

NEVADA COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS RESPONSES TO

2019 Nevada County Civil Grand Jury Report

Facing Year-Long Fire Seasons, Are We Prepared?

DATED July 9, 2019

Responses to findings and recommendations are based on either personal knowledge, examination of official county records, review of the responses by the County Executive Officer, Office of Emergency Services, Public Works and representatives or testimony from the Board of Supervisors and county staff members.

A. RESPONSES TO FINDINGS

F2: OES is in the process of hiring four part-time defensible space employees for 2019, each limited to 1,000 hours per year. This staffing level affords the County far less fire protection compared to 1975, when six full-time inspectors were employed.

Disagree.

In 1975, Nevada County Public Works Building Inspection Division employed six (6) building inspectors who's primary responsibility was to inspect for structural, electrical, and the plumbing of new building development. The same year, the Nevada County Agriculture Commissioner employed two (2) Senior Agricultural Inspectors with the primary responsibility of inspecting for the use of agricultural pesticides and pest control methods. Nevada County Emergency Services only employed 1 Assistant Civil Defense Co-ordinator with the primarily responsibility to keep the County in a state of perpetual readiness for any man-made or natural disaster.

However, the County has maintained between two and four (2-4) inspectors since 1989 as referenced in the County's Cal FIRE Defensible Space Inspection Memorandum of Understating (MOU). Historically, the County hired inspectors that were supervised and managed by Cal FIRE in an effort to help augment CalFIRE's inspector staffing levels.

F4: The County does not allocate sufficient budgetary resources for its abatement ordinance or fire prevention efforts.

Disagree.

The County has increased its overall Emergency Management budget by 88% since FY2017/18 from \$622,443 to \$1,292,996 in FY2019/20. Within the overall service budget unit, the County has quadrupled its Defensible Space Inspection Program and prevention efforts. Moreover, Nevada County Public Works is projecting to spend approximately \$708,000 for vegetation removal along the County's maintained roadways for FY 2019/20, which is approximately 30% of the Roads-Maintenance service budget unit.

B. RESPONSES TO RECOMMENDATIONS

R1: The County should establish a dedicated fire prevention coordinator reporting directly to the County Executive Officer with regular reports to the Board of Supervisors.

This recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted.

The Program Manager of the Office of Emergency Services who oversees the County's fire prevention program regularly reports to the Director of Information General Services, who reports directly to the County Executive Officer. Subsequently, the Board of Supervisors receive periodic reports as requested by the County Executive Officer or by the Board of Supervisors directly.

R2: The defensible space inspection program should be expanded into a year-round program staffed by a minimum of two full-time employees in addition to the four current, part-time positions.

The recommendation requires further analysis.

In FY 2018/19, the work schedules of the part-time inspectors were staggered and scheduled to provide inspection services over the winter months that typically were not covered, as snow and weather permitted. This year the County entered into a new partnership with Nevada County Consolidated Fire District (NCC) to manage and lead the County's Defensible Space Inspection Program. In early 2020, the County and NCC will evaluate the effectiveness of the program, the collaboration with CAL FIRE's inspection program, overall combined inspection results and impact, and then make recommendations to the Board of Supervisors on how to mature the program further.

R3: The County should ensure that all County-maintained roads are cleared at least every five years to comply with best practices.

The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not reasonable.

Although the County maintains 560 miles of road, not all roads can be cleared with currently available resources, including the funding source for road maintenance and gas tax funds, within 5 years. Although the County strives to address vegetation on as many road miles as possible and continues to apply for grant funding to further supplement those efforts, some roads require annual maintenance while others are narrow dirt roads serving no residences and therefore require less maintenance.

R4: The County should fund additional programs to aid homeowners in vegetation management and removal.

This recommendation has been implemented.

The County has applied for grant funding for vegetation management and removal programs. Additionally, the County recently provided green waste receptacles for the public free of charge.