



Information and General Services Department

Office of Emergency Services

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NEVADA COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS Board Agenda Memo

MEETING DATE: January 25, 2023

TO: Board of Supervisors

FROM: Craig Griesbach – Director of Emergency Services

SUBJECT: Overview of emergency preparedness projects, programs, and strategies looking forward in the coming year in accordance with the Board of Supervisors Emergency Preparedness objective.

RECOMMENDATION: Receive staff report and presentation. Consider objective associated to emergency preparedness for 2023.

FUNDING: Not applicable.

BACKGROUND:

Between 2020-2021, 6,873,327 acres burned due to wildfires in California. 14,745 structures were burned, and 36 lives were lost. Although the 2022 fire season was mild in comparison there were still 125 fires in Nevada County for a total of 1,311 acres burned with the largest being the Rices Fire at 904 acres and destroying 13 structures. Wildfire in our community continues to be a major threat alongside continued drought, tree mortality, and severe weather events requiring a need for action. The Nevada County Board of Supervisors have recognized this and have committed to help our community be prepared for these emergency events that will protect life and property.

The Emergency Preparedness objective investing in this effort in 2022 was: **“Lead the community in all hazards planning, preparedness, response, and recovery with a focus on wildfire. Do this by focusing on improving countywide evacuation routes and safety, continuing to strengthen early alert and critical communication systems, partnering closely with residents in emergency preparedness, defensible space, home hardening, green waste disposal, and fire-safe land stewardship.”**

The Nevada County Office of Emergency Services (OES) partnering with the community and key partners have continued to answer this emergency preparedness call to action. 118 community events were conducted with community members and stakeholders from April-December of 2022. This averages almost one for every workday of this last year. This helped educate the community, build projects, implement programs, and leverage our

highly engaged community resources. The annual Ready, Set, Go Guide was also updated and sent to all residents in our community to educate and prepare them for emergencies. Over 3,400 tons of green waste was processed and removed during the free community green waste drop off events. Over 150 miles of roadside vegetation was cleared and over 417 hazardous trees have been removed from critical evacuation routes.

There are several landscape level fuel mitigation projects that have been completed, started, and have been in the planning process over this last year. The Ponderosa West Phase I Shaded Fuel Break project was completed that treated over 900 acres. The South County Shaded Fuel Break project at 339-acres of treatment area is underway to improve key evacuation routes. OES was awarded a grant from CAL FIRE for the Woodpecker Ravine Shaded Fuel Break project that has a 410-acre treatment area that will be started in 2023. There are several other projects that have been awarded, pending grant award, or are in the conceptual phase. Some of these primary projects include the Ponderosa West Phase II Shaded Fuel Break project, Ponderosa West Phase I Maintenance project, South Yuba Rim Shaded Fuel Break project, Roadside Vegetation Abatement project, Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities project, and the Deer Creek Shaded Fuel Break project.

Several other successful projects have been implemented that the community has leveraged to make our neighborhoods safer in the face of disaster. Phase I of the Access and Functional Needs program that was funded by FEMA is wrapping up with phase II anticipated to start toward the end of this year. This has helped provide defensible space around homes for those residents in our community that are in the greatest need due to age, disability and/or lack of available resources. The Firewise Community (FWC) Microgrant Program was also implemented this last year with huge success. This provided \$3,600 in funding for 26 Firewise Communities to complete community level fuel reduction projects for evacuation routes, property clearing, and other vegetation management projects. With over 80 active Firewise Communities contributing to over 11 million dollars in project value annually there is a ton of potential to leverage the microgrant programs success in coming years.

The DSI program continues to mature into a sustainable and successful program. Over this last year the team has worked 264 new cases totaling 863 inspections. This team is currently managing 288 cases and had a compliance with education rate of 92%. The team also conducted 84 inspections in cooperation with the Access and Functional Needs grant program. Many outreach opportunities and community education sessions were completed by this team including several surveys for feedback on the Hazardous Vegetation Ordinance, presentation to the Board of Supervisors on opportunities to improve this ordinance and collaboration with regional jurisdictions for alignment opportunities.

There are three primary emergency preparedness plans that are in the process of being updated and will be crucial for future project implementation and submittal for competitive grants. These are the Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP), Local Hazard Mitigation Plan (LHMP) and Evacuation Study. The CWPP is a primary tool for the community. Completing this update will not only inform wildfire mitigation priorities and projects but it will be a vehicle for the entire community to use. The LHMP update is

crucial on several emergency preparedness fronts but more crucial to ensure we qualify for federal and state reimbursement funding for declared disasters. Lastly, our Evacuation Study will be crucial for informing project priorities for road improvements, vegetation clearing, and abatement of choke points in our community. All projects have initial funding, have released Requests for Proposals (RFP's), and are planned to be completed over the next 12-18 months.

