Fire Hazard Planning
Technical Advisory Update

ICARP TECHNICAL ADVISORY COUNCIL,
12/11/2020

Presented by the Governor’s Office of Planning and Research:
Erik de Kok, Program Manager of Planning and Community Development
Beth Hotchkiss, Program Analyst for Planning and Community Development
A Brief History of Wildfire in California

- **Pre-1800s**: Many of California’s Native American Tribes used prescribed fire to maintain environmental health and promote resilience against catastrophic wildfire.

- **1800s to 1960s**: Settlers enforced a strict fire-suppression regime. Policies were passed that criminalized tribal burning and made California’s landscapes extremely vulnerable.

- **1970s to Today**: Today we are grappling with how to make communities fire-adapted and resilient within the context of climate change and expanded growth into the wildland-urban interface.
Today’s Context

In 2020, California experienced its first “giga-fire” and 6 of the 20 largest fires in the state’s history*.

*Not all numbers are final. Also, the data for this graph was last updated November 3, 2020.

Source: CAL FIRE, Top 20 Largest California Wildfires
WUI Area Burned Over Time Has Been Increasing

The office shall...update the guidance document entitled “Fire Hazard Planning, General Plan Technical Advice Series.” The guidance document shall include specific land use strategies to reduce fire risk to buildings, infrastructure, and communities. The office shall, on and after July 1, 2020, update the guidance document not less than once every eight years.”

-SB 901 (2018) and AB 2911 (2018)
Federal Level

National Cohesive Wildfire Management Strategy

State Level

California Strategic Fire Plan

Local Level

General Plan

Safety Element Requirements
- Wildfire Hazard and Risk Reduction
- Climate Adaptation Requirements
- Evacuation Route Requirements

AB 2140
Provides State incentives to integrate the LHMPs into the General Plan Safety Element.

Local Hazard Mitigation Plan

Community Wildfire Protection Plan

Federal Disaster Mitigation Act of 2000
- Provides Hazard Mitigation Grant Program funding
- More funds are available to states with a Hazard Mitigation Plan
- Local jurisdictions must have a Local Hazard Mitigation Plan (LHMP) to receive FEMA mitigation assistance and must review and revise their plan every 5 years.

Healthy Forest Restoration Act of 2003
- Prioritizes funding for jurisdictions with a Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP)
- CWPPs influence where and how federal agencies implement fuel reduction projects on federal land and how additional federal funds may be distributed on non-federal lands.

Shared Stewardship Agreement
Builds on existing coordination efforts between state and federal agencies to treat 1 million acres of forest and wildland annually.

Land in the SRA and VHFHZSs
These areas are subject to:
- General Plan Safety Element Requirements
- CEQA Analysis of Wildfire Impacts
- Tentative Map and Parcel Requirements
- Fire Safe Regulations*
- Defensible Space Regulations

*standards for VHFHZSs go into effect July 2021

Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zones (VHFHZSs)

Federal Responsibility Area (FRA)

State Responsibility Area (SRA)

Local Responsibility Area (LRA)
Safety Element Requirements

**Wildfire Hazard & Risk Reduction**

*SB 1241 (2012)*

Wildfire is a required topic for jurisdictions in State Responsibility Area (SRA) and Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone (VHFHSZ) and must be addressed upon the next housing element update on or after 1/1/2014.

**Climate Adaptation**

*SB 379 (2015) and SB 1035 (2018)*

Local agencies must assess community vulnerability to climate change and develop adaptation and resilience goals, policies, and implementation measures upon the next LHMP update; OR, upon the next housing element update.

**Evacuation Routes**

*AB 747 & SB 99 (2019)*

Local agencies must identify evacuation routes and evaluate their capacity, safety, and viability under a range of emergency scenarios and identify residential developments in hazard areas that do not have at least two emergency evacuation routes.
Guiding Questions

Q1: **Who should be engaged** in the fire hazard planning process?

Q2: How do you determine the **fire hazards and risks** in your jurisdiction?

Q3: How can we **support populations that are vulnerable** to wildfire?

Q4: What are specific **land use strategies** to reduce risk?

