



Summer 2019

Turning the page on August has long marked the end of summer. School goes into full gear, traffic too. But the end of summer has taken on more serious significance in the wake of California's series of cataclysmic fires. September signals that we are heading into the height of wildfire season. Hence fire is on our minds—individually and collectively — as it should be.

Marin Wildfire Prevention Initiative

The threat of wildfire has always been a reality here. Recorded history (and the growth rings of fallen redwoods) are proof. But that threat has grown as residential development encroaches more deeply into fire prone areas and our naturally fire prone landscape becomes more heavily vegetated after decades of successful fire suppression. Evolving fire science and analysis of recent wildfires in northern California have added to our understanding of our wildfire risk: mainly that climate change is exacerbating conditions that create the perfect storm for wildfire conflagrations; and, that wildfire does not respect jurisdictional boundaries. Under the right conditions, embers can fly miles and start fires far from the fire front. Homes in one suburban downtown are as at risk as their neighbors in the Wildland-Urban Interface when a wildfire is raging.

This understanding of our fire risk, of how fires can behave when conditions are right (conditions which are more likely to occur with climate change), has led fire professionals across the state to recognize the imperative that wildfire prevention and preparedness be approached at a regional scale and with a comprehensive, coordinated approach. Our new fire reality makes clear that every homeowner, business, public entity -- every stakeholder in a community, has a responsibility and role to play in reducing our collective fire risk. Communities must work together to prevent wildfire, to improve our ability to respond to a fire, and to recover from a wildfire should one occur.

Here in Marin, heeding this imperative, a cross-jurisdictional, multi-agency coalition comprised of [FIRESafe MARIN](#), fire agencies, municipal and county government have been working over the past year to develop a county-wide, coordinated strategy for wildfire prevention. Their proposal, dubbed the [Marin Wildfire Prevention Initiative](#) was informed by [2019 Marin Civil Grand Jury report on Wildfire Preparedness](#), the [2018 North Bay Fires Lessons Learned report](#), and [2016 Community Wildfire Protection Plan](#).

The goal of [the initiative](#) is to create a comprehensive, coordinated countywide wildfire prevention program – [governed by one joint powers authority](#) which would be comprised of local fire agencies, cities and towns. [Key elements of the program](#) would include:

- Improving emergency alert and warning systems, and evacuation routes and preparedness
- Expanding and coordinating hazardous fuel reduction and vegetation management in open space, along evacuation routes, around critical public infrastructure
- Expanding defensible space and home evaluation capacity, and homeowner education and support for reducing the vulnerability of their homes to wildfire
- Providing grants and support to seniors, persons with disabilities, and low income homeowners who need assistance maintaining a defensible space, making their homes fire resistant, reducing combustible vegetation, and preparing for emergencies
- Creating and sustaining a coordinated local wildfire public safety and disaster preparedness program
- Creating defensible space and home hardening programs, expanding public education, and funding for specific local community projects

This proposal represents a significant expansion of current fire prevention and emergency preparedness efforts and a new level of coordination, cooperation and implementation. Hence the need for new funding and governance structure. While our fire agencies do a phenomenal job, they are not equipped, do not have the staff or resources, were never envisioned to take on the level of fire prevention, education, and preparedness work that we now know is needed to keep our communities as safe as possible.

Over the next several months, information sessions on the [Wildfire Initiative](#) will be held at local fire district boards, city and town councils to share the proposal and seek input from residents and community leaders. The proposal will then be fine-tuned and brought back to those entities with fire suppression authority towards taking formal action to join the JPA and to request that the County put a Marin Wildfire Prevention Measure on the March 2020 Ballot. I encourage residents to attend one of these meetings. Coming up in the Ross Valley next week, information sessions will be held at [San Anselmo Town Council](#) meeting on Tuesday, September 10 at 7pm and [Ross Town Council](#) on Thursday, September 12 at 6pm. Additionally, [Corte Madera Town Council](#) on September 17 at 6:30pm and [Kentfield Fire District](#) meeting on September 18, time TBD. *(please check town websites beforehand to make sure meeting info is most current and for placement on agenda).*

Marin's wildfire threat is real. The work needed to reduce our individual and collective risk needs to be done on every property, in every community across our county and will require our ongoing attention and investment for decades to come.

Meanwhile...Out in the Open Space

While we work towards establishing a much needed comprehensive and coordinated wildfire prevention program, [Marin County Parks/Open Space](#) (manager and steward of 34 open space preserves scattered throughout the county), continues to expand its fire prevention and stewardship efforts through collaborations with neighbors, other land managers, and local fire agencies. This past spring, Marin County Parks [formed a partnership](#) with [Marin County Fire](#) to help support a Fuels crew (making for a total of three crews of 12 members each) specifically to do fire fuel management work on County parks and preserves. Fuels Crew projects in District 2 this summer/fall include:

Loma Alta Preserve/White Hill School - The Fuels Crew has been busy in the vicinity of White Hill School on Glen Drive in Fairfax removing dead trees, clearing, chipping, and hauling brush. These efforts helped create defensible space near the school and surrounding residential areas. A shaded fuel break is also being established, to make firefighting efforts more effective, and allow students to shelter in place on school grounds safely in a fire emergency. [Marin County Parks](#), [The Marin County Fire Department](#), [FIRESafe MARIN](#), [Ross Valley School District](#), and [Ross Valley Fire Department](#) collaborated on this project.

Cascade Canyon, Fairfax - In September, the Fuels Crew will be working at Cascade Canyon in the vicinity of Toyon Fire Road. This project follows up on summer goat grazing coordinated with the Town of Fairfax, to clear poison oak and other shrubs in advance of the crew. The Fuels Crew will remove dead and dying trees, thin dense stands of native vegetation, and remove invasive species including French and Portuguese broom. Debris will be chipped, off-hauled, or set into burn piles as needed.

Bald Hill - Marin County Parks and Marin County Fire are coordinating with a new Firewise community group in the vicinity of Bald Hill. The goal is to set priorities for vegetation management work by the Fuels Crew, in order to maintain access routes in the event of a fire emergency.

For the past three years, Parks staff has been evaluating the effectiveness of animal (goats and sheep) grazing as a method to control invasive vegetation on **King Mountain Preserve, Terra Linda/Sleepy Hollow Preserve**, and other open space areas. With the third summer season coming to an end, Parks vegetation scientists will be gathering observations to gain insights that can guide future fuel reduction strategies. Vegetation management for both wildfire risk reduction and environmental health have and continue to be an integral part of Marin Parks management program.

Watch Doug O'Connell's [OpenRoad TV segment](#) focused on Marin Parks Fire Strategy to learn more.

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