

ARTICLE 7. HAZARDOUS VEGETATION ABATEMENT

Sec. G-IV 7.1 Findings

A. The Nevada County Board of Supervisors supports the improved parcel defensible space obligations found in California Public Resources Code Section (PRC) 4291. However, PRC 4291 does not address hazardous vegetation abatement beyond the property line of a parcel on which a protected building or structure is located or the potential impact that hazardous vegetation beyond a property line could have on an adjacent improved parcel. This Article extends and supplements state law, utilizing the same treatment requirements as provided by PRC 4291, to ensure defensible space is maintained on parcels adjacent to improved parcels and along emergency access and evacuation routes and fire access easements so that land owners benefit from the application of PRC 4291 on adjacent parcels where appropriate.

B. During the fire season, Nevada County generally has a dry, arid climate conducive to wildfires. Nevada County also has a very diverse and complex landscape which includes dry, brush-covered and grass-covered wildlands, mountainous areas, dense heavily forested properties and other terrains which are home to many sensitive plant and animal species. Many of the County's native and non-native plant species can be highly combustible during normal dry periods and have contributed to significant wildfires within the County. Difficult topography and terrain exacerbate the fire danger and the difficulty of fighting wildfires, and have resulted in catastrophic fire losses to life, property and the environment.

C. Of paramount importance to the Nevada County Board of Supervisors and the citizens of Nevada County are the protection of lives and structures from the threat of wildfire, and the safety of fire and law enforcement during wildfires. The proper establishment of defensible space benefits property owners, public safety personnel and all citizens of Nevada County by dramatically increasing the likelihood that structures will survive a wildfire, provides for firefighter safety during a firestorm and generally aids in the protection of lives.

D. It is the purpose of this Chapter to establish a hazardous vegetation abatement program that provides a process to identify and abate hazardous vegetation on parcels and protects the lives and property of the citizens of Nevada County, while at the same time protecting sensitive plant and animal species and protecting against significant erosion and sedimentation. The removal of hazardous vegetation in the areas subject to this Article is recognized as an essential action homeowners and property owners can take to increase the chances that homes, structures and other property will survive a wildfire, while protecting the natural environment. Regular fuels management and modifications consistent with the requirements of this Article is necessary to ensure adequate defensible space is achieved. The defensible space required by this Article is necessary to significantly reduce the risk of transmission of flame or heat sufficient to ignite the structures, and there is no other feasible mitigation measure possible to reduce the risk of ignition or spread of wildfire to structures on adjacent improved parcels.

E. The Nevada County Board of Supervisors does not provide fire protection or suppression services within the County. Such services within Nevada County are provided by CAL FIRE and numerous local fire protection districts, the United States Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management. The Nevada County Board of Supervisors finds and declares that CAL FIRE and the local fire protection districts, individually or collectively are best suited and equipped to implement this Article.

Sec. G-IV 7.2 Application of Article

This Article shall apply to:

A. All Parcels adjacent to Improved Parcels where (a) the owner/occupant of the Improved Parcel is unable to obtain the required defensible space, as delineated in adopted County codes and/or PRC 4291, and (b) the current condition of fuels on the subject Parcel is assessed by the Local Fire Official as a hazardous fire condition. The owner of the subject Parcel

shall provide the fuel modifications to meet the defensible space requirements of the adjacent Improved Parcel.

B. All Parcels where (a) the parcel is adjacent to a roadway which is determined by the Local Fire Official to be necessary for the safe ingress and egress to the area served by the roadway or fire access easement, and (b) the current condition of fuels on the adjacent Parcel is assessed by the Local Fire Official as a hazardous fire condition.

C. The owner, occupant or other person in control of the Improved Parcel may be responsible for fifty (50) percent of the abatement cost on the adjacent Parcel if the owner of said adjacent parcel consents in writing to the abatement.

Sec. G-IV 7.3 Definitions

As used in this Article, the following definitions shall apply:

A. "Biomass" shall mean all green waste material generated during the fuels treatment project. Biomass includes without limitation all grass, weeds, vegetation and tree trimmings.

B. "Board of Supervisors" shall mean the Board of Supervisors for the County of Nevada.

C. "Combustible Material" shall mean all rubbish, litter or material of any kind other than hazardous vegetation that is combustible and endangers the public safety by creating a fire hazard.

