents.

However, community fuel reduction and fire safety is an evolving field. Restoring landscapes to be more fire resilient is a very long-term process. Mistakes will be made, and are part of our re-learning how to live in balance with wildfire, instead of trying to control and suppress it at all costs. Wildfire is a natural aspect of nearly all California landscapes; it is impossible to eliminate completely. Beyond the particulars of which fuel-management treatment techniques a landscape might require, the community should cooperate and share experiences in all aspects of the CWPP and this evolving field. Understanding wildfire ecology, and achieving responsible stewardship of a fire-adapted ecosystem, will be an ongoing process. This process will be most effective when monitoring successes and failures over time.

Consequently, it is important to monitor the actions identified within this CWPP to better understand the actual impact they are having meeting the Plan’s objectives: to minimize ignitions, decrease intensity, decrease damage, increase permeability, and increase resiliency.

As stated above, CWPPs are monitored on a national scale to evaluate their effectiveness in addressing wildfire issues. A standardized format for participating in the national-level evaluation can be found at: http://ri.uoregon.edu/documents%20and%20pdfs/eval_9-8-08_web.pdf/.

9.1.1. Project Monitoring

“What Goes into Monitoring and Evaluating a CWPP Locally?”

- Only monitor what matters! (Communities may lack resources to engage in a long or complex monitoring process.) Community partners should identify key goals and objectives, and make decisions to monitor what is most important to the long-term sustainability of their CWPP.
- Track accomplishments and identify the extent to which CWPP goals have been met.
- Examine collaborative relationships and their contributions to CWPP implementation, including existing participants and potential new partners.

¹ CWPP Task Force and Wildland Fire Leadership Council. *Community Guide to Preparing and Implementing a Community Wildfire Protection Plan*. August 2008. p. 18.

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- Identify actions and priority fuels reduction projects that have not been implemented, and why; set a course for future actions and update the plan.”²

The most basic of monitoring methodologies is photo point monitoring, where photos are taken of a given place before, during, and after treatments. This provides a physical comparison. More complicated monitoring methods are available as well (*see Ecological Monitoring below*).

Strategic Planning and Projects

The table at the end of this chapter provides a format for the Lake County Fire Safe Council and other Plan Partners to track project progress. This table is based on one developed by the El Dorado Fire Safe Council, who uses it to track projects throughout the county, with many partnering Fire Safe Councils, and others. Filling out and tracking projects through this table should be one of the first actions of the Lake County Fire Safe Council following approval of this Plan. (*Please see Figure 9-1. Strategic Planning Matrix at the end of this document.*)

9.1.2. Ecological Monitoring

Monitoring means not only how successful projects are to reduce fuels and the impact of fire, but also refers to tracking how projects affect ecological process and function. Projects should be designed to have minimal adverse ecological impact. As stated, this is an evolving field. No one is clear about the long-term ecological impacts of fire-safety actions. In working within the Conservation Principles identified in Chapter 1, it is important to be aware of potential negative impacts. Ecological monitoring is the best way to understand these impacts. The following description from the 2008 “Community Guide To Preparing And Implementing A Community Wildfire Protection Plan,” summarizes ecological monitoring well:

“A critical outcome related to CWPPs is related to the change in fire behavior, as affected by the number and type of fuels treatments that occur as a result of priorities identified within the CWPP. The HFRA (Section 102(g)(5)) instructs the USFS and DOI to establish a collaborative multiparty monitoring, evaluation, and accountability process when significant interest is expressed in such an approach. (The Healthy Forests Initiative and Healthy Forests Restoration Act Interim Field Guide www.fs.fed.us/projects/hfi/field-guide/web/page16.php.)

Multiparty monitoring gives communities an opportunity to assess environmental, social, and economic outcomes related to fuels reduction projects. Multiparty monitoring also builds trust and provides an opportunity for residents to learn about fire-adapted ecology. The USFS Collaborative Forest Restoration Program [CFRP] in the Southwest offers a set of guidelines for monitoring community-based forest restoration. Communities engaged in ecological monitoring of hazardous fuels reduction projects can use these guidelines. They provide an overview of the multiparty monitoring process, ecological and socioeconomic goals and indicators, and examples of measures, data sources, and tools that can be used in conducting this kind of monitoring. The CFRP program also developed a series of handbooks to help communities conduct this monitoring. These resources can be downloaded directly at www.fs.fed.us/r3/spf/cfrp/monitoring/index.shtml.

