

## **El Cerrito - Kensington Fire Action Plan Summary Working Session #1 – February 4, 2016**

I. **Introduction.** Ms. Miller welcomed the group and attendees introduced themselves.

- Fire Marshal Michael Bond, El Cerrito Fire (also services to Kensington Fire Protection District)
- Ralph Boniello, Friends of Five Creeks
- Division Chief Robert Chew, CAL FIRE Santa Clara Unit
- Tom Gehling, El Cerrito Trail Trekkers
- Peter Liddel, Friends of Kensington Community Center
- Alisha Lomeli, PG&E Vegetation Management
- Patrick McIntyre, East Bay Regional Park District, Supervisor Wildcat Canyon Regional Park
- Cheryl Miller, Executive Coordinator Diablo Fire Safe Council
- Stephen Prée, City of El Cerrito, Arborist
- Susan Schwartz, Friends of Five Creeks
- Ciara Wood, Kensington Fuel Reduction Group, Boardmember Diablo Fire Safe Council

### **2. Program Overview.**

What is a CWPP and an CWPP Action Plan:

Cheryl Miller, Executive Coordinator, Diablo Fire Safe Council (DFSC) provided an overview of the Contra Costa County Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP). A CWPP is a written document, mutually agreed upon by local, state and federal representatives and stakeholders, that identifies how a community will reduce its risks from wildland fire. As well as providing coordinated strategies, CWPPs have been critical for grant funding for fire safety activities. Since 2009 DFSC and partners in Contra Costa and Alameda Counties has been awarded over \$1.3 million of grant funds for activities in the CWPPs. Community Wildfire Protection Plans are authorized and defined in Title I of the Healthy Forest Restoration Act (HFRA), passed by Congress November 21, 2003 and signed into law December 3, 2003. The HFRA established unprecedented incentives for communities to take lead roles in community wildfire protection. Twelve years after the legislation CWPPs continue to shape prevention and fuel reduction. The 2009 adopted plan and 2014 draft updated plan (adoption in progress) document are available for download at <http://www.diablofiresafe.org/publications.html> - CWPP.

In order to be federally recognized the CWPP must be signed by three entities:

1. The applicable local government (El Cerrito City Council and Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors)
2. The local fire department(s) (El Cerrito Fire Department & Kensington Fire Department)
3. The state entity responsible for forest management – CAL FIRE.

There are three minimum requirements that also must be met:

1. **Collaboration:** A CWPP must be collaboratively developed by local and state government representatives, in consultation with federal agencies and other interested parties.
2. **Prioritized Fuel Reduction:** A CWPP must identify and prioritize areas for hazardous fuel reduction treatments and recommend the types and methods of treatment that will protect one or more at-risk communities and essential infrastructure.
3. **Treatment of Structural Ignitability:** A CWPP must recommend measures that homeowners and communities can take to reduce the ignitability of structures throughout the area.

The goal of the current planning process is to develop a CWPP Action Plan focusing on the El Cerrito and Kensington area. This Action Plan will be an appendix of the countywide CWPP.

### Planning Process and Time Frame

An “Overview” was provided to the group that identified the 4 step planning process, timeframe, key outcomes, results and deliverables.

Step 1: Kickoff, convene decision-makers, involve agencies, engage interested parties.

Step 2: Review existing assessments and on-going projects. Preliminary project identification and community information.

