



KENSINGTON FIRE PROTECTION DISTRICT

DATE: January 23, 2025
TO: Emergency Preparedness Committee
RE: Community Wildfire Defense Grant Projects
SUBMITTED BY: Mary A. Morris-Mayorga, General Manager

Recommended Action

This item is for information and input from the EPC.

Background

The Community Wildfire Defense Grant 2024 (FY25) West is open for applications and staff is in the process of identifying eligible projects to apply for funding. This program is authorized in Public Law 117-58, Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, commonly referred to as the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) with two primary project types for which the grant provides funding:

- The development and revision of Community Wildfire Protection Plans (CWPP)
- The implementation of projects described in a CWPP that is less than ten years old

The [El Cerrito - Kensington Wildfire Action Plan](#) was developed in 2017 so projects included would qualify for this grant; relevant pages are attached for reference.

Fiscal Impact

There is no substantial fiscal impact outside of staff time for development of the Volunteer Policy.

Attachments: Draft Project Narrative
El Cerrito - Kensington Wildfire Action Plan (*reference pages*)

Community Wildfire Defense Grant 2024 (FY25) West

Project Description

Hire private contractors (*and CDC crews?*) to maintain and enhance defensible space areas on public land and between natural areas and neighborhoods as funding allows.

Project Introduction

This project is described in a CWPP that is less than ten years old. The project aligns with the 2017 Contra Costa County CWPP. CWPP alignment is described in detail in the project justification.

Project Justification

Due to the number and density of homes built in the high fire hazard zone and changes in the natural fire-cycle, Kensington has areas of highly flammable structures amongst an over-accumulation of flammable vegetation. This massive fuel load of homes and vegetation in the area's steep topography makes fires very difficult to contain. In addition, non-native and invasive weedy vegetation has replaced the more fire resistive and ecologically stable native species in many places, adding to the threat.

Years of drought and associated pests and disease have increased tree mortality. The Contra Costa County region has seen a decline in tree health due to drought, pine beetles and Sudden Oak Death. Ongoing tree mortality assessments will provide additional information on declining conditions.

The wildland urban interface (WUI) is defined as an area in which wildlands and communities are sufficiently close to each other to present a credible risk of fire spreading from one to the other. Nationally, the WUI has gained increasing importance as more Americans build homes in rural settings adjacent to public lands.

The housing density and geography of Kensington are such that most of the developed areas not only border WUI areas, but also include conditions within the urbanized areas that can fuel wildfires. The two communities include locations considered "Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zones" and are at significant risk for loss of life and property if a fire were to occur on a normal or extreme weather day. For the purposes of this plan, the CAL FIRE Fire Hazard Severity maps were used as a starting point to determine where significant fire hazards exist both in the wildland and urban areas. Both El Cerrito and Kensington and the adjacent EBRPD parklands have been identified as at significant risk from wildfire.

