

The California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CDF) and local government fire departments have come to recognize that the expansion and excessive buildup of flammable vegetation within “ wildland urban interface “ has created a potential for devastating loss of life, residential, commercial property and forest resources.

The San Mateo & Santa Cruz Unit has developed the Fire Management Plan (FMP) to implement the statewide fire plan at the local level. The overall goal of this plan is to *reduce total wildfire costs and losses* from wildland fire by protecting assets at risk through focused vegetation management projects and aggressive “Fire Safe Defense Awareness” Programs throughout the San Mateo & Santa Cruz Unit.

The major components of the plan include:

- Creation of local forums to determine what the fire problem is through input from citizens, community groups, local agencies and other stakeholders.
- Identification of assets at risk, enabling the stakeholder forums and the Unit to set priorities for vegetation management project work. These assets include citizen and firefighter safety, structures, watersheds, wildlife and habitat, timber or unique areas of cultural or historic significance, and air quality.
- Development of wildfire protection zones through vegetation management projects that reduce the risks of large damaging wildland fires.
- Development and implementation of vegetation management projects cooperatively with stakeholder forums. Projects may include a combination of mechanical clearing or prescribed fire.

This document is a dynamic working plan that will be reviewed and updated periodically, yet is flexible enough to meet the needs of the Unit. The intent is to keep it simple, easy to understand and, above all, a “guide”.

SAN MATEO & SANTA CRUZ UNIT PROFILE

The San Mateo & Santa Cruz Unit covers an area of 1000 square miles and protects 426,230 acres of State Responsibility Area (SRA). The Unit’s western boundary is the Pacific Ocean, to the north San Francisco, to the east the San Francisco Bay area, Santa Clara County and to the south the Pajaro River.

San Mateo and Santa Cruz Counties lie completely within the Santa Cruz Mountains. The main axis runs in a general northwest – southeast direction. From just south of San Bruno Mountain in San Mateo County to Mt. Madonna in Santa Cruz County, the ridgeline runs about 65 miles and contains the highest point of the range at Loma Prieta (3806 feet). Among the higher peaks are: Mount Umunhum (3442 feet); Castle Rock (3214 feet); Ben Lomond

Mountain (2600 feet); Eagle Rock (2488 feet); Kings Mountain (2315 feet) and Mount Madonna (1897 feet).

The Santa Cruz Mountains continue to be molded by rapidly evolving interplay of uplift and erosion. This movement has caused water runoff (streams) creating moderate to very steep slopes. The area has numerous seismographic faults that run throughout the range -the San Andreas Fault being the most famous. The frequent earthquakes in the region show that mountain building forces are still at work.

Dense conifer stands, typically with a heavy accumulation of litter and downed woody material, dominate the vegetation within the Unit. Coastal scrub communities, consisting of low vegetation up to six feet in height, occur on coastal bluffs, coastal hills and, frequently on wind swept summits. Growth is usually dense and difficult to penetrate. True chaparral communities can be found in isolated areas on southwest aspects throughout the Unit and at higher elevations. Grasslands occupy areas mainly in the coastal valleys, along the eastern slopes of the Santa Cruz Mountain Range, and in the southern end of the unit. The majority of this community has been lost to agriculture or urban development.

Approximately one million people reside within the Unit. Another one million + people uses the numerous state, county and city recreational facilities and forested areas annually. Recreational use of public lands is a year round activity and remains in great demand by people from the metropolitan Bay Area.

Half a dozen major highways, all of which pass through CDF protected watersheds, traverse both San Mateo and Santa Cruz Counties. These transportation corridors are vital to the state highway system and state commerce.

Development and open space (wildland) form a common boundary in both counties. Much of this area is contiguous to State Responsibility Areas (SRA) and the development of rural style living is progressing at a moderate to rapid pace. Where there were once summer cabins on winding, narrow roads there are now yearlong residences, most of which are valued in excess of four hundred thousand dollars with many in the one million to three million dollar range.

GENERAL CLIMATE

The Santa Cruz Mountains have what may be considered a cool summer Mediterranean climate, characterized by low average summer temperatures and wet winters. Generally speaking, most of the rain occurs between December and March. It is not uncommon to see periods of precipitation begin as early as October and extend into April. Rain may occur in June or July, though that is rare.

The average season rainfall total for the last 5 years:

Skylonda	50 inches
Corralitos	37 inches
Felton	54 inches

The above three locations are a good representation of rainfall locations.

During the summer months coastal fog is common and extends inland to the crest of the ridges, often pouring through passes onto the eastern slopes, into the San Francisco Bay Area, and the Santa Clara Valley. Local topographic features prevent fog from reaching some of the higher ridge top areas. As a rule of thumb, the fog normally burns off about midday, allowing for daily temperatures to reach an average of 70 to 85 degrees.

Snow occasionally falls on the higher crests and ridges of the mountains usually melting within a day.

STAKEHOLDERS

Recognizing the need for resources to provide the work on fuel reduction projects within San Mateo County, the San Mateo County Sheriff's Department, local government and CDF/County Fire developed a working partnership that would provide two "deputy" supervised inmate conservation crews to work on projects.

In the fall of 1991, two crews began work on Old Stage Road adjacent to the San Francisco Watershed (Crystal Springs), to provide fire department access below the Highland Subdivision (Bunker Hill area).

Due to budget challenges, one crew remains funded and their quarters have moved to a Transitional Unit within the San Mateo County Jail.

In 2003 *Fire Safe Crews* worked a total of 24 project days clearing 28 tons of vegetation and protecting property worth 34 million dollars.

Originally named the "San Mateo County Wildland Hazard Task Force", the founding members included CDF Ranger Unit Chief Dave Mack, Captain John Wells of the San Mateo County Sheriff's Department and retired Division Chief Steve Richmond.

This organization preceded the state's own Fire Safe Council by three years.

Fire Safe San Mateo continues to be the driving force behind fuel reduction projects within the county and continues to encourage and support Fire Safe presentations and activities. It has supported community events in Woodside (San Mateo County), La Honda (San Mateo County) July 4th Celebration, and the Half Moon Bay Fire Department's (San Mateo County) Safety Fair. Other accomplishments include developing a Fire Safe Speaker's Bureau, a grant program for homeowner groups to reduce hazardous vegetation from around their neighborhoods; working with local fire agencies on press releases, and providing self-help procedures and Fire Safe information for homeowners. As part of its 2004 Goals, *Fire Safe San Mateo* will actively seek public and private grants to fund Fire Safe projects, seek projects with new agencies or homeowner associations, and provide defensible space demonstrations to homeowner or road associations.

Santa Cruz County. Since the dissolution of the Santa Cruz County Fire Safe Council, the idea that a smaller council be established under the auspices of the Santa Cruz County Fire Chiefs' Association is currently being explored.