There are also tools used by state and federal agencies to conduct ecological monitoring and monitor maintenance of treated areas. One such program is the Fire Effects Monitoring and Inventory Protocol (FIREMON). FIREMON is an agency-independent plot-level sampling system designed to characterize changes in ecosystem attributes over time (http://frames.nbii.gov/portal/server.pt?open=512&objID=286&&PageID=495&mode=2&in_hi_userid=2&cached=true).

Other methods for conducting ecological monitoring for fuels reduction projects may include using photo points, modeling changes in fire behavior, and measuring change in fire regime and condition class. There are a wide range of approaches to ecological monitoring; FIREMON and other modeling systems are mostly within federal purview, but community organizations and

² CWPP Task Force, et al. p. 18.

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citizens have many monitoring options available and simple methods like comparing photo points and conducting vegetation surveys that are valuable and important.”³

The Lake County Fire Safe Council has both project and ecological monitoring expertise in its partner organizations such as the Mendocino National Forest, Bureau of Land Management, Natural Resources Conservation Service, and the local Resource Conservation Districts. These organizations can help to develop a monitoring strategy to track the long-term success of the projects identified herein, and ultimately this Plan.

9.2. Project Maintenance

Steps need to be taken early on in project implementation to prepare for their long-term maintenance. Ideally, maintenance strategies will be designed into projects, both in terms of activities and the resources to support them.

In terms of large-scale fuel reduction projects, one of the most effective and economical long-term maintenance strategies for programs in northern California is prescribed fire (aka controlled burning). Once fuels are reduced to levels where “cool” fires can be safely introduced, this strategy should be fully explored and implemented. Lake County is fortunate to have both a population that supports the use of prescribed fire, and local experience and expertise in using it. The controlled burning efforts of the Hendricks family in Scotts Valley over the last several generations is an excellent example of how to use fire over time to maintain and enhance ecosystem conditions while improving community fire safety.

The Action Plan in Chapter 8 identifies an “Adopt a Fuel Break” strategy that can be used to maintain fuel treatments around neighborhoods and communities. It will be the responsibility of land management agencies leading a project and the Lake County Fire Safe Council to ensure that long-term project maintenance is planned for (including budgeted for) in the implementation of all projects. The Strategic Planning Matrix at the end of this document can help facilitate monitoring of maintenance needs.

9.3. Updating This Plan

No plan is ever permanent. This Plan was written in 2009 based on current conditions and best available information. The field of fire safety is rapidly changing. It is likely that new developments will occur in the coming years. Therefore, it will be important to review this Plan at least every five years and update it as needed. The Strategic Planning Matrix in this chapter can be used between Plan updates by the Fire Safe Council to document the progress of Plan implementation. Copies of this Plan will be available for public review at the Lake County Courthouse, the Lake County Fire Safe Council, all county public libraries, and other public locations throughout the county.

9.4. Resources Needed to Support Ongoing Efforts

The Lake County Fire Safe Council will be the principal organization charged with implementing this Plan. The recent efforts and actions of the FSC and its leadership have shown it to be capable of successfully facilitating the long-term implementation of this CWPP, and leading fire-safety efforts in Lake County over time.

To ensure the FSC’s success, and that of this Plan, the Lake County FSC will need to develop a structure for Plan implementation. A Coordinator was hired in 2009 with funding from the County. It will be critical to maintain and augment this funding source over time to ensure Plan and project continuity. A strategic plan for the Council should be developed to identify a successful long-term management structure that maximizes both resident and agency participation, and a long-term funding strategy to ensure its survival.

Finally, the success of the Fire Safe Council will also depend on the ability of participating organizations to contribute resources to the Council and its projects. The will to succeed and the *social capital*⁴ exist right now within Lake County for the effective implementation of this Plan. Plan authors are confident that Lake County will soon be a positive example for fire safety throughout California. We wish you well!

³ CWPP Task Force, et al. p. 22.

⁴ Social Capital: The individual and communal time and energy that is available for such things as community improvement, social networking, civic engagement, personal recreation, and other activities that create social bonds between individuals and groups. (From: CDC Healthy Places Terminology, <http://www.cdc.gov/healthyplaces/terminology.htm#p>)