Step 3: Fire Safe 2015 Action Plan development and assessment strategy

Step 4: Draft and Final Action Plan

Download Overview at [http://www.diablofiresafe.org/pdf/El-Cerrito-Kensington\\_overview\\_0216.pdf](http://www.diablofiresafe.org/pdf/El-Cerrito-Kensington_overview_0216.pdf)

**3. Existing wildfire assessments and How we address risk:** The group discussion included existing assessments, ways we have been addressing address risk through projects and resources, as well as issues unique to the project area:

- CAL FIRE Santa Clara Unit (SCU) provides fire protection in the state responsibility areas (SRA) of Alameda, Contra Costa, Santa Clara and a portion of San Joaquin Counties. A copy of the map showing Contra Costa County Fire Hazard Severity Zones in SRA was displayed, including a closeup showing that all of Kensington and about 40% of El Cerrito are located in the very high fire hazard severity zone. ([http://www.fire.ca.gov/fire\\_prevention/fhsz\\_maps\\_contracosta.php](http://www.fire.ca.gov/fire_prevention/fhsz_maps_contracosta.php)).
- What is at risk from wildfire: Life safety is the first concern; residents and their families (including their pets), as well as firefighters. Property includes homes and businesses and extends to infrastructure such as the PG&E transmission lines and communication equipment (often located on top of the PG&E towers). Last but not least is the natural environment, including El Cerrito’s Hillside Natural Area and East Bay Regional Park’s Wildcat Canyon Regional Park.
- There are currently 4 ways Diablo FireSafe Council and Partners in Wildfire Prevention address the risk.
  1. Outreach and Awareness: Outreach at community events and safety fairs to help raise awareness about wildfire safety. Red flag weather awareness including ignition prevention awareness. Information about defensible space and what you can do around your house. For examples see DFSC Resources at [www.diablofiresafe.org](http://www.diablofiresafe.org).
  2. Education and Training: More specific training for contractors, landscape designers and homeowners. These could be presentations about how wildfires spread (ember awareness). Group exercises spotting where homes and gardens are vulnerable and what you can do make them more Firesafe. Examples about key features of firesafe design. Hands on training in the field with landscape contractors
  3. Planning: Planning for fire safety customized to the community. By working with communities, agencies and fire departments we can help identify projects that can make a difference. The CWPP provides access to federal and state fund to leverage community efforts.
  4. Hazardous fuel reduction projects: Projects can be on public lands such as the Hillside Natural Area and new El Cerrito Dorothy Rosen Memorial Park. Diablo Fire Safe Council has a right of entry permit with East Bay Regional Park District that has allowed years of work with the Kensington fuel reduction group (made up of homeowners) working along edge of Kensington – Wildcat Canyon Regional Park. Cost-share programs also have been used with smaller groups of homeowners on private property. Past projects include:

<p><b>El Cerrito</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Natural Area</li> <li>• Camp Herms</li> <li>• Dorothy Rosenberg Park</li> <li>• Balra Drive</li> <li>• Prospect Sierra School</li> <li>• Bates Avenue</li> <li>• Contra Costa Dr/ King St</li> </ul>	<p><b>Kensington</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• EBRPD - Wildcat Canyon Regional Park               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Kensington Court</li> <li>○ Purdue Meadow</li> <li>○ Lake Drive</li> <li>○ Los Altos Drive</li> <li>○ Beloit Ave</li> <li>○ Canon Drive</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Carmelite Monastery</li> <li>• Kensington Community Center</li> </ul>
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#### 4. Preliminary Project Ideas

The 2014 CWPP Update listed 10 different strategies that could provide ideas for future ideas. See [http://www.diablofiresafe.org/pdf/2014-Draft\\_Contra\\_Costa\\_County\\_CWPP\\_Update.pdf](http://www.diablofiresafe.org/pdf/2014-Draft_Contra_Costa_County_CWPP_Update.pdf) Section 2.4.

1. Collaborative partners
2. Risks of ignitions
3. Fire weather
4. Community at risk hazards
5. Defensible space
6. Structure survivability
7. New and infill development
8. Fuel management on public and large scale private lands
9. Protect facilities and infrastructure
10. Local preparedness and firefighter capability.