Recovery efforts have continued for several projects including the River Fire, 2021 December Winter Storms, COVID pandemic, Jones Fire, Rices Fire and the 2022-23 Winter Storms. These recovery efforts take a substantial amount of staff time but diligence with this is crucial for the sustainability of the community. Many of these projects involve millions of dollars in reimbursement that is key to help cover our response efforts, staff time, and efforts from our community partners. This is shown in the success of staff efforts in the Jones Fire recovery project that resulted in the reimbursement of the schools, fairgrounds, law enforcement, and administrative staff time.

Over this past year the OES team has continued to evolve and mature into a sustainable structure that will provide needed capacity for the community for many years to come. The addition of a Director, Community Wildfire Coordinator, and transition of a temporary Defensible Space Inspector (DSI) to full time has built a sustainable path for progressive planning efforts, program implementation, proactive mitigation efforts, effective response, and support for recovery. This team has 6 full-time staff and also a strong partnership with the Sheriff's Office by having a Lieutenant embedded in the team as the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) Coordinator.

Although there is a lot being done to support the communities' efforts towards emergency preparedness there continues to be primary gaps and a lack of sustainable resources. With Measure V, the proposed ½ cent general sales tax for emergency preparedness initiatives and support, coming up short with the voters over this last year the need for resources is that much dire. Moving forward we will need to have a strategic grant focus, prioritization of key projects and initiatives, leverage cross matching grants, ensure management and administrative costs are fully covered in grants, and we are diligent with recovery funding reimbursement. We will also need to keep focus on this core OES team by leveraging limited term positions, interns and volunteers to help ensure this sustainable structure is maintained while strategically maturing existing programs. With OES managing 17 grant projects currently that total approximately 60 million dollars, having a sustainable structure and strategy will be key for continued success.

There are several specific need areas where gaps remain and there is a lack of available resources to address these gaps. Using an example for the green waste disposal need, we currently have a budget of \$40,000 annually for green waste efforts. There is over a million-dollar need based on a cost analysis, community feedback and reflecting on past programs. In addition to green waste, some of these primary need areas include bio-mass availability, vast tree mortality/hazard trees, challenges with federal property land management, lack of resources for Firewise Communities, and the increased need for workforce development. If these gaps are not addressed, emergency preparedness initiatives will continue to be more challenging than ever.

Over this next year it will be crucial that we have clear **emergency preparedness priority areas**. The priorities staff recommend over this next year are:

- Wildfire initiatives that compliment other emergency preparedness areas. An example would be evacuation vegetation clearing that also has benefits during storm events.
- Investing in strategic planning efforts (CWPP, LHMP, and Evacuation Study)
- Focusing on large scale evacuation priorities and initiatives
- Continue focusing on large fuel mitigation projects
- Continue our robust community engagement and outreach efforts, and
- Cultivating individual projects into larger community-wide projects

It is important that we have a holistic **grants and funding strategy** moving forward to ensure we are maximizing resources. The key to this and recommendation from staff are:

- Continuing our aggressive grants approach
- Budgeting annually a general fund amount for grant match
- Being strategic with grant applications based on match requirements and management and administration funding availability
- Investing in supporting and maturing existing programs and OES team
- Continuing to focus on large landscape fuel mitigation project grants
- Including green waste and biomass solutions into projects as much as possible
- Leveraging community partnerships to weave projects together, and
- Continuing conversations with the community about sustainable funding solutions to meet their needs that builds on the feedback we've received this past year.

As we continue to navigate challenges and opportunities moving forward there are key considerations we need to be strategically thinking about and implementing in the years ahead. Knowing that sustainable resources are limited, key questions include:

- What projects and/or programs have been the most impactful?
- Where do we see our biggest opportunities moving forward based on available resources and proposed state/federal budgets?
- What do we think are some key opportunities when leveraging partnerships that will get projects and programs implemented?
- Where do we think there are opportunities for regional equity when working with partners and the community?

Looking forward the community has many challenges ahead in the face of a variety of emergency preparedness challenges. With challenges comes opportunity. OES will continue to support and navigate these challenges hand-in-hand with our community and partners. This can be done through building on our already strong foundation, diligently working our strategic plans, have a strategic funding, project, and grants focus, focusing on large community scale projects, and build on our community and stakeholder partnerships. If we do this moving forward our entire community will turn these challenges into opportunities and be ready for the inevitable emergency events to come.

2023 Objective Consideration:

An option for a 2023 objective associated to emergency preparedness could be: **“Lead the community in all hazards planning, preparedness, response, and recovery with a focus on wildfire. Do this by focusing on improving countywide evacuation routes and safety, continuing to strengthen early alert and critical communication systems, partnering closely with residents and community partners in emergency preparedness, defensible space, home hardening, green waste disposal, and fire-safe land stewardship.”**

Item Initiated by: Craig Griesbach, Director, OES

Approved by: Stephen Monaghan, Director, IGS