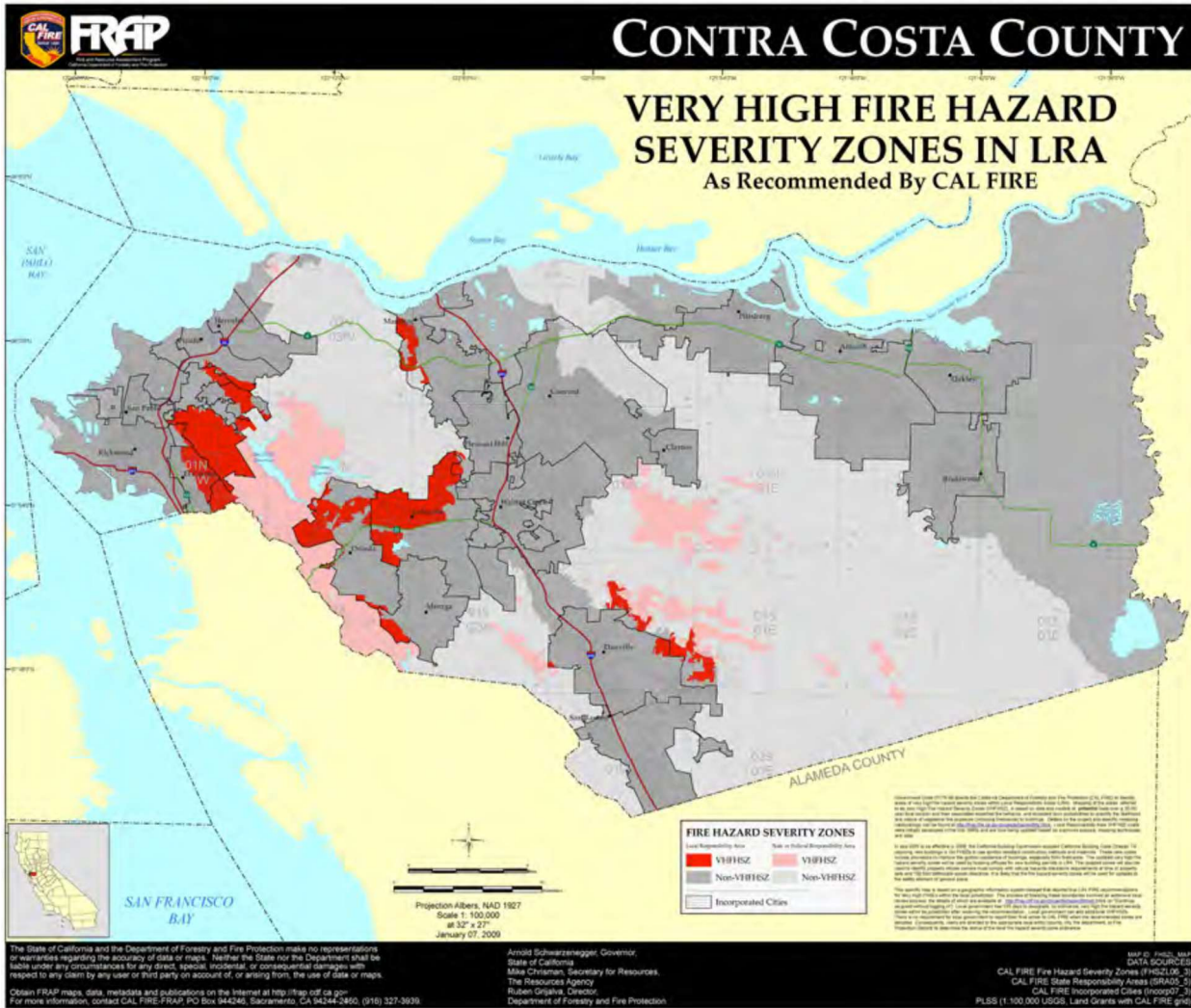
Another factor that has been assessed is fire weather or periods of "Diablo winds" that bring low relative humidity and higher temperatures. Alameda and Contra Costa Counties have 11 remote automated weather stations (RAWS) that provide localized information on the weather. Many fire departments also take local weather readings to supplement these regional data. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association's National Weather Service also provides "red flag warnings" and "Fire Weather Watch" of periods of high fire danger. www.wrh.noaa.gov/firewx/cafw/

The CAL FIRE statewide hazard assessment maps have served as the basis for much of the analysis in Contra Costa County. Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zones for State Responsibility Areas (SRA) and Local Responsibility Areas (LRA) 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.³

The hills portion of El Cerrito (see detailed map in Appendix) and all of Kensington were identified as very high wildfire hazard severity zones, as well as the adjacent EBRPD lands.

The unincorporated community of Kensington has a population of 5,077 and 2,199 households all of which are located within the very high fire hazard severity zone.4 Of particular concern are those who for whatever reason would not be able to leave during an evacuation without assistance.



Project Objectives

The prime objective of the Hazardous Fuel Management Project is reduction of hazardous fuels that, if left untreated, would generate high intensity burning adjacent to structures or communities at risk, or produce large quantities of airborne burning embers that would carry into communities or other important resources. More specifically, the objectives are:

- reduce hazards along strategic emergency access and evacuation routes, or other critical infrastructure;
- include vegetation modification treatments that will reduce the threat of unacceptable impacts of high intensity fire to high value ecosystems, sensitive watersheds and high concentration recreation areas, including regional parklands or state lands.

