



FEMA Hazard Mitigation Grant Program

Wildfire Adapted Sonoma County Education and Incentives Program

Project Title:	Wildfire Adapted Sonoma County: Education and Incentives for a Safe and Resilient Sonoma County		
Lead Department:	Permit Sonoma		
Funding Requested:	\$5,000,000		
Estimated Total Cost:	\$6,677,777	Estimated Grant Start Date:	October 2019

PROGRAM SUMMARY. *Sonoma County has the potential for significant wildfire losses.* To reduce the risk of wildfire and damage in high risk areas, residents need to actively create and maintain wildfire-resilient homes and landscapes. Sonoma County is taking proactive steps to prepare residents for wildfires that impact the area. The County is developing an incentive program to help shoulder the cost of this work.

PUBLIC BENEFITS OF THE PROGRAM. Decrease likelihood of catastrophic wildfire, provide safety and human survivability, increase protection of public and private property, and empower and educate the public to reduce risk.

WILDFIRE IN SONOMA COUNTY. *The potential exists for catastrophic wildfire losses in the County's extensive Wildfire Urban Interface (WUI) areas.* Risk factors include homes built without fire resistant construction materials and practices, inadequate defensible space management, fine fuels (e.g. annual grasses) within and near residential areas, steep topography, fire history, dry and windy fall weather, and a variety of human-caused factors. In the 50 year span from 1964-2015 Sonoma County experienced 18 major wildfires that destroyed nearly 2,000 structures. In October 2017 the "Sonoma Complex Fires" resulted in the loss of life, destroyed nearly 7,000 homes, and burned more than 100,000 acres in Sonoma County and surrounding counties. The "Sonoma Complex Fires" burned in nearly identical footprints to 1964's Hanley Fire and Nuns Canyon Fire.

The Sonoma Complex fires were catastrophic and are the second costliest on record for the state. Housing and economic losses will continue to impact the County and its residents for many years to come, yet the area burned represents just a small percentage of Sonoma County's thousands of acres at risk to wildfire.

THE PROBLEM. *Hazards result from a variety of factors, either natural-occurring, human-caused, or both.* For example, as housing has expanded against and into the Wildfire Urban Interface (WUI) areas over the past 60 years, risks have increased. Future climate change may increase uncertainty in a climate system already characterized by minimums and maximums of a periodic very wet year followed by very dry years. Homeowners are faced with the expense and difficulty of implementing, and maintaining in perpetuity, strict, defensible space zones; retrofitting existing structures with fire resistant materials and methods; and working together to manage fuel reduction areas and larger fire breaks near their houses and housing developments.

THE SOLUTION

Educate and Engage. The County will provide targeted information to property owners and residents about proven methods to create defensible space around the home and reduce structural vulnerabilities that can lead to home ignition from embers and direct contact with the fire front. Educational outreach will include a combination of print materials, social media outreach, and community meetings. In addition to increasing awareness of fire-adapted principles, outreach will also focus on encouraging local communities to create FireSafe Councils or become Firewise Communities.

Inspect and Inform. A key component of the project is to assess homes that are in the WUI area. Following all home inspections, property owners will be given a comprehensive report that identifies vulnerabilities and includes mitigation strategies. The County will conduct two types of wildfire safety home inspections:

- ❖ **Defensible Space:** These inspections will identify high risk defensible space (non-structural) elements such as: trees and shrubs that are “ladder” fuels to the eaves, roofs, and siding, attachment points of wood decks and fences, flammables storage under, crawl spaces and under-house areas, landscape maintenance, pruning, mowing, and plant selection and location in defensible space zones (5, 30, 100, 300 foot zones). Fire Protection staff will inspect every accessible structure in identified project areas. Inspection reports with specific requirements and recommendations for complying with defensible space standards will be delivered to the homeowners.
- ❖ **Voluntary WUI Building Inspections:** Home hardening assessments are voluntary and will be offered to the homeowner following the completion of the defensible space inspection. These inspections will be focused on the identification of high fire risk structural elements including: wood decks and fences that attach to the structure, crawl spaces and under-house areas that are open and can shelter an ember, unenclosed roof overhangs and soffits, ignitable roofing and siding, and heat breakage-susceptible windows, etc. Voluntary WUI building inspections will be comprehensive, and will denote vulnerabilities identified in the county building code and provide recommendations based on current research on home ignitions.

Financially Incentive Wildfire Risk Reduction Measures. Financial incentives may be provided to help homeowners create defensible space and retrofit homes to diminish potential wildfire hazards and comply with WUI standards. Incentives can be used to hire crews to help homeowners remove vegetation, including in areas heavily impacted by tree mortality. Homeowners can also participate in cost-share programs to retrofit homes to comply with WUI building standards and recommendations.

For more information contact Lisa Hulette, Senior Grant Manager, Sonoma County Office of Recovery and Resiliency

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