

## **NEVADA COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS RESPONSES TO**

### **2020 Nevada County Civil Grand Jury Report**

#### **Report on responses to the 2018-2019 Grand Jury Report: Nevada County Request for Proposal and Procurement Practices**

**DATED August 11, 2020**

In accordance with California Penal Code § 933.05(b), the Nevada County Board of Supervisors is responding to the Nevada County Civil Grand Jury Fiscal Year 2019/20 Report entitled *Wildfire Prevention: Let's Treat It as If Our Lives Depend on It*. The responses to findings and recommendations are based on examination of official county records, review of the responses by the County Executive Officer, County Counsel and representatives or testimony of the Board of Supervisors and County staff. The responses contained herein also represent the Nevada County Office of Emergency Services and Nevada County Human Resources response as requested by the Grand Jury.

#### **A. RESPONSES TO FINDINGS**

F5: Not every homeowner will comply voluntarily with state, county and local ordinances. Nevada County has been enforcing Ordinance 2463 using Defensible Space Inspectors (DSI) to cite those out of compliance.

**Agree**

F6: Nevada County's DSI inspectors conduct few proactive inspections because most of their time is spent on the complaints received.

**Agree**

**Initially the Office of Emergency Services set a goal for the DSI Program to proactive inspections in FY 2019/20 but due to staffing challenges and the pandemic outbreak of COVID-19, this has not occurred thus far in 2020. Once staffing positions have been filled, the County anticipates this will be implemented. The County also contracts with Nevada County Consolidated Fire District (NCCFD) for the management of the DSI Program that encourages greater communication, cooperation and coordination between the County and local fire authorities.**

F7: Nevada County is on track to end the fiscal year without using all the funds budgeted to hire DSI inspectors because it has been unable to hire for the positions available.

**Agree**

**FY 2019/20 funds for temporary DSIs went unused as the County was unable to fill those positions. Substantial efforts have been made, as articulated below, to address the recruitment and hiring efforts.**

F8: Even if all Nevada County DSI positions were filled, the county does not have enough DSI's to inspect vegetation management at every property with a structure every five years, which is best practice.

**Agree**

**Currently the Office of Emergency Services budget includes three to four (3-4) temporary seasonal DSIs and one (1) Lead DSI. This level of staffing can only inspect a small portion of unincorporated properties.**

F9: The lack of a central repository of data makes it difficult to know how many defensible space inspections have been completed and when a property was last inspected.

**Partial Disagree**

**Due to the differences of criteria, types of inspections and qualifications of inspectors between different agencies, organizations and community associations, a central repository of defensible space inspection data may not accurately track the number of completed inspections that meet the County's inspection criteria. However, the County does currently maintain an internal data system that tracks the County's DSI Program. Moreover, the County currently contracts with Nevada County Consolidated Fire District (NCCFD) for the management of the DSI Program to encourage greater communication, cooperation and coordination between the County and local fire authorities.**

F10: Not all property owners in the county are aware that they are responsible for clearing their private roads.

**Agree**

**In order to help make all County property owners aware of their responsibility, a letter, that included a defensible space checklist, was mailed out on April 27, 2020 to all property owners within the unincorporated area of the County. Moreover 60,806 2020 Ready, Set, Go! Handbook: Your Guide**

**to *Wildfire Safety & Emergency Preparedness* handbooks were mailed to every resident address in Nevada County, including within the incorporated jurisdictions of the City of Grass Valley, City of Nevada City and Town of Truckee.**

F11: Not all residents in the county are aware that they may file a complaint with DSI's to inspect private roads for ingress/egress and compliance with Ordinance No. 2463.

**Agree**

**In order to help make all County property owners aware of their responsibility, on April 27, 2020 a letter that included a defensible space checklist was mailed out to all property owners within the unincorporated area of the County. Moreover 60,806 *2020 Ready, Set, Go! Handbook: Your Guide to Wildfire Safety & Emergency Preparedness* handbooks were mailed to every resident address in Nevada County, including within the incorporated jurisdictions of the City of Grass Valley, City of Nevada City and Town of Truckee. However, the Office of Emergency Services will bolster its public education and marketing campaign in FY 2020/21 to include roadside complaints to educate county residents on the process to file a complaint on private roads, as well as on defensible space.**

F12: A public awareness campaign about owner responsibility of clearing private roads would assist in compliance.