D. "County" shall mean the County of Nevada, a political subdivision of the State of California.

E. "Fuel Modification Area" shall mean a strip of land in which the following fuel reduction activities are required to occur:

- a. cut and remove all weeds and grasses down to 4" or lower;
- b. prune and remove "ladder fuels" up to 10' or higher;
- c. "mosaic" all stands of brush;
- d. remove all dead or decaying trees and tree limbs; and,
- e. perform any other fire protection or maintenance activities within the Fuel Modification Area consistent with the standards and requirements contained in Public Resources Code section 4290 or as required by a Local Fire Official.

F. "Hazardous Vegetation" shall mean any vegetation that is combustible and endangers the public safety by creating a fire hazard including, but not limited to, seasonal and recurrent weeds, stubble, brush, downed limbs, low hanging branches, and dry leaves. Hazardous Vegetation shall not include a commercial agricultural crop which is being actively grown and managed by the property owner or his or her legal tenant.

G. "Improved Parcel" shall mean a portion of real property on which a Structure is located, the area of which is determined by the assessor's maps and records and which may be identified by an Assessor's Parcel Number.

H. "Local Fire Official" shall mean the CAL FIRE unit chief, or the Fire Chief of any local fire protection district located in whole or in part within the County of Nevada, and all chief officers, company officers and trained prevention staff as may be designated by the Fire Chief to enforce the provisions of this Article.

I. "Parcel" shall mean a portion of real property of any size, the area of which is determined by the assessor's maps and records and which may be identified by an Assessor's Parcel Number.

J. "Structure" shall mean any dwelling, house, building, or other type of combustible construction subject to PRC 4291.

K. "PRC 4291" shall mean California Public Resources Code section 4291, and any amendments thereto.

Sec. G-IV 7.4 Nuisance Declared; Duty to Abate Hazardous Vegetation

A. Hazardous Vegetation and Combustible Materials within one hundred (100) feet of a Structure (or greater as determined by the Local Fire Official) or along roadways that serve as primary ingress and egress routes, is hereby declared to be a public nuisance that may be abated in accordance with this Article, and by any other means available by law.

B. It shall be the duty of every owner, occupant, and person in control of any Parcel or any interest therein, which is located in the unincorporated territory of the County of Nevada to abate therefrom, and from all sidewalks and roadways on or immediately adjacent thereto (except for those roads accepted into the County maintained system), all Combustible Material and Hazardous Vegetation which constitutes a fire hazard and public nuisance which may endanger or damage neighboring property or forestland.

C. The requirements of this section shall be satisfied if the Parcel is cleaned in accordance with a Notice to Abate by cutting brush, trimming trees, thinning trees, disking, mowing, plowing or any other method described in the Notice and removing all Combustible Materials as follows:

1. A minimum of a ten (10) foot wide strip of land beyond the shoulder of the roadway, to a height of fifteen (15) feet along the boundary of an Parcel; and/or;

2. A one hundred (100) foot wide strip of land around combustible Structure(s) located on an adjacent Improved Parcel (some or all of this defensible space requirement may be required on an adjacent Parcel depending upon the location of the Structure on the Improved Parcel);

3. The Local Fire Official may require a fifty (50) foot wide Fuel Modification Area along the boundary of any adjacent Improved Parcel which is five (5) acres in size or less if the Fire Official finds that a Fuel Modification Area is necessary to significantly reduce the risk of transmission of flame or heat sufficient to ignite structures, and there is no other feasible mitigation measure possible to reduce the risk of ignition or spread of wildfire to a structure on an Improved Parcel;

4. The Local Fire Official may mandate additional fuels management of an area more or less than the above-referenced widths or height, for the protection of public health, safety or welfare or the environment if the Local Fire Official finds that the additional fuels management is necessary to significantly reduce the risk of transmission of flame or heat sufficient to ignite the structures, and there is no other feasible mitigation measure possible to reduce the risk of ignition or spread of wildfire to a structure on an Improved Parcel. The Local Fire Official shall determine appropriate defensible space distances based upon a visual inspection of the Parcel and shall consider all factors that place the Structure(s) on the adjacent Improved Parcel at risk from an approaching fire. These factors shall include, but are not limited to, local weather conditions, fuel type(s), topography, and the environment where the adjacent Parcel or the Structure(s) is located;

D. Where the terrain, condition or environment on the adjacent Parcel is such that it cannot or should not be disked or mowed, the Local Fire Official may require, or authorize, other means of Hazardous Vegetation removal.

