

# Fact Sheet on Emergency Proclamation on Wildfire Risk

March 22, 2019



**Summary:** Citing extreme peril posed by wildfire risk, Governor Newsom issued an [Emergency Proclamation](https://www.gov.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/3.22.19-Wildfire-State-of-Emergency.pdf) directing CAL FIRE to immediately implement projects to protect lives and property. To ensure necessary work can get underway immediately, the proclamation suspends certain requirements and regulations as needed to carry out its directives. The Wildfire State of Emergency Proclamation can be found at <https://www.gov.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/3.22.19-Wildfire-State-of-Emergency.pdf>.

## 1. What projects will CAL FIRE implement?

CAL FIRE has identified 35 priority projects that can be implemented immediately to help reduce public safety risk for over 200 of California's most wildfire-vulnerable communities. Project examples include removal of hazardous dead trees, vegetation clearing, creation of fuel breaks and community defensible spaces, and creation of safer ingress and egress corridors. Project descriptions can be found at <http://www.fire.ca.gov/general/45-DayReport>.

The projects will focus on small and medium diameter ladder fuels and understory vegetation. Most of the vegetation removal will occur in the understory and be aimed at reducing excessive tree densities in the lower canopy. Few large trees will be removed. The projects are part of an all-of-the-above approach to protecting public safety this year.

## 2. What requirements are being suspended and why?

The emergency proclamation provides the Secretary of the Natural Resources Agency (CNRA) and the Secretary of the California Environmental Protection Agency (CalEPA) discretion to suspend state environmental permitting requirements on a case-by-case basis so that the 35 priority projects can get underway immediately, including suspending requirements to prepare California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) documents. Absent a waiver, the CAL FIRE projects would require CEQA review prior to implementation, which can take months or years to complete. To ensure environmental protection during implementation of the 35 priority projects, CAL FIRE will work to identify and avoid sensitive natural and archaeological resources when designing and constructing fuels reduction projects. The proclamation also suspends certain requirements for

licensing and procurement where possible to allow CAL FIRE to immediately begin work on priority fuel reduction projects.

**3. What steps will be taken to protect environmental, cultural and historical resources during implementation of the 35 priority projects?**

To ensure environmental protection when designing and constructing fuels reduction projects, CAL FIRE will work to identify and avoid sensitive natural and archaeological resources using the following approach:

- Known sites of rare, threatened, or endangered plants or animals will not be disturbed, threatened, or damaged by CAL FIRE or its contractors during project implementation. Information on these sites is available from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife's (CDFW) Natural Diversity Database. CAL FIRE will query this database during project scoping to evaluate the presence of biological resources and ensure biological resource protection by avoiding any such sites. Where unmapped resources may be, trained field crews (including but not limited to Registered Professional Foresters) will be onsite to identify possible resource issues ahead of project work as it progresses. Further, in working with the CDFW and the Water Boards, CAL FIRE will engage staff of those agencies to ensure field protocols are followed to avoid resources such as nesting sites or wetlands, and minimize unnecessary disturbance to unlisted species, by following best management practices assigned by CDFW.
- CAL FIRE and its contractors will avoid damaging known archaeological or historical sites. Information on these sites may be available from the Information Centers of the California Historical Resources Information System within the California Department of Parks and Recreation. CAL FIRE will query this system during project scoping to evaluate the presence of cultural resources and ensure cultural resource protection by avoiding any such sites. Where unmapped resources may be, trained field crews (including but not limited to Registered Professional Foresters) will be onsite to identify possible resource issues ahead of project work as it progresses.
- A Registered Professional Forester or designee will be onsite during project implementation to assist with resource identification and protection as these projects progress to completion. The standard practice of resource identification and avoidance will be adhered to for resource protection, in conjunction with Best Management and Operational Practices as determined by departments and agencies with jurisdiction over the 35 projects.

In addition, CAL FIRE will employ standard Forest Practice Rule best management practices for projects in all landscapes – whether forest, chaparral or oak lands – to

ensure resource protection. Environmental resource professionals are engaged early in project design, including Registered Professional Foresters, environmental scientists, archeologists, hydrologists, soil scientists, fire scientists, and various other experts in natural resource protection. While specific measures may vary, standard protective measures include the following:

- Limiting heavy equipment operations on steep slopes.
- Avoiding work within areas near lakes and streams.
- Avoiding known sites of rare, threatened, or endangered plants or animals, as well as significant archaeological and historical sites, are during the construction of a fuel break.
- Ensuring that Registered Professional Foresters or other qualified personnel will be onsite during operations to evaluate the presence of potential resources and to ensure protection through avoidance.

