SECTION IV: PRE-FIRE MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

A: FIRE PREVENTION & LAW ENFORCEMENT - Battalion 4620

The primary goal of the San Benito - Monterey Unit Strategic Fire Plan is to prevent the ignition and spread of unwanted, human-caused fires with an emphasis on reducing losses as a result of large damaging fires. Utilizing fire history, fuels data, weather data, assets at risk, incorporating input from the Monterey County Community Wildfire Protection Plan and Federal partners, the unit has identified "Priority Landscapes" as indicated in this document. Proactive pre-fire suppression activities and public information and education programs are key elements of this plan.

San Benito-Monterey Unit management addresses fire prevention through the engineering, education and law enforcement programs. Their shared objective is reduced fire hazard and risk. This is more narrowly addressed in a planning process based on ignition management and loss reduction, including biomass utilization, fire resistant landscaping, mechanical fuels treatment, building construction standards, infrastructure, land use planning and pre-fire, safety zone and escape plans.

Ignitions are managed by preventing fires likely to exceed the capabilities of available suppression forces that could result in large damaging fires. Loss reduction is integral to mitigating large and damaging fires. Significant improvement can be achieved by reducing hazards (fuel buildups around structures and communities) and working with private industry to implement hazard reduction plans around residential developments in the rural-urban intermix areas. Additionally, pre-designated suppression and evacuation plans are effective tools in ensuring civilian and firefighter life safety. Successful programs permit more effective utilization of CAL FIRE's initial attack forces and enhance firefighter safety and citizen safety.

See Appendix C for Ignition Data

-Title 24 (addresses fire apparatus access, water requirements, building materials, and construction methods as of 2007) – These requirements are performed by the district or agency with jurisdiction. Currently, San Benito County funds a Fire Marshall position within CAL FIRE to complete all PRC 4290, Protection Planning, Code Enforcement and Building Inspections issues.

While many structures in the Unit are not built to current standards, all new construction is being held to the Chapter 7 (Fire-Resistance-Rated Construction) and Chapter 7A (SFM - Materials and Construction Methods for Exterior Wildfire Exposure) building construction standards. Fire Hazard Severity Zones (FHSZ) dictate what codes have to be followed in which areas. A map showing the FHSZs in the Unit is shown in the "Maps" portion of this document.

-Title 19, PRC 4290 - *A*ddresses fire apparatus access and water requirements and is dealt with at the County level

-Protection Planning - Fire Protection planning is reviewed at the subdivision and parcel map level and typically implemented at the development stages of a project.

-Code enforcement - Carmel Highlands Fire Protection District, Cypress Fire Protection District and Pebble Beach Community Services District have full time Fire Protection Planners who review all building permits. Among other codes, they enforce the current California Building Codes, which include Chapter 7 (Fire-Resistance-Rated Construction) and Chapter 7A (SFM - Materials and Construction Methods for Exterior Wildfire Exposure).

-PRC 4291 - Addresses defensible space around structures. Each battalion has a predetermined amount of LE-100 inspections to complete each year. Some battalions, due to housing density, have more inspections and are on a three year cycle to alternate neighborhoods. Inspections will be done on any and all structures when requested, even if it is not within the normal rotation of inspections that year.

-Pre-Plans - Unit personnel is constantly gathering updated data in each battalion to submit to Unit GIS personnel in efforts to produce updated battalion preplan maps. The San Benito-Monterey Unit also works with students from local colleges for pre-plan mapping of communities for emergency response. The goal of this is to increase public and emergency responder awareness of community values, hazards, evacuation routes, potential safe refuge areas, and coordinate emergency responders while students have an opportunity to engage in GIS projects and emergency planning for college credit.

-Fire Hazard Severity Zones (FHSZ) – In 2007, FHSZs were updated with improved accuracy and adopted throughout the Unit, not only on state responsibility lands, but also in local jurisdiction. Several cities throughout Monterey County had Very High FHSZs which required cities to either adopt or reject. All cities affected within the San Benito-Monterey Unit adopted recommended changes in the Very High FHSZs and now adhere to building code regulations contained in CBC Chapter 7A.

http://www.fire.ca.gov/fire_prevention/fire_prevention_wildland.php

INFORMATION AND EDUCATION

Fire safety education is a high priority in the unit, whether it is a formal school program or advising residents on how to keep their homes safe inside and out. Unit personnel perform training at the local schools in each battalion on fire safety inside the home as well as what to do if there is a fire outside in the wildland. The crews also take advantage of their time out in the field while doing LE-100 inspections to help educate the residents on ways to cut back brush, trim trees and mow while still keeping an attractive, natural look to the landscape.

The unit purchased several large fire prevention signs in 2005 on a grant from the Bureau of Land Management, as did the San Benito Fire Safe Council and has placed them at strategic locations throughout the unit to spread the fire safety message. Several of the signs have been placed at fire stations of other agencies to gain high visibility of the dangers of wildfire.

Results of the Unit's ignition data shows that recently vegetation fires caused by equipment use, smoking and vehicles have been reduced. Unit managers believe that our public education efforts are having a positive influence on the general public. Power line caused ignitions are also down for the same period, possibly due to increased communications and interaction between the Unit and utility companies over power line maintenance.

The San Benito and Monterey Fire Safe Councils actively seek grant funding to work with local landowners and stakeholders as well as CAL FIRE personnel to reduce roadside fuels, increase public awareness, build fuel breaks around communities and develop updated evacuation plans in the Unit. Grant funding will enable Unit personnel to purchase newspaper ads, large roadside signs, fund a Unit website and other avenues for public outreach.