Sec. G-IV 7.5 Enforcement

The Local Fire Official and Code Compliance shall be the primary authority for enforcement of this Article, and shall administer and enforce the requirements as provided in this Article. The Community Development Agency (“CDA”) Director shall develop guidelines to assist Local Fire Officials and Code Compliance with the enforcement process. The Local Fire Official shall, as more broadly defined below, exhaust all informal steps to resolve the abatement of Hazardous Vegetation and Combustible Materials on Parcels in advance of using the administrative enforcement process and shall comply with CDA Director guidelines prior to initiating the formal abatement process in accordance with Section G-IV 7.11, below..

A. The Local Fire Official shall have the following responsibilities and authorities in the enforcement and administration of the provisions of this Article:

1. Plan and conduct PRC 4291 inspections within the limits of available resources.
2. Review the requirements of PRC 4291 and the provisions of this Article with property owners and/or occupants found to be out of compliance, to support voluntary compliance with the provisions of this Article.
3. Prepare and issue Notices to Abate, and such other notices as may be necessary to encourage voluntary compliance with the provisions of this Article.
4. Conduct post-notice/pre-abatement inspections and documentation and conduct post-abatement inspections and documentation in conjunction with Code Compliance.
- 5.. The Local Fire Official may, at his or her discretion issue an administrative or criminal citation for violations of this Article, in lieu of abating a Parcel.

B. Code Compliance shall have the following responsibilities and authorities in the enforcement and administration of the provisions of this Article:

1. Conduct post-notice/pre-abatement inspections and documentation and conduct post-abatement inspections and documentation in conjunction with the Local Fire Official.
2. Conduct abatements and handle accounting, assessment and collection of costs, including recordation of liens.

Sec. G-IV 7.6 Notice to Abate

Whenever the Local Fire Official determines, based on a planned PRC 4291 inspection, that a Parcel is in violation of this Article and requires abatement, the Local Fire Official shall send the owner of record for the Parcel a Notice to Abate. The Notice to Abate shall be in writing and shall:

A. Identify the owner(s) of the Parcel upon which the violation exists, as named in the records of the County Assessor, and identify the occupant(s) or person in control of the property, if other than the owner(s) and if known or reasonably identifiable.

B. Describe the location of the Parcel by its commonly used street address, if any, and identify the Parcel by reference to the Assessor’s Parcel Number, if any.

C. Briefly describe the violation(s) on the Parcel and identify the fuel modifications which are required to abate the violation(s) and bring the Parcel into compliance with this Article.

D. Contain a statement that the legal owner or occupant is required to correct the violation and allow at least thirty (30) calendar days from the date the Notice is served for the work to be completed.

E. Outline the appeal process as provided in Section G-IV 7.9 of this Article.

F. Contain a statement that, unless the legal owner or occupant abates the violation(s) and brings the Parcel into compliance with this Article, or seeks an appeal within the time prescribed in the Notice, the violation may be abated at the legal owner and/or occupant's expense. It shall also state that the abatement costs, including administrative costs, may be made a special assessment added to the County assessment roll and become a lien on the real property, or be placed on the unsecured tax roll.

Sec. G-IV 7.7 Service of Notice to Abate

All notices required by this Article shall be served in the following manner:

A. By delivering it personally to the legal owner(s) of the parcel(s) and to the occupant(s), or by mailing it by certified United States mail to the legal owner(s) of the parcel at his or her address as it appears on the last equalized assessment roll and to any non-owner occupant(s), if known, at the street address for the parcel.

1. If the records of the Nevada County Assessor show that the ownership has changed since the last equalized assessment roll was completed, the Notice shall also be mailed to the new owner(s) at his or her address as it appears in said records, or;

2. In the event that, after reasonable effort, the Local Fire Official is unable to serve the notice as set forth above, service shall be accomplished by posting copies of the notice along the frontage of the subject parcel(s), and at such other locations on the parcel(s) as are reasonably likely to provide notice to the owner(s) and any person known by the Local Fire Official to be in possession of the parcel(s). At least two (2) copies of the notice shall be posted on a parcel pursuant to this section.

B. The date of service for the notice is deemed to be the date of personal delivery or posting, or three (3) days after deposit in the U.S. Mail.

Sec. G-IV 7.8 Enforcement Process

Not less than thirty (30) days after the Notice to Abate is served, the Local Fire Official shall conduct a post-notice/pre-abatement inspection on the Parcel and, if the required fuel modifications have not been performed, the Local Fire Official may require that the required fuel modifications be completed by the County, and the cost of enforcement and the abatement with administrative fee be attached to the property tax as a lien.

