

Santa Clara Unit Strategic Fire Plan, 2011

SECTION I:

UNIT OVERVIEW

A: UNIT DESCRIPTION

The Santa Clara Unit is unique to the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, located between the east side of the San Francisco Bay and the western Sacramento / San Joaquin valley, encompassing the Counties of Contra Costa, Alameda, Santa Clara, and western portions of Stanislaus and San Joaquin. There are a total of 1.3 million acres of direct protection area within the unit with a combined population of 5.5 million people. Air quality control is covered by Valley Air Quality Management and the Bay Area Air Quality Management District. Santa Clara Unit management staff work closely with these agencies to ensure reduced smoke plume impact as a result of our vegetation management program and wildland fire activity upon the local population.

The major population centers include the cities of San Jose and the surrounding, 'Silicon Valley', Oakland, Berkeley, Livermore/Pleasanton, Walnut Creek, Concord, Martinez and Richmond. Numerous major highways run through the unit and daily traffic congestion is a constant within the unit. Technology, manufacturing, heavy industry, three major sea ports, and three major airports all drive a large portion of the 5th largest economy in the world. Given the large population concentration in the unit, recreational use and open space preservation issues are constantly being addressed.

Vegetation types in the unit range from annual grasses and brush in the eastern areas to large 80 plus year old brush fields and Coastal Redwood on the western edge of the unit. Recent large damaging fire's include the Lexington Fire (1985/ 13,128 acres), the Tunnel Fire (1991/ 1624 acres, 25 deaths and 3500 structures), the Croy Fire (2002/ 3007 acres and 300 structures), the Santa Clara Complex (2003/ 32,000 acres), the Lick Fire(2007/ 47,183 acres), and the Corral Fire (2009/ 12,500 acres). With the current population levels in the unit and the intrusion of urban development into the wildland, the Santa Clara Unit is taking every opportunity to be pro-active in wildland fuels management. The unit is heavily involved in fire protection planning programs with our local cooperators to address existing problems and identify areas where we can implement changes early in the planning stages. The Santa Clara Unit is located in an active earthquake fault area, as evidenced by the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake, which the unit was heavily involved in the emergency response to.

Two Fire Safe Council's, Santa Clara Fire Safe, Diablo Fire Safe, and a working group formed after the Tunnel Fire to address projects in the local jurisdictions in the East Bay Hills interface areas, the Hills Emergency Forum, are involved with fire safety and planning in the five county area. With input and cooperation from these groups and other stakeholder groups, the unit managers establish goals and projects in the unit Fire Management plan to reduce the threat of large damaging fires. The document is the units' template for fuels reduction projects to pending, completed, and for general public review, and comment.

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The unit's fire plan allows us to respond to the needs and concerns of the public and identifies projects to be funded through cooperative grants and donations.

In 2008, the Federal Farm Bill added a provision to federal law that required states to conduct an assessment of forest resources. These assessments were to identify key issues and trends affecting all forest and rangelands in each state. Spatial areas (called priority landscapes) were delineated to help focus investments and other programs to deal with the associated issues. Three general themes were developed with eleven subthemes.

The three general themes are:

- 1- Conserve working forest and range landscapes.
- 2- Protect forests and rangelands from harm.
- 3- Enhance public benefits from trees, forests and rangelands.

These themes were then followed by eleven subthemes that provide more detail for a priority landscape rating.

High priority landscapes identified within the Santa Clara Unit include:

- Restoring wildfire impacted areas to maintain ecosystem health.
- Priority landscaping to protect communities from wildfire.
- Water quality and the threats within the watershed that affect water quality.
- Urban forestry tree planting.
- Urban forestry maintenance.
- Community wildfire planning.
- Wildfire threat to areas protected for habitat.

