Executive Summary

Tulare Unit is located in Central California and makes up part of the San Joaquin Valley. It consists of 888,723 acres of local responsibility which is protected by CDF under a Schedule "A" contract, 793,716 acres of state responsibility land under direct CDF protection, and 1,429,881 acres of lands under Federal Government Protection. The total of 3,112,320 acres, makes Tulare County the seventh largest county in area in the state. The Unit is bordered on the east by Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks, and the Sequoia National Forest. The counties of Kern, Kings and Fresno border to the South, West, and North respectively. Tulare Unit is divided into two Divisions and eight Battalions (two Schedule "A" and four Schedule "B"). There are nine state funded fire stations; one air attack base, one 120-man conservation camp, and Mountain Home Demonstration State Forest.

The elevation of Tulare Unit land receiving direct protection by CDF ranges from 200 feet along the county's western boundary to a highest point of 9,300 feet on Moses Mountain to the East. The entire county elevations range from 200 feet on the West Side to the highest point in the contiguous United States, Mt. Whitney at 14,495 on the eastern boundary. This wide range of elevation supports many areas of vegetation consisting of grass, oak deciduous, oak persistent, brush, and timber.

The January 1, 2003 Department of Finances estimates Tulare County's population at 386,246. 145,128 of those people receive their fire protection from California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection / Tulare County Fire Department. Our dispatchers reported 16,071 responses last year averaging 43.9 calls a day. The majority of the population in the state responsibility area is located along two east-west highways. Highway 198 which leads to the Sequoia / Kings Canyon National Parks and Highway 190 which accesses a significant portion of the Sequoia National Forest / Giant Sequoia National Monument. Tulare Unit continues to experience a population growth rate of approximately 1 percent annually. Fire occurrence spot maps indicate a direct relationship between use areas and fire occurrence. Along with the population increase, mountain areas have increased wildland urban intermix problems. Structures are being built throughout wildland areas wherein vegetation fires can spread. Providing adequate fire protection to those structures has become a major undertaking.

Tulare Unit's Fire Management Plan is our mechanism to catalog potential hazard areas and develop prescriptions to begin mitigating them based upon assessed priorities.

Pre-Fire Management: History indicates that it's not of matter of "if" we have a fire, but rather "when" we will have a fire. A good Pre-Fire Management Plan will allow us to prevent those fire starts from becoming large damaging fires. The common denominators for large wildfires are fuel, slope, weather, and assets at risk. We cannot change slope or weather but we can modify fuels and ensure that the individual homes and communities have a defendable space. All new homes being built are subject to PRC 4290 regulations which assist us in the defense of these newest additions to the

watershed.

The first step is to identify the areas with the highest potential for a fire start to become a large fire (over 300 acres). Fire history in this Unit shows that many of the large fires occur in the same areas. Therefore, it would seem obvious that if all factors remain the same, the greatest potential for a large fire will be in the areas where they have burned before. By using the fire history map and overlying the assets at risk, we can determine priorities for projects.

After identifying the high risk areas, it is time to develop fire management projects to provide solutions to the problem areas. Some examples are:

1. Modifying the fuels in these areas for easier fire containment.
2. Maintain fire breaks from previous fires.
3. Maintain fuel breaks.
4. Look for areas to construct new firebreaks where frequent ignitions occur.
5. Insure that homeowners create a defendable space around their homes and communities.
   a. Use Fire Safe Council's to conduct community presentations in an effort to assist in developing solutions for area specific problems.
   b. Create community action groups to be proactive in fire safe projects and work with the Fire Safe Councils.
   c. Increase PRC 4291 compliance and educate homeowners on the need to transition from the 30' to 100' clearance requirements. .
   d. Work with local cooperating agencies to accomplish fuel reduction projects, watershed enhancement, range improvement, and pre-suppression projects that benefit all agencies.

Pre-Fire Management Staff's goal is to minimize the threat of a fire from becoming a large and damaging wildfire. To attain that goal, we must reduce the amount of brush covered lands. We must also develop fuel modification projects in the populated areas to create better defendable spaces and limit the potential for fires to spread from a populated area into the wildland.

Pre-Fire Management's focus will continue to solicit local ranchers to participate in VMP projects to reduce the fuel loading, and reestablish water generation. Fire Safe Councils will be a key partner to determine successful strategies in minimizing our threat to key assets at risk. The success of these projects will depend on support from willing stakeholders, motivated field personnel, and supportive administrative staff. New projects promoting our goals must be developed at the Battalion level. Pre-Fire Management Staff will support these new projects and assist in its implementation. When the number of projects becomes greater than the resources or budget allows, projects will be prioritized based upon their level of threat, stakeholder cooperation, and the realistic ability for the project to make it to completion.