**Agree**

**For the second year in a row, the Nevada County Office of Emergency Services mailed out 60,806 *2020 Ready, Set, Go! Handbook: Your Guide to Wildfire Safety & Emergency Preparedness* to every resident address in Nevada County, including within the incorporated jurisdictions of the City of Grass Valley, City of Nevada City. And Town of Truckee. The 2020 Handbook included guidelines to ensure that roadways should be clear or a minimum of 10 ft of vegetation beyond the shoulder with trim shrubs and trees overhanging the roadway being cleared of a minimum height of 15 feet. The Office of Emergency Services also engages in regular marketing events and opportunities that include movie theater public service announcements, Town Hall Meetings, attending community and neighborhood association meetings, actively engaging users on social media platforms and participating in local radio interviews.**

F13: Nevada County does not have enough DSI's to inspect every private road every five years, which is best practice.

**Agree**

**Nevada County has approximately 1,500 miles of private roads. Nevada County would need to conduct 300 miles of roadside inspections annually which is not possible with current staffing levels.**

F14 Current Nevada County ordinances do not deal adequately with vegetation management of vacant properties.

**Agree**

**Currently the County's Hazardous Vegetation Ordinance does not include vacant parcels. Office of Emergency Services (OES) is conducting an analysis, as outlined below, and will be providing recommendations at the 2021 Board of Supervisors' Annual Workshop.**

F16: Current fire prevention funding levels are inadequate. Nevada County OES staff has presented the BOS with a funding gap of \$5.4-\$10.1 million dollars, along with the idea of a sales or property tax to close the gap.

**Partially Disagree**

**At the 2020 Board of Supervisors' Annual Workshop in February 2020, the Board of Supervisors directed staff to engage stakeholders in developing a public safety evacuation and hazardous vegetation reduction tax measure to increase funding for wildfire prevention and response in the amount of \$5.5 Million to \$10.1 Million. Unfortunately, due to the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic, efforts to bring an initiative to the ballot became unfeasible. However, the Office of Emergency Services received a budget increase of 67% for a total budget allocation of \$2,151,864 for FY 2020/21. Additionally, the Office of Emergency Services was awarded \$3.5M in grants and priority project funding from the Governor to complete the Ponderosa West Grass Valley Defense Zone Project in coordination with CAL FIRE and the Fire Safe Council of Nevada County. The County has and continues to apply for substantial grant funding for wildfire prevention, including our Public Works Department recently being awarded a Cal FIRE grant in the amount of \$868,084 for additional vegetation management along 200 miles of County public roadways.**

R1 The BOS and OES should financially support certification of the Firewise Communities currently on the waiting list.

**This recommendation has been implemented.**

**The Office of Emergency Services contracted with the Fire Safe Council of Nevada County to support the creation of 25 new Firewise Communities between FY 2018/19 and FY 2019/20. The County continues to allocate funds for the Fire Safe Council annually to grow Firewise Communities and anticipates certifying and recertifying 10-15 Firewise Communities for FY 2020/21.**

R2 Nevada County should meet with trained defensible space inspectors who volunteer their time to better understand why the paid DSI positions remain unfilled.

**The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted.**

**Nevada County Human Resources has worked with the Office of Emergency Services to adjust the rate of pay up by 15% effective June 12, 2020. This was done to set the rate of pay at a level more in line with the skills required of the Inspector, their critical value to the community, and to attract the widest possible number of candidates during a tight time in the labor market. All these efforts are designed to maximize the County's ability to draw in and hire the best, most stable group of qualified candidates. Additionally, Human Resources is encouraging current temporary employees, who are both familiar with County operations and who have demonstrated a commitment to serve the County in which they live, to apply for these positions. The job posting has been modified to eliminate the requirement for special training and noting that it is preferred. This change makes it easier for more candidates to qualify for the positions. Office of Emergency Services will provide the candidate the training below if they don't already possess it upon hire.**

R3 Nevada County DSI inspectors should significantly increase their efforts to inspect more than just complaint-driven properties.