Project Time/Schedule

Project Budget

Administrative/fire oversight? Quotes?

Recommended Action Plan

3.1 Selection of Recommended Priorities

The El Cerrito Kensington Wildfire Action Plan was developed through collaboration of stakeholders and residents that attended work sessions, public presentations or commented on draft versions of this plan. Participants were invited to submit project ideas that provide protection and reduce risk. The following recommended priorities are based on this collaboration, as well as the Countywide CWPP, analysis and the recommended strategies for reducing the risk with the WUI detailed in Sections 1 and 2.

Each of the following topics outlines specific recommendations and associated actions. It is anticipated that additional opportunities for actions will be identified as the Fire Action Plan is implemented. Projects, workshops, demonstrations and education efforts will be recommended for implementation and funding based on the following attributes:

- Protects life, property and infrastructure in areas of El Cerrito and Kensington where risk of catastrophic wildfire is most severe.
- Reduces risk of fire spreading between private lands to public lands (regional parklands, open space, or watershed lands) or areas where significant natural or cultural resources are at risk.
- Seeks to create a detailed implementation plan for fire prevention or mitigation at the local level in an area identified as “at risk”.
- Involves stakeholders at all levels, which is to say there is strong community support, as well as support from applicable agencies and landowners. Intensity of local support will be a significant factor when choosing projects.
- Demonstrates the capacity to continue to manage and maintain the project effectively, and/or supports ongoing, previously planned efforts.
- Projects that will improve firefighting response, wildfire control capabilities and residential evacuation plans and operational programs.
- Removal of invasive plants of known high flammability listed in a recognized source such as Cal-IPC California Invasive Plant Inventory (publication 2006 or updated).

Many of the recommended actions will take long-term commitment over multiple years to address the complex hazards. Some actions have current funding, but additional funding and efforts are needed to continue to address the issue.

3.2 Information, Education and Collaborative Planning Priorities

Education is viewed as a force multiplier and stakeholders felt it should be a high priority. A key recommendation is working with potential partners to find common ground, share ideas and develop joint implementation of local projects. These partners may expand beyond the traditional agency partners to include volunteer groups who have interest in neighborhood or

nearby open spaces. They may also include organizations, such as the Friends of Five Creeks, El Cerrito Trail Trekkers, California Native Plant Society or Contra Costa County Master Gardeners, offices of the mayor or elected officials, homeowner associations or local businesses. One such recommendation includes supporting fire prevention educational program for ignition prevention.

Priority Action: Fire Prevention Educational Program

Recommendation: Support year-round community efforts with education programs regarding wildfire safety and ignition prevention. These should identify inexpensive things a homeowner, contractors and others can do.

Implementation Actions:

- Identify various audiences (e.g. residents, contractors, special interest groups). Identify the needs of residents versus special interest or recreational users.
- Develop topics including:
 - How the home can ignite (e.g., the ignition chain of how a wildfire or adjacent house fire can be transmitted through the landscape or house to house).
 - Importance of neighborhood defensible space, especially critical on dead end streets or where homes are close together. This information should be made available before inspections.
 - General awareness (e.g. wildfire season, red flag days)
 - Demonstration garden (see discussion in Section 4 Fuel Reduction treatments)
 - How to identify, develop and fund a hazardous fuel reduction project
- Delivery methods: Direct mail, information on existing electronic/ social networks (county, city and community list serves), open houses at Fire Stations and other community events.
- Encourage resident participation

Lead and Partners: Diablo Fire Safe Council and partner agencies.

Time frame: Short-term timeframe. On-going 9 month or year round program.

Estimated Funding Need: \$ to development/ distribution of materials and evaluate additional needs.

3.3 Enhanced Suppression Capability and Emergency Preparedness Priorities

Each year wildfires reinforce the importance of local emergency preparedness and evacuation plans. The emergency service agencies (County Office of Emergency Services, El Cerrito Police, County Sheriff, and the various fire departments) are interconnected through mutual aid agreements and common training of the Incident Command System and National Incident Management System. To expand this preparedness to a local and neighborhood level, there are Citizen Emergency Response Training (CERT) programs offered through the El Cerrito and Kensington Fire Departments. One priority recommendation focuses on assisting in the development of local evacuation plans. Another opportunity is to collaborate with updates to local hazard mitigation plan or general plan safety elements.