Q5: What **examples or resources** could help with these efforts?
Engage early and often!

Get the right people to the table to inform the planning process at each step of the way.

Work collaboratively to align fire hazard planning with other efforts. This will allow your jurisdiction to leverage resources, avoid duplication, and maximize the strengths of each effort.
Determining Fire Hazards & Risks

Action begins during the general plan update process itself.

The hazard and risk assessment reveals not only where the hazards are and their potential severity, but also who and what in the community is most vulnerable to wildfire.

This assessment should inform the General Plan’s land use and growth alternatives analysis as well as the policies and programs incorporated into the plan.

Source: Community Planning Assistance for Wildfire, with permission by Wildfire Planning International
Supporting Vulnerable Populations

Certain groups are more vulnerable to the impacts of wildfire than others.

Fire hazard planning presents an opportunity for local planning agencies to identify just and equitable solutions. Local agencies should coordinate fire hazard planning with environmental justice and climate vulnerability requirements in the general plan update process where applicable.


Source: The U.S. Fire Administration social media toolkit.
Reducing Risk to Existing Communities

How can we avoid and minimize “unreasonable risk” in existing developed areas?

- Retrofit and Protect Existing Development
- Implement Landscape Management Practices
- Increase Community Capacity & Resilience
Reducing Risk to Existing Communities

Retrofit and Protect Existing Development

Retrofit and protect existing buildings and infrastructure.

Scale-up defensible space compliance efforts.

Leverage existing programs to find funding and incentives.

Source: CAL FIRE, Defensible Space Zones
Reducing Risk to Existing Communities

Implement Landscape Management Practices

Establish and maintain fuel breaks, buffer zones, and other landscape management techniques.

Reduce hazard severity and risk through fuel modification in adjacent “wildland” areas (e.g., prescribed burning or other vegetation treatments)

Source: Managed Versus Unmanaged Ponderosa Pine Forest (Source: Erika Sloniker, The Nature Conservancy)
Reducing Risk to Existing Communities

Increase Community Capacity & Resilience

Prioritize the needs of vulnerable communities.

Increase local capacity to prepare, evacuate, and recover from wildfire events.

Plan for compounding and cascading hazard events such as flooding and landslides, water contamination, and housing needs.

Source: Listos California Disaster Readiness Guide
Land Use Strategies

How can we avoid and minimize “unreasonable risk” through land use planning and development review?

Start Upstream

Develop Local Solutions

Align Efforts
Land Use Strategies

Start Upstream

Integrate wildfire risks into the land use alternatives analysis.

Weigh the costs, benefits, and tradeoffs of different approaches with respect to wildfire risk.

Consider long-term resilience, sustainability, and equity implications.

Source: Martin Dreiling Smart Code Module - Comparison of Conventional Versus Clustered Development in the WUI
Land Use Strategies

Develop Local Solutions

Implement land use development and review procedures to identify and reduce unreasonable risks that are specific to the local context.

Apply community-scale risk reduction measures and resilient design features into code updates.

Source: Community Planning Assistance for Wildfire with permission by Wildfire Planning International
Land Use Strategies

Align Efforts

Harmonize conservation and open space policy with hazard and risk reduction.

Plan to rebuild not only efficiently but in a manner that increases resiliency.

Align plans to maximize the strengths of each.
Examples & Resources

OPR is not the first to publish guidance for how to plan for wildfire, good resources are out there already.

The updated technical advisory contains:

- Example Policies and Programs
- Funding Sources
- Guidance Documents
- Tools and Data Sets
- Case Studies

Peer-Learning and Support Programs
- Community Planning Assistance for Wildfire
- Fire-Adapted Communities Learning Network
Get Involved: Submit a Public Comment

1. Read the [draft Fire Hazard Planning Technical Advisory update](#)!

2. Review our [FAQ document](#) if you have any questions about the TA.

3. Submit your input through OPR’s [Public Comment Submission Form](#). All public comments are due by December 18, 2020.

4. If you have additional questions, please send an email to [WildfireTA@opr.ca.gov](mailto:WildfireTA@opr.ca.gov)
Questions & Discussion