

Solano County Wildfire Prevention Related Efforts

Protection vs Prevention

Fire protection is defined to include systems and support for protection during an actual fire. This can include sirens/towers, engines, adequate stations and staffing, as well as evacuation planning software and signage. Fire prevention is defined to include community outreach (fire safe councils) and fuel reduction efforts (fire breaks, debris removal, home hardening). It is important that Solano County take a multi-pronged approach to addressing the enhancement of its current protection and prevention programs.

Planning

In order to be grant eligible for Emergency Management Planning Grants (EMPG) and CAL FIRE fire prevention grants, there are steps that must first be achieved. The County has submitted its Multi-Jurisdictional Hazard Mitigation Plan (MJHMP), has received notification of review by CAL OES and FEMA certification, which will enable the County to be eligible for future EMPG grants. The MJHMP will come to the Board in March for adoption. The County will begin establishing a countywide fire safe council and a Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP), which are requirements for future CAL FIRE planning grants. Staff will begin working on evacuation planning, which will identify evacuation routes specific to each disaster and will utilize an application for coordination and outreach for each incident.

Equipment

Solano County, in its efforts to evaluate the state of wildfire protection to the unincorporated areas, has taken inventory of its detection systems and fire equipment. Staff reviewed a recent Citygate study to review equipment owned and used by four of its Fire Protection Districts, with the other two districts contracting with cities for services. The state of fire equipment is that of an aging system with districts lacking funds to replace and renew its current inventory. Additionally, early detection systems, including sirens or other systems, would require investment with no current funding identified. Grants may allow chipping equipment, masticators, and other tools to allow for mowing fire breaks, clearing debris, and reducing fuels.

Resources/ CAL FIRE Grant

In order to become a Fire Wise Community and be more competitive for future grants, Solano County is working on building resources to provide wildfire prevention services. This includes establishing a countywide fire safe council, a CWPP, and evacuation plans. The CAL FIRE grant will enable the County to support creating the resources needed by the community to become grant eligible and/or more competitive; provide community outreach, education, and technical assistance to property owners; and to support the growing number of community based Fire Safe Councils, such as Green Valley and Pleasants Valley. The Countywide Fire Safe Council will be established as an umbrella organization which will provide resources and grants to subrecipient councils for technical assistance.

Budget Trailer Funding

Senator Bill Dodd requested State funding for wildfire prevention, on behalf of Solano County, and as part of SB129 \$1,900,000 was approved for fuel reduction, alert warning systems, and fire preparedness public engagement and education. The Governor's Office of Emergency Services

notified the County this funding will be pass through funding, with no reporting requirements. Staff is conducting meetings to develop project recommendations and aims to return to the Board in March.

County Coordinator Grant

The California Fire Safe Council has awarded Solano County with a grant to hire a County Coordinator position, which will support several fire prevention efforts within the county. This position will work closely with a grant funded position secured by the Solano RCD. Staff is beginning a Request for Proposals (RFP) process for a firm or contractor to provide fire prevention related support services for a term of 18 months. This position will support many of the CAL FIRE grant projects, fire district consolidation work, as well as to support several of the planning efforts underway by the Solano County Sheriff's Office/Office of Emergency Services. This program is administered by the California Fire Safe Council as a pilot with the potential to become a long term support to counties.

Solano RCD

Statewide, resource conservation districts (RCDs) are increasingly becoming partners with counties to address the growing wildfire threat. State funding is available to RCDs from agencies such as the California Department of Conservation and the Natural Resources Conservation Service. The Solano RCD is taking an active role and had partnered with the Yolo RCD to learn about and support Fire Safe Councils as well as to provide technical assistance following resource conservation practices. The growing relationship between the County and the Solano RCD is of great benefit to the community and a good way to leverage funding opportunities to eliminate redundancy and to leverage funds for maximum efficiency.

Fire Protection Districts/ LAFCO Application for Reorganization

The unincorporated county contains six fire protection districts (Cordelia, Dixon, Montezuma, Suisun, Vacaville, and Vallejo). Currently, there are three districts adjacent to the WUI area of the county. In consideration of past Civil Grand Jury recommendations, Cordelia and Vacaville Fire Protection Districts passed resolutions in support of exploring consolidation or reorganization efforts. LAFCO conducted a study, assisted by the consultant Citygate, and formed an Ad Hoc committee to study fire districts. Cordelia and Vacaville approached the County, asking for support in filing an application to LAFCO. The County's subcommittee of the Board looked into this further and at the June 22, 2021 meeting of the Board, staff was directed to file an application. This application is still being assembled due to many requirements for mapping, fiscal and service analysis of the districts, response to Solano LAFCO Standards and State LAFCO Factors. It is anticipated this application will be submitted later this month for the concurrent reorganization of the Cordelia and Vacaville Fire Protection Districts, including a small northern portion of the Suisun Fire Protection District, known as Study Area One, as well as a Sphere of Influence Update coterminous with the proposed district.

Revenue Measure

The Board directed staff to build and expand communications with the community on wildfire risks and protective actions, and to gauge public interest in support of additional funding such as a revenue measure to increase wildfire protection capabilities. Staff worked with consultants to complete a public survey of support for both a general sales tax and a dedicated sales tax. In

addition to wildfire, there were other priority items the community supports, including access to parks and management of public lands.

Big Picture/Next Steps/ Next Cycle of Grant Funding

With the recent passing of the Biden Infrastructure Bill, it is anticipated a great deal of funds will become available to counties prepared to begin mitigation projects. Grants programs tend to be targeted to agencies ready to fund projects already identified and developed so it is important Solano County be ready for these upcoming grant cycles. Funding opportunities appear to be developing for shovel ready projects which are one time in nature.

In order to fund ongoing enhancements to wildfire protection and prevention services countywide, the Board may want to further explore a revenue measure. While grant programs will be available for one-time projects for infrastructure, fuels reduction, and equipment, the only grants available for increasing staffing begin with 75% of funding and taper off by 25% each year, evaporating after three years. These SAFER grants are designed to assist localities with ramping up staffing with the understanding that jurisdictions sustain this level of staffing.