

2005 Activities:

- A Hells Hollow neighborhood meeting drew many residents and property owners. Issues addressed at this meeting included hazardous fuels reduction in and around the community, and emergency access and evacuation problems such as narrow, overgrown roads and poor road and address signage. Follow-up meetings initiated by community members resulted in nearly 100% community interest and pledged participation with community fire safe projects. Another outcome of the meeting was the identification of community resources that could assist with the community's fire safe efforts. The skills identified ranged from grant writing and administration to professional expertise in logging, shredding, chipping, and bulldozing equipment. A number of residents have already cleared a significant amount of acreage either through personal efforts, private contract work, or various programs such as the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). Community interest and participation encouraged the Stanislaus National Forest-Groveland Ranger District to approve a project providing 200' of thinning and fuels reduction on either side of roads crossing National Forest land in Hells Hollow.
- The YF FSC Coordinator attended the annual Yosemite Vista Estates Board Meeting and Homeowners Association meeting to explain the proposed project. Community members welcomed these efforts on their behalf and are eager for work to begin.
- The YF FSC participated in the Tuolumne County Resource Advisory Committee field trip to funded project sites in southern Tuolumne County.
- Two YF FSC grant proposals approved by the California Fire Safe Council Clearinghouse will provide \$40,000 for fuels reduction work and road improvements in the Hells Hollow area, and \$35,000 for chipping in the Groveland area. The Tuolumne County Solid Waste Division will provide space for a yard waste collection site at the former Groveland Landfill, where the public can drop off vegetative waste to be chipped and used as mulch and weed and erosion control. Besides reducing hazardous fuels, this will also reduce the amount of material disposed of by burning, and associated smoke and air pollution.

INSTITUTIONAL AND OTHER ISSUES

Although Pre-Fire Management projects provided great benefit to the citizens living in the Unit, they did impose an additional work load on TCU staff. Grant, contract and project administration took up an enormous amount of staff time. Almost all of the fuel reduction projects require a VMP agreement between CDF and the project partners. This entails the expertise of a CDF Forester to perform the CEQA analysis for the project.

TCU lost its VMP Forester position in 2002 and that work now must be done by existing Unit foresters whose workloads are already overwhelming. The list below contains these institutional and other issues that have made implementation of the TCU Fire Plan, projects, grants and contracts more difficult.

- The delay in announcing grants that were awarded through the National Fire Plan reduced the time frame to actually implement the grant projects.
 - This has frustrated both the Battalion Chief and cooperator sponsors of these projects.
 - A more timely process must be developed to streamline grant award notification.
- CDF fire crews have been very involved in the implementation of fire plan projects. There are just not enough crews to support the work load generated by the fire plan. CDF managers in Sacramento must continue to support the Camp Program and fight any efforts to close camps or cut crews. If anything, they should fight for expanding the Camp Program to add camps and crews to the CDF arsenal.
- The National Fire Plan grants do not allow funding of maintenance projects that will treat fuels that have grown back in existing fuel breaks and treated areas.
 - The only way that most of these maintenance measures will take place is through the use of grant dollars.
 - CDF needs to communicate this fact to the federal agencies that sponsor the grants, otherwise maintenance of past treatment efforts will never occur.
- Prescribed burns have become more difficult to execute for the following reasons:
 - Implementation of more stringent air pollution rules – “Burn Days” occur less frequently than before.
 - More difficult to schedule equipment and personnel resources during fire season. Many burns were postponed or cancelled altogether because resources were committed to incidents or cover assignments.
 - Rain in early October has caused burns to be cancelled.
 - Due to lawsuits being filed against government officials following recent prescribed burn escapes that have caused property damage, many CDF officers are not willing to assume that liability.
- Loss of VMP Forester I position in 2002 fiscal year has delayed processing VMP agreements for pre-fire projects.
- VMP Programmatic Environmental Impact Report for performing VMP’s in coniferous forests needs to be approved to avoid the current requirement of filing “Negative Declarations” for these VMP projects.
- Need to integrate both NEPA and CEQA into a single checklist to prevent the necessity of duplicating these efforts on projects with federal partners.
- Delay in processing the new Five Party Agreement has delayed projects that involved federal partners.
- There is usually not enough Unit staff available to identify, plan and implement Pre-Fire projects during the non-fire season due to Amador Plan and equipment maintenance commitments. There is a need to develop a fully staffed fuels

management program in CDF. It is unrealistic to expect suppression staff to design, plan, and implement fuels treatment projects utilizing the current grant funding cycles and requirements.

- Weather has affected project implementation in the following ways:
 - Snow at higher elevation projects has kept crews from working during the winter months. This has been an issue on 2 grant projects.
 - As mentioned above in #2, rain has caused delays or cancellation of prescribed burns.
- The time frames for completing the annual pre-fire management plan are not realistic, especially when considering that the date the fire plan analysis data is made available to CDF pre-fire staff is usually late April or May. Due to errors in the original 2005 data that was available May 11th, the final corrected data was not available until after May 31st. If our fire plans are going to continue to be due June 1st of each year, realistically the data would need to be available in late March in order to hold public meetings and get all the required signatures by June 1st.
- CDF staffing, in general, is insufficient to provide adequate personnel to plan and implement pre-fire projects. This is especially true when county contracts and Amador Plan programs use Schedule B personnel to augment their programs.
- The retirement of the Fire Prevention Assistant II (also the Unit VIP Coordinator) in TCU in December 2004 has affected the Unit's VIP program. The position has not been filled.

UNIT-WIDE BLM PROJECTS

2005 and Beyond Activities

This section of the plan was received too late to be incorporated into the body of the plan. In the next printing, the BLM projects may be incorporated into the CDF Battalion Plans where the projects will occur. These projects are listed in approximate order of planned accomplishment. None of these projects are funded for 2006 through the BLM but will be requested for funding beginning in 2007.

- Hetch Hetchy/Anker # 2 VMP – This project is a prescribed burn on HHWP, BLM, and private land in the Moccasin area. The northern end of this project is the Hetch Hetchy/Anker #1 VMP, and the southern end is the Creek Fire. Reducing these fuels will give fire fighters a chance to contain the fire before it gets into the Priest Reservoir basin. Priest Reservoir provides drinking water to millions of people in the Bay Area. Status: Project is being reviewed in Region Office; plan to begin prep work in winter/spring 2005.
- Cattle Drive Trail Fuel Break and Fuel Reduction Program – This project is being planned in three phases and will extend from Yankee Hill Road to Parrott's Ferry Road. The fuel break is located along Cattle Drive Trail for the first phase and then follows the main ridgeline west to Blue Mountain Minerals. From Blue