Notes from the San Benito Community Wildfire Protection Plan Update Community Meeting #2

When: Wednesday, July 17, 5:30-8:00 PM

Where: St. Francis Retreat, 549 Mission Vineyard Road, San Juan Bautista

Welcome and Introductions

- Barb Satink Wolfson of UC Cooperative Extension (UCCE) walked attendees through a slide deck that outlined the meeting agenda, objectives, and goals of the San Benito Wildfire Resilience Program.

- Paul Hain, a county resident, provided a presentation entitled *Lessons Learned from the June 2024 Tres Pinos Fire* - a recent fire that affected his property. Lessons learned included:
    - The importance of clearing access roads so equipment can get through. Meet requirements for minimum width and height clearance for fire trucks.
    - Keeping vegetation along access roads sufficiently thinned/trimmed.
    - Keeping burnable trash away from structures that need protection.
    - Enhance water availability on site as much as possible. CalFire ground rigs need water and will use it. Lucky to have nearby ponds that a helicopter was able to get water from.
    - There may be times when firefighters are not able to be readily available to respond to a fire on your property. Important to be prepared yourself.

- Core Collaborators introduced themselves, highlighting:
    - How the 2011 Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) benefited the County
    - The benefits of updating the CWPP
    - What Collaborator entities are doing to address wildfires

Presentation: Cultural Significance of Lands (Chairman Val Lopez, Amah Mutsun Land Trust)

- Chairman Val Lopez of the Amah Mutsun Land Trust (AMLT) provided background on the Indigenous history of the area, including roles as land stewards and managers.
- Fire was and is an important tool for land management and cultural burns are still implemented by tribes.
    - These burns help release seeds by softening shells for new growth, these seeds also feed birds. Smoke from the burns kills bugs and prevents infestation of acorns from oak and other trees.

- Amah Mutsun Land Trust is about to relaunch its cultural burn program and San Benito County is the heart/center of these lands.
  - They want to work with landowners to reduce the risk of catastrophic fires, restore landscape health, and understand the importance of starting small and encouraging confidence from the community.

Presentation: CWPP Update Process and Outcomes (Rachel Gregg, ESA + Ian Moore, SIG)

- Rachel Gregg of Environmental Science Associates (ESA) and Ian Moore of Spatial Informatics Group (SIG) provided an overview of CWPPs, wildfire risk in the county, and potential actions and strategies for inclusion in the CWPP.
- The slide deck can be viewed [here](#).

Presentation: Fire Prevention, Fuels Reduction, and Post-Fire Recovery (Lynn Overtree, San Benito Agricultural Land Trust + Alex Michel, Central Coast Prescribed Burn Association)

- Lynn Overtree, San Benito Agricultural Land Trust (SBALT) and Alex Michel, Central Coast Prescribed Burn Association (CCPBA) presented the goals of fire risk reduction projects highlighting some project examples, including complete, planned, and potential projects.
- They noted that partnerships help reduce wildfire risk on public and private lands.
- Slide deck can be viewed [here](#).

Q&A

Community members were given the opportunity to ask questions and raise their concerns. The following include the questions asked and the discussion that ensued:

- Question Prompt: What are your concerns and questions for the next ten years of wildfire protection?
  - Brice Muenzer, CALFIRE: Having active CWPP is important to have, required or helps a lot when going after grant funding.
- Question: Are the comment cards being circulated still? Is the HVRA survey still live?
  - Yes
- Question: What is the education that is being brought into the schools about fires?
  - Barb Satink Wolfson: working with people in UC to develop a fire program or project, long term thing for org (not specific for school), which may have opportunities for some orgs to go into schools. They are currently thinking about it, it's not happening yet, but they are potentially looking for funding.
  - Comment: Will spread education to community colleges and colleges

- o Comment: Recommend considering how we are an all in community, design materials for ages 7-70s so everyone can benefit from education
- o Comment: Hard to get community involved, takes a lot of manpower to host these events and no one comes
- o Comment: Opportunity to offer CERT trainings (community emergency response trainings)
- ▣ Question: What is the ideal number of prescribed burns? What is limiting the capacity of the CCPBA to enforce these burns?
  - o Alex Michel, CCPBA: they're trying to build capacity, training, education, and getting landowners and neighbors involved. We need to understand that fire is good.
  - o Jared Childress, CCPBA: The CCPBA is not focused on acreage and is trying to build culture in fire which doesn't exist in California at the moment.
  - o Comment: Someone offers Fairgrounds as a resource

Small Group Discussions/Open House

- ☐ What are you most worried about with respect to wildfires?
  - o Storing water on site
  - o Neighbors are not caring for their property to reduce flammables
    - ▪ Neighbors burning in leaves in July
    - ▪ BBQ/Firepit etiquette
  - o Clear zones (0-5 ft, 5-30 ft) / Reduce accumulated fuels
  - o Home hardening and attic vents
  - o Protecting home, defensible space clearance / Ember resistance wire mesh around raised decking
  - o Knowing who to call and what to expect
  - o How long it will take to get a response // How do notify residents of a wildfire
  - o What's the plan to control traffic to prevent congestion
  - o Identify existing fire breaks to contain fires
  - o How to identify potential areas of concern and protect sensitive areas

- ☐ What are some potential solutions that you as a resident and/or homeowner can take?
  - o Follow Monterey County example and pilot a cost sharing program for eucalyptus tree removal
  - o Enforcement and incentives
  - o Escape/evacuation signing on roads
  - o Access to properties on San Juan Canyon Road
  - o Pressure county to mow roadsides
  - o More community education and trainings
  - o Reduce expense of home hardening and defensible space tasks

- o Communication to rural homes without service / establish a protocol to establish communication systems
- o Ensure firefighting infrastructure is function and identified
- o Need to identify schools and other public places as temporary short term or long-term housing for displaced people

- ⬚ Possible Fire Hazard
    - o The Alameda – dry dead trees

Large Group Plenary: Concerns and Potential Solutions

After breaking out into small groups, the community came back to share 3-5 ideas from each group.

- ⬚ If you see a fire hazard, report it so it can be looked at and is documented, and property owners can be held accountable
- ⬚ On the map, people were surprised that Aromas wasn't showing more results because there are a lot of fires there and a lot of people on the side of the highway, and there is a lot of traffic due to being right off 101
    - o Map shows severity, and not frequency
- ⬚ Surprised that San Juan Canyon didn't have more fire risk as well
    - o Consultants are getting more data, may have different results
- ⬚ Education: Farm Bureau sponsors farm day every day, 900 third graders at Bolado Park, if something develops that is third grade ready, can incorporate fire stuff into curriculum
    - o There is a fire ecology curriculum, but is very Sierra specific
- ⬚ Someone wants a chipping program
- ⬚ Asking about big piles of chipped material, is that a fuel load?
    - o Yes, but typically doesn't happen much on chipped piles as you don't get much nitrogen from chipping trees. More likely from compost, would have to be a super large chip pile to create a lot of pressure to spontaneous combust, won't happen with what people are seeing on the side of the road currently.
- ⬚ Indian Canyon has a fire workshop but won't happen this year
- ⬚ Who is writing the plan?
    - o All core collaborators, but mostly the consultants based on community input