

41. Accept and file report on 2024 wildfire resilience activities funded by 22 CAL FIRE Wildfire County Coordinator-Northern Grant Program ()



County of Santa Cruz Board of Supervisors

Agenda Item Submittal

From: Office of Response, Recovery and Resilience

Subject: County Coordinator Grant Update

Meeting Date: January 28, 2025

Formal Title: Accept and file report on 2024 wildfire resilience activities funded by 22 CAL FIRE Wildfire County Coordinator-Northern Grant Program

Recommended Actions

Accept and file report on 2024 wildfire resilience activities funded by the 22 CAL FIRE Wildfire County Coordinator-Northern Grant Program.

Executive Summary

The California Fire Safe Council (CFSC) provides funding through the County Coordinator Grant Program to assist counties with wildfire mitigation outreach and coordination. This report by the Office of Response, Recovery, and Resilience (OR3) describes the outcomes and results of the 2024 grant performance period. Focus areas included building collaborative partnerships among wildfire stakeholder groups, improving emergency preparedness outreach, and removing permitting barriers to scaling wildfire fuel reduction projects.

Discussion

The 22 CAL FIRE Wildfire County Coordinator-Northern Grant Program, funded through the California Climate Investments (CCI) program and administered by CALFIRE and the California Fire Safe Council (CFSC), provides funding of up to \$200,000 for counties to educate, encourage, and develop county-wide collaboration and coordination among various wildfire mitigation groups. The County Office of Response, Recovery, and Resilience (OR3) has participated in the last two funding cycles through this grant to enhance the County's wildfire resilience programs and stakeholder coordination efforts.

In 2024, OR3 focused the County Coordinator project on bolstering community engagement efforts while addressing barriers to increasing the pace and scale of wildfire mitigation projects. The three key focus areas were as follows:

1. **Strengthening Collaborative Partnerships:** Throughout the fall and winter of 2024, OR3 engaged with an experienced consultant to host strategic planning sessions between OR3, the Resource Conservation District (RCD) of Santa Cruz County, and the Fire Safe Council of Santa Cruz County, resulting in the development of a collaborative framework to improve public communication and coordination of services among the three agencies. This framework outlines existing each agency's role and strengths, while assessing current available resources across various geographic scale, starting at the individual property level and moving outwards to neighborhoods, and landscape/regional scale projects. This collaborative framework has helped OR3 and its key partners strengthen collaborative relationships to better leverage several new funding opportunities on the horizon – including recent state and local tax revenue measures that could support cost-share models for wildfire risk reduction activities for private landowners. Moving forward, the next step will be to expand participation by inviting fire agencies and community-based organizations to

contribute to the collaborative framework, ensuring that future coordination efforts are inclusive, comprehensive, and aligned with regional wildfire resilience goals. We see this effort as complementary to the Measure Q implementation and grant program over time as well.

2. **Removing Environmental Permitting Barriers:** Recognizing that many high-risk wildfire areas overlap with sensitive habitat zones throughout the County's wildland-urban interface (WUI), the County engaged with a biologic consultant to conduct a GIS Needs Assessment through interviews with a group of stakeholders with expertise in this area including County GIS staff, Environmental Planning, OR3, and the RCD. The assessment identified gaps in mapping layers related to local biotic resources, to better anticipate permitting challenges associated with compliance for wildfire risk reduction. This portion of the project resulted in the creation of a comprehensive geodatabase and an accompanying metadata document to be shared with the RCD and County Environmental Planning division to support future wildfire project planning and funding applications. By incorporating this information early in the project scoping process, agencies can design projects and treatment plans that align with the unique characteristics of the landscape, enhance forest health, and increase the likelihood of timely and favorable review by regulatory authorities. As we seek additional grant dollars or implement existing grants in the hazard risk reduction space this effort will help streamline permit review and project scoping to deliver projects on the ground faster.
3. **Bolstering Emergency Preparedness Outreach:** The County Coordinator grant supported additional development, printing and distribution of emergency preparedness materials, including OR3's "Ready, Set, Go" evacuation planning guide and "Living with Wildfire" booklet, available in both English and Spanish. OR3's 2024 outreach efforts were throughout the County with a focus on South County communities, particularly in Watsonville, through participation in community events such as National Night Out and Trunk or Treat, ensuring vital information reached historically underserved populations.

Financial Impact

There is no financial impact associated with this update.

Strategic Initiatives

Climate Action - Natural & Working Lands, Wildfire Prevention

Submitted By:

David Reid

Recommended By:

Carlos J. Palacios, County Administrative Officer

Artificial Intelligence Acknowledgment:

ChatGPT, an Artificial Intelligence (AI) large language model tool, significantly contributed to the development of this agenda item, including Staff Report, in compliance with the County of Santa Cruz AI Appropriate Use Policy.