For parcels owned or controlled by public agencies, the Local Fire Official or designee may provide a Notice of Nuisance and include the project area in the local community wildfire protection plan and request the Hazardous Vegetation or Combustible Material be abated in accordance with the Healthy Forest Restoration Act of 2003 (H.R. 1904) or the State Public Resources Code.

Sec. G-IV 7.9 Appeals Process

A. Any person upon whom a Notice to Abate has been served may appeal the determination of the Local Fire Official by delivering a written request for hearing to the Clerk of the Board's office within ten (10) days of the date of the Notice to Abate, together with payment of any appeal fee as may be duly adopted by the Board of Supervisors. The written request shall include a statement of all facts supporting the appeal. The time requirement for filing such a written request shall be deemed jurisdictional and may not be waived.

B. If a timely appeal is filed with the Clerk of the Board, no further enforcement action will be taken until after the Hazardous Vegetation Abatement Hearing Body has made a determination on the appeal. In the absence of a timely filed written request that complies fully with the requirements of this Section, the determination of the Local Fire Official as set forth in the Notice to Abate shall become final and conclusive on the thirty-first day following service of the Notice.

C. The hearing on the appeal shall occur not more the thirty (30) days after receipt of a timely appeal and shall provide written notice of the hearing date and time to the appellant at least ten (10) days prior to the date of the hearing, unless such time limits are waived in writing by the Local Fire Official and the appellant.

Sec. G-IV 7.10 Hazardous Vegetation Abatement Hearing Body

A Hazardous Vegetation Abatement Hearing Body is hereby established to hear appeals on any Notice to Abate issued by a Local Fire Official. The Hazardous Vegetation Abatement Hearing Body shall consist of the County Fire Marshal or designee, the County's Emergency Services Program Manager or designee, and a Fire Chief from a local fire protection district selected by the Nevada County Fire Chiefs Association; provided, however, that if the Notice to Abate being appealed was issued by the County Fire Marshal or designee, then the Hazardous Vegetation Abatement Hearing Body shall consist of the the County's Emergency Services Program Manager or designee, and two Fire Chiefs from a local fire protection district selected by the Emergency Services Program Manager. The Hazardous Vegetation Abatement Hearing Body shall have the authority to amend, dismiss, or uphold a Notice to Abate by a majority vote.

Sec. G-IV 7.11 Abatement by Code Compliance

If, at the end of the time allowed for compliance in the original Notice to Abate, or as extended in cases of appeal, or as specified by the Hazardous Vegetation Abatement Hearing Body, compliance has not been accomplished, the Local Fire Official issuing the notice, or the agency of which he or she is an officer, may turn the violation over to Code Compliance by delivering such notices and documentation as deemed necessary by Code Compliance to pursue a lawful abatement. Code Compliance may proceed with the abatement of the Hazardous Vegetation or Combustible Material and provide that it be removed by public officers or by employees of the agency or by a private contractor selected by the agency in accordance with applicable statutes. The cost of such removal and enforcement accompanied by a reasonable administrative charge may be imposed as an assessment in the County tax roll.

The costs so assessed shall be limited to the actual costs incurred by the Local Fire Official and the County in enforcing the violation and abatement upon the subject Parcel. Such costs may include, but are not limited to, the costs of all prior inspections, appeal hearings and other enforcement actions leading up to the abatement, payments to the contractor, costs of site inspection, costs of notice, boundary determination and measurement, costs for material disposal and all clerical, personnel, consultant, and other administrative costs.

Sec. G-IV 7.12 Abatement Penalties and Costs

Upon expiration of the time limits and appeal processes established by this Article, Code Compliance shall acquire jurisdiction to abate the nuisance, and may carry out the following as appropriate:

A. **Disposal of Materials.** Any materials abated may be disposed of as a part of the removal process to include, as appropriate, recycling or as a part of a Biomass utilization program.

B. **Cost Accounting, Receipts and Notice of Assessment.** Code Compliance shall keep an itemized account of the costs of enforcing the provisions of this Article, and of the proceeds of the sale of any materials connected therewith. Upon completion of the abatement, Code

Compliance shall prepare a notice to be served on the affected parcels as provided in Section G-IV 7.7 and, specifying:

1. The work done (supported by before and after pictures);
2. An itemized account of the costs and receipts of performing the work;
3. An address, legal description, or other description sufficient to identify the Parcel which was subject to abatement and/or lien;
4. The amount of the assessment proposed to be levied against the parcel(s), or the amount to be refunded, if any, due to excess proceeds over the expenses;
5. The time and place where Code Compliance will submit the account to the Hazardous Vegetation Abatement Hearing Body for confirmation. The time and place specified shall be no less than fifteen (15) days after service of the notice;
6. A statement that the Hazardous Vegetation Abatement Hearing Body will hear and consider objections and protests to the account and proposed assessment or refund.