Overarching findings from the California's Forests and Rangelands 2010 assessment that affect the Santa Clara Unit include:

- Forest and rangelands remain valued assets critical to economic, social, and the environmental well-being of California.
- Forest and rangelands face a variety of threats, and trends indicate these threats are increasing in number.
- Demands on forest and rangeland resources are increasing.
- Opportunities exist to improve the quality and quantity of benefits from these lands.
- Reaching desired future conditions will require political, social, and economic challenges.
- The potential to reach desired future conditions of our forest and rangelands will depend on taking advantage and augmenting existing collaborative efforts.

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Priorities for the Santa Clara Unit include working with local landowners and governmental agencies for implementation of fire management plan objectives. Santa Clara Unit will continue to support the Community Wildfire Protection Plans (CWPPs) that are enacted within the unit and assist with grant funding for community wildfire protection projects. A continuance of the Vegetation Management Program (VMP) is a priority for healthy fuels management.

Additionally, through the use of this strategic fire plan, the Santa Clara Unit is working with local landowners to reduce unplanned ignitions within the unit and limit damage caused by uncontrolled fires through the use of education, pre fire mitigation projects, patrol, and law enforcement to meet the mission statement of the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection.

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Sweetwater Forest Fire Station:	1- State owned fire engine
Smith Creek Forest Fire Station:	1- State owned fire engine
Stevens Creek Forest Fire Station:	1- State owned fire engine
Alma Forest Fire Station:	1- State owned fire engine 1- Battalion chief
Alma Helitack Base:	1- State owned helicopter
Almaden Forest Fire Station:	1- State owned fire engine 1- Battalion chief
Pacheco Forest Fire Station:	1- State owned fire engine
Coyote Forest Fire Station:	1- State owned fire engine
Morgan Hill Forest Fire Station:	2- State owned fire engines 1- County owned (schedule A) fire engine 1- Battalion chief 1- Transport/bulldozer
Morgan Hill Headquarters:	1- Emergency Command Center 3- Battalion chiefs 1- Heavy equipment mechanic

In order for Santa Clara Unit to meet the objective of keeping 95% of all wildland fires to 10 acres or less (as defined by CAL FIRE), a large number of auto-aid agreements exist in the area. These auto-aid agreements allow for the nearest fire suppression resource to respond to the scene of a wildland fire and begin fire suppression activities.

The following list contains all the agencies that participate in auto-aid agreements with Santa Clara Unit (listed by county):

Contra Costa

- East Bay Regional Parks Fire Department
- Crockett Fire Department
- Contra Costa Fire Protection District
- East Contra Costa Fire Protection District
- Pinole Fire Department
- San Ramon Valley Fire Protection District
- Rodeo-Hercules Fire Department

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- Moraga-Orinda Fire Protection District
- Richmond Fire Department
- El Cerrito Fire Department

Alameda

- East Bay Regional Parks Fire Department
- Alameda County Fire Protection District
- Berkeley Fire Department
- Alameda Fire Department
- Oakland Fire Department
- Livermore-Pleasanton Fire Protection District
- Hayward Fire Department
- Piedmont Fire Department
- Fremont Fire Department

San Joaquin

- Tracy Fire Department

Stanislaus

- West Stanislaus Fire Department

Santa Clara

- South Santa Clara County Fire District (Schedule A contract)
- Santa Clara County Fire Department
- Gilroy Fire Department
- San Jose Fire Department
- Palo Alto Fire Department
- Milpitas Fire Department

Other Fire Agencies providing Auto-Aid into Santa Clara Unit

- Pajaro Valley Fire Protection District
- San Benito County Fire Protection District
- Merced County Fire Department
- San Juan Fire Department

The Morgan Hill Emergency Command Center (ECC) provides command and control through dispatch agreements for Local Government Cooperative Agreements with the South Santa Clara County Fire District, Alameda County Fire Protection District at the Sunol Forest Fire Station and two Amador Contracts. One Amador Contract at the Pacheco Forest Fire Station in Santa Clara County, and the other is at Sunshine Forest Fire Station in Contra Costa County.