Priority Action: Evacuation Planning and Preparedness

Recommendation: Collaborate with partners (CERT, Neighborhood Watch, Red Cross) to assist community groups in developing neighborhood evacuation plans so residents know what to do in the event of a wildfire.

Implementation Actions:

- Tie to general education of wildland urban interface issues, red flag warnings, “Ready Set Go!”. Community warning systems such as Weather Radio, Nixel and Community Warning System.
- Focus on community groups and block level.
- Explain community evacuation procedures and develop appropriate expectations about access/ egress, parking, evacuation routes, role of police and sheriff, notifications etc.
- Identify essential supplies to maintain (Go Pack).
- Identify special populations or needs at the block level.
- Identify primary and secondary evacuation routes. Reinforce understanding that law enforcement is in charge of the evacuation.
- Pre-designate suitable evacuation shelters.
- Physical improvements to the routes as needed (parking restrictions, vegetation clearance, roadside maintenance, signage etc.)

Lead and Partners: Coordinate with other groups that address evacuation trainings such as CERT and Red Cross, as well as outreach to home owner association, fire department and police/sheriff departments.

Time frame: Short to identify, medium to long term to implement improvements.

Estimated Funding Need: \$ for maps and brochures; \$\$\$\$ for physical improvements.

Prioritizing Hazardous Fuel Reduction Treatments

4.1 Hazardous Fuel Management

Hazardous fuel management, ideally a subset of sound vegetation and ecosystem management, is the practice of removing or modifying vegetation in order to reduce wildfire ignitions, rate of spread and intensity. Fuel management requirements depend on the vegetation type, location, condition and configuration. Given the dynamic nature of the fuels in El Cerrito and Kensington, a single treatment type or prescription is not effective. Follow up is often needed to avoid encroachment by weedy, non-native invasive species. Rigorous oversight, active management and an adaptive approach are required to achieve fuel management goals with a positive by-product of ecosystem improvement.

Generally five fuel management methods are available and used within the WUI:

- Manual (hand labor such as pulling or cutting)
- Mechanical treatment (equipment used for mowing, selective cutting of trees, masticating or crushing)
- Prescribed herbivory (targeted grazing by sheep, goats or cattle)
- Chemical treatment
- Prescribed fire

Specific fuel management treatment goals and methods are addressed more fully in the *Best Management Practices Guidebook for Hazardous Fuel Treatments in Contra Costa County*. These best management practice guidebooks will continue to be refined based on environmental compliance documents, adaptive management practices and other lessons learned by the various stakeholders.

The sustainability of fuel management is an on-going challenge at all landscape scales – from the single residence, neighborhoods, public open space, watershed and parklands. Existing residential areas typically depend upon private property owners and their fire agency's fire prevention programs to reduce fuel loads. El Cerrito and Kensington both have the ability to enforce compliance with local fire codes. However, they are limited by the extent of local codes. Any new or in-fill residential development needs not only a plan for fire hazard reduction, but also funding mechanisms for long term vegetation management of any commonly held open space. Funding must include not only initial treatments, but also on-going maintenance on an annual or multi-year cycle.

4.2 Fuel Reduction Treatments – Geographically Based Projects

Public agencies, private owners, and fire districts establish hazardous fuel reduction treatment priorities on a regular basis as a part of their long-range planning or annual budgeting procedures. Some of the public land managers have detailed plans that incorporate fuel reduction treatments. Regionally such plans have not only identified geographically based projects, but also have developed best management practices and mitigation measures that should be incorporated into projects to reduce the impact of fuel