Stakeholders shared their past projects and ideas for future projects, including:

- El Cerrito Hillside Natural Area. Friends of Five Creeks completed a cost share hazardous fuel reduction project using Shelterbelt to clear poison oak and broom on slopes too steep for volunteers. They continue to do volunteer projects. The southern end of the area has a eucalyptus grove that is full of fuel. Other areas with potential projects include: north of Portrero, edge of PG&E property along Moeser, Eucalyptus on Motorcycle Hill, poison oak by old EBMUD tank. Concern over use of goats in natural area as they are indiscriminate (eating desired native plants), cause erosion and can introduce invasive species seeds. Friends of Five Creeks has GPS data on locations of fire prone invasives in the main portion (75 acres) of the Hillside Natural Area. Another longer term project is reduction of fennel. There are two plans for the Hillside Natural Area, a Vegetation Management Plan (1987) and a Fire Hazard Reduction Plan (1994).
- Friends of the Kensington Community Center completed a cost share hazardous fuel reduction project that augmented their ongoing volunteer work around the Kensington Community Center.
- Kensington Fuel Reduction Group has been working from the Berkeley to El Cerrito border along the edge of Wildcat Canyon Park and the homes. There has not been a fire in this area in over 100 years, so they focus on breaking up fuels.
- PG&E has a new program related to the extreme drought called CEMA (catastrophic emergency memorandum account). This program has increased the annual patrol of power lines to every six months. They are targeting hazardous trees. They also have extra patrols in high fire danger areas. New technology has been used in the Sierra area to better monitor tree decline.
- Drought related tree decline: El Cerrito and Kensington area has been observing increased tree mortality, especially in Monterey pine and eucalyptus. They also have been seeing tree decline in live oaks (so far the decline does not seem linked to SOD). The steep terrain creates additional challenges for addressing dead and dying trees. Two key areas are Willits property and Motorcycle Hill.
- Impacts of Sudden Oak Death (SOD): The SOD Blitz provides an annual monitoring for Sudden Oak Death (see [http://nature.berkeley.edu/garbelottowp/?page\\_id=2461](http://nature.berkeley.edu/garbelottowp/?page_id=2461) for 2015 results). SOD is in Wildcat Canyon (along the El Cerrito and Kensington border and near the Wildcat Creek Trail). It may change the fire regime. The next SOD Blitz is April 9, 2016.

- Ivy choking trees: Ivy is also present in some areas of Wildcat Canyon Regional Park (typically adjacent to homes) and choking trees.
- Talk to people about what to do to reduce wildfire hazards. Community meetings to highlight flammability of juniper and other common garden plants. Potential audiences include California Native Plant Society, Friends of Five Creeks, local garden clubs. Provide links to websites. El Cerrito Historic Society another potential audience related to fire history.
- Fire danger signs in parks.
- Escape routes – similar to Berkeley where paths are viewed as potential evacuation routes.
- Volunteers: UC Berkeley students offer a pool of volunteers; however, locations need to be reachable by AC Transit plus a reasonable walk(or get transportation donated c).
- Mapping of fuel loads and invasive plants. CAL Flora has an app for mapping observations. <http://www.calflora.org/add/pofaq.html>. This could be used to map invasive plants. Cal weed mapper <http://calweedmapper.cal-ipc.org> through the California Invasive Plants Council is another app.
- Potential private-public partnership project: Wildwood HOA (south of Portrero) has eucalyptus globulus with junipers below.
- Potential private-public partnership – eucalyptus and pine trees along Moeser, under PG&E transmission lines.

## **5. Expanding Participation in the Planning Process**

Outreach methods for the planning effort include email updates (stakeholders and project partners will be ask to forward them to others), media release, information on websites and newsletters with links for planning partners to share with their audiences, presence and presentations. DFSC requests that stakeholders spread the word about the project with their groups, and recommend anyone else who should be added to the contact list.

## **6. Next Steps**

The next meeting is on Thursday, March 3, 3:00 – 4:30, Kensington Community Center (to be confirmed). We also begin to develop an Action Plan for future projects (both short term, as well as long term projects) and talk about priorities and an assessment strategy.