C. **Hearing on Account and Proposed Assessment.** At the time and place fixed in the notice, the Hazardous Vegetation Abatement Hearing Body will hear and consider the account and proposed assessment, together with objections and protests thereto. At the conclusion of the hearing, the Hazardous Vegetation Abatement Hearing Body may make such modifications and revisions of the proposed account and assessment as deemed just and may order the account and proposed assessment confirmed or denied, in whole or in part, or as modified and revised, and shall issue a written recommendation regarding the proposed lien to the Board of Supervisors. The Board of Supervisors may summarily adopt the recommendation of the Hazardous Vegetation Abatement Hearing Body without further notice of hearing, or may set the matter for a *de novo* hearing in accordance with Government Code section 29845(h). The determination of the Board of Supervisors as to all matters contained therein shall be final and conclusive.

D. **Notice of Lien.** Upon confirmation of an assessment by the Board of Supervisors, Code Compliance shall notify the affected parcel owners by certified mail, return receipt requested, of the amount of the pending lien confirmed by the Board of Supervisors, and advise them that they may pay the account in full within thirty (30) days in order to avoid the lien being recorded against the parcel(s). If the lien amount is not paid by the date stated in the letter, Code Compliance shall prepare and have recorded a Notice of Lien with the Nevada County Clerk-Recorder's Office. The Notice of Lien shall contain:

1. A legal description, address and/or other description sufficient to identify the parcel(s) to be liened;
2. A description of the proceeding under which the special assessment was made, including the order of the Board of Supervisors under this code confirming the assessment;
3. The amount of the assessment;
4. A claim of lien upon the described parcel(s).

E. **Lien.** Upon the recordation of a Notice of Lien, the amount claimed shall constitute a lien upon the described premises, pursuant to Section 25845 of the California Government Code. Such lien shall be at parity with the liens of state and county taxes, to the extent allowed by applicable law.

F. **Collection with Ordinary Taxes.** After recordation, the Notice of Lien shall be delivered to the County Auditor-Controller, who shall enter the amount of the lien on the assessment roll as a special assessment. The amount set forth shall be subject to the same penalties and interest as ordinary County taxes. All laws applicable to the levy, collection and

enforcement of County taxes are hereby made applicable to such assessment to the extent allowed by applicable law.

Sec. G-IV 7.13 Violations

Pursuant to Nevada County Code, it shall be an infraction or misdemeanor for any person, natural or corporate, owning, possessing, occupying, or controlling any lands or premises to fail to perform the duty set forth in this Article, or to fail to comply with the requirements in the Notice to Abate as specified in this Article, or to interfere with the performance of the duties herein specified for any of the officers named in this part or their deputies, or to refuse to allow any such officer or their deputies or employees, or approved private contractors, to enter upon any parcel for the purpose of lawfully inspecting and/or as ordered, removing any Hazardous Vegetation and Combustible Material hereinbefore described as a public nuisance, or to interfere in any manner whatever with the officers or contractors in the work of a lawful inspection and ordered removal herein provided.

Sec. G-IV 7.14 Penalties for Violations

A. Any person violating or failing to comply with the provisions of this Article shall be guilty of a misdemeanor, except that when the District Attorney or County Counsel shall elect to charge such violation as an infraction, it shall be an infraction. Each such person shall be guilty of a separate offense for each and every day during any portion of which any violation of any provision of this Article is committed, continued or permitted by such person and shall be punishable accordingly. Any person convicted of a misdemeanor under the provisions of this Code shall be punishable by a fine of not less than one hundred dollars (\$100) or more than one thousand dollars (\$1,000.00).

B. Alternatively, the Local Fire Official may prosecute violations of this Article by civil action, including without limitation, issuance of administrative citations.

C. This Article is a local safety code. Every violation of this Article which is determined to be an infraction or an administrative violation shall be punishable in accordance with Government Code sections 53069.4 and 23125, as may be amended from time to time..

Sec. G-IV 7.15 Authority to Promulgate Reasonable Rules and Regulations

The Board of Supervisors reserves its right to adopt reasonable rules, regulations, and resolutions consistent with this Article to enforce, interpret, and carry out the provisions of this Article. Such rules, regulations and resolutions may vary between different areas within Nevada County.