El Cerrito	Kensington
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Balra Drive • Bates Avenue • Camp Herms • Contra Costa Dr/ King St • Dorothy Rosenberg Park/ Shevlin Drive • Hillside Natural Area • Mira Vista Golf Club • Villa Mira Vista HOA • Prospect Sierra School 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cambridge Avenue • Carmelite Monastery • EBRPD - Wildcat Canyon Regional Park with adjacent homeowners on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Kensington Court ○ Purdue Meadow ○ Lake Drive ○ Los Altos Drive ○ Beloit Ave ○ Canon Drive • Edgecroft Road • Highland Boulevard • Kensington Community Center • Kensington Elementary School • Kingston Road

When funding is available, fuel reduction treatment projects with the following attributes should be given the highest priority:

- Project reduces hazardous fuels that, if left untreated, would generate high intensity burning adjacent to structures or communities at risk, or produce large quantities of airborne burning embers that would carry into communities or other important resources.
- Project reduces hazards along strategic emergency access and evacuation routes, or other critical infrastructure.
- Project includes vegetation modification treatments that will reduce the threat of unacceptable impacts of high intensity fire to high value ecosystems, sensitive watersheds and high concentration recreation areas, including regional parklands or state lands. Projects to include strategies and funding for on-going maintenance, especially follow-up management of non-native invasive species that could create hazardous fire conditions.

2017 Geographically Based Priority Hazardous Fuel Reduction Projects and Prevention Strategies

Agency or Group	Project or Strategy	Status
CAL FIRE Santa Clara Ranger Unit	Technical support and personnel to allied agencies who are conducting projects in the SRA and LRA of Contra Costa County. See Unit Plan Santa Clara County.	Ongoing Funded
	Coordination of Fire Crews for project work	Ongoing Funded (limited availability)
	Grant programs for SRA area (part of Kensington)	2016-2017 funding
City of El Cerrito- Public Works Department	Continue to implement vegetation management programs in City owned Hillside Natural Area, parks and rights-of-way	Funding Needed
	Continue to coordinate vegetation management programs with volunteers	Ongoing Funded
Diablo Fire Safe Council (DFSC)	Defensible Space Program - seed fund for community projects + chipping	Ongoing Funded
	Partner with homeowners, HOAs and other groups to fund and manage hazardous fuel reduction activities	Ongoing Funded
	Right of Entry with East Bay Regional Park District (Kensington Fuel Reduction Group)	2016-2017 funding
East Bay Regional Park District	Project implementation in East Bay Hills. See Wildfire Hazard Reduction and Resource Management Plan.	Ongoing Funded
	Right of Entry with Diablo Fire Safe Council (Kensington Fuel Reduction Group)	Ongoing Funded
	High fire danger information - use restrictions	
	Integrated Pest Management Program (some treatments also include fuel reduction)	Ongoing Funded
El Cerrito Fire Department/ Kensington Fire Protection District	Continue to implement vegetation management programs. Visually inspect every property (public and private) within El Cerrito and Kensington.	Ongoing Funded
	Notify property owners when vegetation management standards are not being met, and achieve compliance, with 100% voluntary compliance as a goal	Ongoing Funded
	Hire private contractors and CDC crews to maintain and enhance defensible space areas on public land and between natural areas and neighborhoods as funding allows	Additional funding needed
	Continue to dialog and collaborate with East Bay Regional Parks to enhance area fire safety	Ongoing Funded
El Cerrito Trail Trekkers	Continue to implement vegetation management programs with volunteers in Hillside Natural Area and other public owned right of ways (paths)	Volunteer
El Cerrito Tree Committee and Green Team	Continue to implement vegetation management programs with volunteers	Volunteer
Friends of Five Creeks	Continue to implement vegetation management programs with volunteers in Hillside Natural Area and Cerrito Creek	Volunteer

Agency or Group	Project or Strategy	Status
Kensington Community Center Volunteers	Continue to implement fuel reduction projects around Kensington Community Center	Volunteer
Kensington Fuel Reduction Groups	Continue to implement fuel reduction projects under Right of Entry with EBRPD and DFSC	Volunteer
Kensington Public Safety Committee	Continue to implement vegetation management programs with volunteers in Kensington	Volunteer
Pacific Gas and Electric	High voltage and distribution lines vegetation maintenance	Ongoing Funded
	Implement right tree right place	Ongoing Funded