**This recommendation has not yet been implemented but will be implemented in the future.**

**Due to staffing shortages and the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, Office of Emergency Services has been unable to increase efforts to conduct pro-active defensible space inspections. It is anticipated that once staffing has been increased the Office of Emergency Services will increase efforts to inspect more than just complaint-driven properties.**

R4 The BOS should direct staff to collect information from CAL FIRE, Fire Districts, HOAs, Fire Safe Council and others to develop a database on defensible space inspections, which would be searchable by property to reveal the date that a property was last inspected.

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

**The recommendation is not reasonable because a central repository of defensible space inspection data may not accurately track the number of completed inspections that meet the County's inspection criteria due to the differences of criteria, types of inspections and qualifications of inspectors between different agencies, organizations and community associations. However, the County uses, and will continue to maintain, an internal data system that tracks the County's DSI Program. County staff will continue to work to incorporate other data repository systems into its internal system as applicable and as resources allows. The County also contracts with Nevada County Consolidated Fire District (NCCFD) for the management of the DSI Program that encourages greater communication, cooperation and coordination between the County and local fire authorities.**

R5 The BOS and local fire districts should develop a campaign to educate landowners about their responsibility to clear private roads.

**This recommendation has been implemented.**

**The *2020 Ready, Set, Go! Handbook: Your Guide to Wildfire Safety & Emergency Preparedness* was mailed to 60,806 resident addresses that included guidelines that roadways should be clear of a minimum of 10 ft of vegetation beyond the shoulder with trim shrubs and trees overhanging the roadway being cleared to a minimum height of 15 ft. Also, on April 27, 2020 a letter that included a defensible space checklist was mailed out to all property owners within the unincorporated area of the County. The County also contracts with Nevada County Consolidated Fire District (NCCFD) for the management of the DSI Program and remains a close partner on outreach activities that encourages greater communication, cooperation and coordination between the County and local fire authorities.**

R6 The BOS and local fire districts should develop a campaign to educate county residents that they may file a complaint on private roads as well as on defensible space.

**This recommendation will be implemented.**

**Office of Emergency Services will bolster its public education and marketing campaign in FY 2020/21 to include roadside complaints to educate county residents on the process to file a complaint on private roads, as well as on defensible space.**

R8 The BOS should develop and fund a private road inspection program that prioritizes private roads and inspects high priority roads in alignment with best practices.

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

**The County's current DSI Program address roadside vegetation hazards along private roads. It is anticipated that once staffing has been increased, the Office of Emergency Services will inspect more properties that include private road inspections.**

R9 The BOS should direct staff, with stakeholders including members of the public, to develop appropriate vegetation management regulations for vacant properties.

**This recommendation requires further analysis.**

**County staff will conduct a study on options and recommendations on appropriate vegetation management regulations for vacant properties. Staff will conduct research, engage applicable stakeholders, and provide analysis for recommendations at the 2021 Board of Supervisors' Annual Workshop.**

R10 The BOS should direct staff, based on statistics, to determine the number of inspectors needed to inspect occupied structures, private roads and undeveloped property in accordance with best practices. Once the number has been determined, Nevada County should work toward increasing the number of DSI in order to meet the goal.

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

**The Board of Supervisors work closely with the County Executive Office and Office of Emergency Services to carefully balance and allocate limited funding resources to projects and initiatives that can have the greatest impact for the public's benefit. The DSI Program is a major component of the County's priority objective to prevent wildfire. The DSI Program will continue to be funded as priority while balancing the fiscal resources necessary to sustain County core services and respond to other emergencies like the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic.**

R11 The BOS should continue to financially support the free community green waste pickup program.

**This recommendation has been implemented.**

**The 2020 Green Waste Program was highly successful and well received by the public. The County will continue to fund the Green Waste Program in FY 2020/21.**