The unit has made it a priority to have a public information officer available at all times to notify media of emergencies in the unit and throughout the state during peak fire season. Since a majority of fires are human caused, we believe that public awareness is key to reducing ignitions.

The San Benito – Monterey Unit has been very proactive in gaining defensible space compliance by aggressively doing LE-100 inspections in the interface areas. Public reaction has been positive as residents are educated on the various ways they can be compliant with the law and still maintain an attractive landscape that will assist fire personnel in the event of a wildfire in their neighborhood. The Unit's ability to keep fires small with minimal damage in and around structures has proven that more residents are becoming fire safe and our education efforts are working.

B. VEGETATION MANAGEMENT

The San Benito-Monterey Resource Management Program strives to enhance the county's natural resources for both present and future use. The Unit has a Registered Professional Forester on staff to provide assistance and education to landowners on forestry issues.

The Unit administers an active Vegetation Management Program (VMP). The purpose of the VMP program is to reduce flammable vegetation that may contribute to large, damaging wildfires and high fire suppression costs. The flammable vegetation on public or private lands can be reduced through prescribed burning or mechanical treatment. Vegetation management also results in benefits to grazing, wildlife, plant diversity, and water quality.

Overview:

The Vegetation Management Program is a cost-sharing program that focuses on the use of prescribed fire, and mechanical means, for addressing wildland fire fuel hazards and other resource management issues on State Responsibility Area (SRA) lands. The use of prescribed fire mimics natural processes, restores fire to its historic role in wildland ecosystems, and provides significant fire hazard reduction benefits that enhance public and firefighter safety.

VMP allows private landowners to enter into a contract with CAL FIRE to use prescribed fire to accomplish a combination of fire protection and resource management goals. Implementation of VMP projects is by CAL FIRE Units. The projects which fit within a unit's priority areas (e.g., those identified through the Fire Plan) and are considered to be of most value to the unit are those that will be completed. The Vegetation Management Program has been in existence since 1982 and has averaged approximately 35,000 acres per year since its inception.

History:

The Vegetation Management Program is a cost share program that allows public and private landowners to participate in wildland fuel reduction projects. The primary tool used is prescribed fire, although in more recent years CAL FIRE has used the program for mechanical treatments of vegetation as well.

Vegetation management, or VMP, was preceded by the Range Improvement Program that was used aggressively by CAL FIRE to remove undesired woody vegetation and increase forage production for domestic stock and wildlife. Early records indicate that range improvement burns were conducted by CAL FIRE as early as 1945, when CAL FIRE was known as the Division of Forestry under the Department of Natural Resources. Acres burned during the period of 1949-1953 averaged 141,400 acres per year, and totaled approximately 707,000 acres for the same period (T. F. Arvola Deputy State Forester, Inter Office Memo, April 5, 1954). These burns were carried out in cooperation with landowners primarily interested in improving forage for livestock.

In July of 1980 Senate Bill 1704 (Keene) created the Chaparral Management Program. This legislation provided CAL FIRE authorization to contract with private and public landowners for the purpose of fuel hazard reduction, vegetation management, and the improvement of wildlife, range, and forest resources. The program is currently known as the Vegetation Management Program; however, the objectives and authority for fuel reduction projects are still guided by the statutes created by Senate Bill 1704. VMP acres treated have declined significantly in recent years, averaging approximately 13,000 acres per year since 1999. Increasing rural populations,

air quality issues, and new CAL FIRE programs have reduced the use of prescribed fire in many areas of the state. However, VMP is a cost effective tool that is still used to treat vegetation where physical and social conditions are conducive to its use. The program has proven to be well suited for controlling invasive weeds and improving wildlife habitat under joint projects with organizations such as the Nature Conservancy. Its use to establish fuel breaks and eliminate heavy fuel accumulations in many areas of the state will continue.

Local Program:

Locally, the emphasis is on projects in the Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI) and the Wildland-Urban Intermix. The intention is to treat hazardous fuel accumulations near structures and infrastructure to reduce potential losses during wildfire. Other items of concern for VMP project selection are watershed protection, habitat enhancement (especially for threatened and endangered species), and property owner goals.

The unit has multiple projects in various stages of planning that are addressed in each Battalion section of this plan.

Depending upon weather conditions and resource availability, we may be able to conduct multiple prescribed burns this year on projects with an active contract. Public notification of an impending prescribed burn shall be through a press release to local media outlets and may include road signs, as well.

Fuels:

Four distinct wildland fuel types dominate the San Benito-Monterey Unit.

Fuel Model 1 (annual grasses)

Although inter-mixed with fuel model 4 (brush), this fuel model dominates the foothills of the eastern portion of the Unit. Extending from the Santa Clara County line southward along the foothills east of the Salinas valley, this fuel model represents more than fifty percent of the fuel types in the Unit.

Fuel Model 2 (oak woodland)

This fuel model is typically located on the north and east facing slopes of the Unit. It is predominant in the northeast, southeast and southwest areas of both San Benito and Monterey counties and typically aligned with Fuel model 4 (brush), on the opposite facing slopes.

Fuel Model 4 (brush)

While a substantial amount of brush is located in the foothills east of the Salinas Valley, in the area of the Pinnacles National Monument, the majority of this fuel type is found in the mountains west of the Salinas Valley throughout the coastal range. Typically, it is found on south and western facing slopes in areas not used for cattle grazing. Brush can be found measuring over five feet in height, which corresponds to over 30 years of age.

Fuel Model 9 (conifers)

Conifers consisting of several species of pine and redwood are located in two distinct areas within the Unit, specifically, in the Fremont Peak area south of San Juan Bautista, and throughout the coastal mountains south of Monterey. The conifer forests extend into the Big Sur and Ventana Wilderness areas.