**4. What does the emergency proclamation mean for other state fuels reduction and wildfire mitigation projects not associated with the 35 priority projects?**

The emergency proclamation applies exclusively to the 35 projects identified by CAL FIRE, noted above. Otherwise, CAL FIRE initiated projects are subject to the environmental review and permitting process. A Program [Environmental Impact Report](#) (EIR) is currently under preparation to evaluate potential environmental impacts of future CAL FIRE vegetation treatments to reduce wildfire risks and avoid or diminish the harmful effects of wildfire on the people, property, and natural resources in the State of California. The draft Program EIR is expected to be completed by the end of 2019.

**5. How will the 35 projects contribute to achieving the 500,000-acre goal for 2019? The**

35 priority projects collectively cover 90,000 acres, which would add significantly to the number of acres treated in 2019. The Forest Carbon Plan has a goal of treating 500,000 acres of private land every year. The priority fuel reduction projects would treat approximately 90,000 acres, or about 20% of the goal.

**6. How will the projects be funded and at what cost?**

The 35 priority fuel reduction projects identified by CAL FIRE would cost approximately \$30 million to complete. These funds would come from the fiscal year 2018-2019 Forest Health and Fire Prevention budget allocation.

**7. How much fuels management has been done over the past four years?**

Since 2010, California has nearly doubled the number of acres treated by fuel reduction and tripled the number of acres treated by prescribed burning. Recent fuels management work includes:

Table 1. Acres treated by CAL FIRE

| <b>Fiscal Year</b>                  | <b>Fuels Reduction</b> | <b>Prescribed Fire</b> | <b>Total</b>     |
|-------------------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|------------------|
| 2018/2019<br>(through January 2019) | 5,490                  | 10,352                 | 15,842 (to date) |
| 2017/2018                           | 13,344                 | 19,413                 | 32,757           |
| 2016/2017                           | 15,755                 | 13,941                 | 29,696           |
| 2015/2016                           | 11,481                 | 16,896                 | 28,377           |
| 2014/2015                           | 14,728                 | 3,331                  | 18,059           |

Despite this work, California faces a massive backlog of forest management work. Millions of acres need treatment, and this work – once completed – must be repeated over the years.

#### **8. What is California doing to help with home / community hardening?**

California arguably has some of the most stringent wildland building codes in the world. Since 2008, new construction in California's wildlands requires building materials that are ember-resistant. For homes built before the 2008 standards, CAL FIRE is working to develop a list of low-cost retrofit steps homeowners can take. In addition, the Office of the State Fire Marshal (OSFM) maintains an advisory committee of fire and building officials that continuously considers building code updates to improve fire safety. Most recently, OSFM advanced building code changes including sealing of garage door gaps, sealing skylights and safety improvements to outbuildings.

Homeowners also are encouraged to actively maintain defensible space, which is defined as a minimum 100-foot area around a home where all dead, dying and overgrown vegetation has been removed. Since grass, brush and trees grow throughout the year, maintenance is an ongoing task. California inspected more than 217,600 homes for defensible space compliance since in 2017-2018 alone.

Under AB 2911 of 2017, CAL FIRE is beginning to work with the Board of Forestry to review subdivisions in wildland areas that were built without secondary emergency egress to improve both public evaluations and emergency access. Another critical piece is CAL FIRE's Land Use Planning Program, which works with local planning and building professionals to help them develop the safety element of their General Plans as well as Local Hazard Mitigation Plans.

**9. What steps will CAL FIRE take to engage communities and inform the public?**

CAL FIRE continues to partner with numerous organizations to educate the public about fire prevention and safe practices through social media, community meetings, fairs and other events. CAL FIRE units also educate and inform the public about prescribed burn projects in local areas through social media and community events.

In addition, CAL FIRE will work with the Forest Management Task Force to develop coordinated messaging on public education campaigns, including coordinated messaging for Cal Volunteers and Office of Emergency Services grants consistent with AB 72 enacted earlier this year.