

Memorandum

To: CANDACE GREGORY
Region Chief
Southern Region
Department of Forestry and Fire Protection

Date: August 13, 2009

Telephone: (209) 754-3831

Website: www.fire.ca.gov

From: MIKE NOONAN
Unit Chief
Tuolumne-Calaveras Unit
Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE)

Subject: 2009 Tuolumne-Calaveras Unit Pre-Fire Management Plan
Cover Memorandum

The 2009 Tuolumne-Calaveras Unit Pre-Fire Management Plan (aka "Plan") is the sixth update of the Unit's Plan since the implementation of the 1996 California Fire Plan, and the first since our 2005 Plan

This year's iteration of the Plan is focused on the activities of Unit personnel and programs alongside our community stakeholders, but makes no attempt to serve as a Community Wildfire Protection Plan (herein after referred to as CWPP) for any specific community. The goal of the Plan this year is to serve our "in house" needs. CWPP's for Tuolumne and Calaveras counties remain current and in use by the various stakeholders.

Included in this years Pre-Fire Management Plan is:

- A review of the Unit Chief's priorities for the Unit
- Current description of the Unit
- A review of recent fire occurrence data
- The Battalion-specific mitigation plans
- A discussion of the fuels, weather, level of service and assets at risk

While the Unit waits for new direction regarding Fire Plan production and implementation from the Board of Forestry, our long term intentions regarding subsequent annual Fire Plans is to include the many stakeholders in their development, as per whatever program changes are implemented by the Board.

Unit Fire Plan Business Process Assessment

The original Fuels, Weather, Level of Service, and Assets at Risk assessments were completed in 1998, prior to the first release of the Unit Pre-Fire Management Plan. This data has been carried forward through the 2005 Plan, and is included here with only a few updates (Assets at Risk). These assessments were used to identify the high hazard areas within the unit. The fuels analysis showed that the fuels found in many areas that are threatened by major fires on a regular basis are rated medium or high hazard, not very high as would be expected. In many cases, fires would start in areas where very high hazard fuels exist, and then progress to the point of threatening communities and other valuable assets in areas with medium or high hazard fuels. This demonstrated the fact that the knowledge and experience of seasoned TCU staff must be taken into account when identifying high hazard areas for projects. The Fire Plan analysis can then be used to justify their choice of projects based on a common sense interpretation of the data.

Unit Fire Plan Data Layers

Validation of the key Fire Plan data layers (fuels, fire history, ignitions, weather station coverage, and asset at risk data) in TCU was completed in 1998. Validation of the fire history, ignitions, fuels and weather station coverage was done in 1996 and 1997. The weather station coverage and asset at risk data was compiled in 1998, prior to the first release of the TCU Fire Plan. In 2005, the weather station coverage was updated based on new weather station data. The historic site data was also revised at this time. Ignitions and weather data are currently under review as part of the rewrite of the Unit NFDRS-Fire Weather Operating Plan.

Unit Fire Plan Integration into Daily Operations

Integration of the Unit Fire Plan into daily operations has been a slow process, but great strides were made in the years prior to 2005, starting with the move to combine the Ignition Management, Fire and VMP Plans into one document. In addition, since 2004 the Unit Battalion Chiefs began playing a larger role in Fire Plan development by preparing summaries of the wildland fire hazards and assets at risk in their Battalions. Based on the issues identified in their summaries, they developed mitigations to reduce the hazard and protect the assets. Unfortunately integration stalled in some Battalions as annual Plan updates were not routinely produced since 2005. The degree to which the Plan remained a working document was due in large part to the implementation of the Prop. 40 program and the involvement of local Fire Safe Councils. As described in the Unit Chief's Priorities, the Unit's intent for the Pre-Fire Management Plan going forward is for it to serve as "...a practical reference document..." for Unit staff and local stakeholders.

Key Fire Plan Participants

Cooperation is a key component of TCU's Pre-Fire Management activities. TCU staff work closely with community groups as well as with the federal, state and local government agencies within the unit. Many cooperative projects have been completed as a result of our efforts with other agencies.

The primary cooperators with CDF within TCU are the three Fire Safe Councils: Calaveras Foothills FSC; Hwy 108 FSC; Yosemite Foothills FSC. Working closely with our Battalion Chiefs, Prop. 40 Forester, and PFE, many projects have been taken from concept to completion since the Councils were first organized in 2002.

The U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management represent the Federal government as important cooperators. California Dept. of Parks and Recreation is a key State cooperator. Local government agencies, the private forest industry and private citizens round out the list of key participants.

Tuolumne County developed their county-wide Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) in 2004. Recent discussions point to an interest in splitting the Tuolumne County CWPP into two separate documents, each one focused on a smaller, geographically well defined, portion of the county community. In 2005 Calaveras County adopted the Tuolumne-Calaveras Unit Pre-Fire Management Plan as their CWPP, targeting all communities in Calaveras County.