

Fire as a process, involves the proper combination of three elements: heat, oxygen, and fuel. A wildfire doesn't conform to jurisdictional boundaries. It burns wherever the three elements are present. Therefore, a wildfire, regardless of size, can impact a wide variety of stakeholders. A stakeholder can be any person, agency, or organization with a particular interest in fire safety and protection of assets from wildland fire. In LNU this includes, but isn't limited to, the fire protection



professionals from more than 100 paid and volunteer fire departments, nearly one hundred active Volunteers-in-Prevention (VIP), planning staffs from the six counties, air quality staff from six separate air quality districts, and dozens of citizens groups, both formal and ad-hoc, that have engaged the issue of fire protection in their respective communities. In LNU, we recognize that such engagement takes many approaches. Our stakeholders have taught us that there is no such thing as a single "standard approach" to reducing costs and losses due to wildfire.

In some instances, concerned citizens have formed exclusively around the issue of fire, in which case they are known as "firesafe councils." In LNU, such councils have been formed at various levels of community and governance. For example, FireSafe Sonoma encompasses the entire County of Sonoma, while the South Lake FireSafe Council encompasses a portion of Lake County that has a common tradition resulting from a geographically influenced fire history and a fire protection district that evolved in response. At an even more local level, the Mt. Veeder FireSafe Council in Napa County is oriented toward a specific community with its' own unique fire safety concerns.

In other instances, long-established community groups can be considered functionally equivalent to firesafe councils. Examples include the Hidden Valley Lake Homeowners Association in Lake County, the Berryessa Estate Homeowners Association and the Circle Oaks Homeowners Association in Napa County, and the Fountaingrove Open Space Maintenance Association and the Fitch Mountain Neighborhood Association in Sonoma County, all of which have worked for years with local CAL FIRE representatives to implement community defense wildfire protection projects. Neighborhood and homeowner groups like these have been in existence for many years and have a long history of addressing common problems of local land use and development, watershed issues, and other local community environmental concerns.



Typical The Sea Ranch Structure and Landscaping

On the northern Sonoma Coast, The Sea Ranch has its' own fire management plan dating back to the 1980s aimed at increasing community wildfire awareness, and the implementation of a combination of fuel breaks and fuel reduction to protect assets, mainly structures, at risk. Dealing with the challenges posed by wildfire is often consistent with these longstanding local approaches.

Other local stakeholders include public and private institutions, such as Pacific Union College, St. Helena Hospital and Health Center, and the California Veterans Home, all in Napa County; the Audubon Society in Yolo County; the Cal Pine Energy Corporation and the Northern California Power Authority, both geothermal energy producers in the Geysers area of Sonoma and Lake Counties; Pacific Gas & Electric, and numerous Resource Conservation Districts throughout the six county area. Unit staff has long worked with every one of these institutions to implement pre-fire management projects of various types.

Various local, state, and federal government agencies also have major stakes in fire safety and protection of assets from wildland fire. At the federal level, LNU has worked closely with the USDI Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) Ukiah Field Office, USDA Forest Service's (USFS) Mendocino National Forest, and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers on numerous pre-fire management projects over the years. State agencies include the Department of Fish and Game, State Lands Commission, and the Department of Parks and Recreation. The Unit currently has either active or recently completed Vegetation Management Program (VMP) projects on lands administered by each of these agencies.



U.S. Army Corps Lake Sonoma Prescribed
Burn in November 2002

The Unit works closely with more than 100 volunteer and paid fire departments. In Napa County, the Unit fulfills a dual function as the Napa County Fire Department. In June of 2003, the Unit partnered with the county fire and planning departments of Napa and Sonoma Counties in co-sponsorship of a regional Fire Wise Community Workshop that engaged many of the stakeholders mentioned above in the Unit's fire management planning process. This process continues today as the Napa FIREWISE Program, which has the full endorsement of the Napa County Board of Supervisors. This countywide program continues to receive federal wildland urban interface (WUI) grant funding. Over and over again, the key issue that arises in all these forums is the growing WUI problem and the related problem of decreasing availability and affordability of homeowner's insurance.

A second key issue in the Unit is the unique class of assets at risk in the Geysers geothermal field. Here, capital improvements that are valued in excess of four billion dollars are vulnerable to some of the heaviest wildland fuel loadings in the Unit. Not only are these facilities at risk to wildfire, they also pose the risk of ignition to themselves. This is due to numerous high-voltage transmission lines associated with the power plants that generate and deliver electricity to over one million Californians daily.



Unit 18 in The Geysers