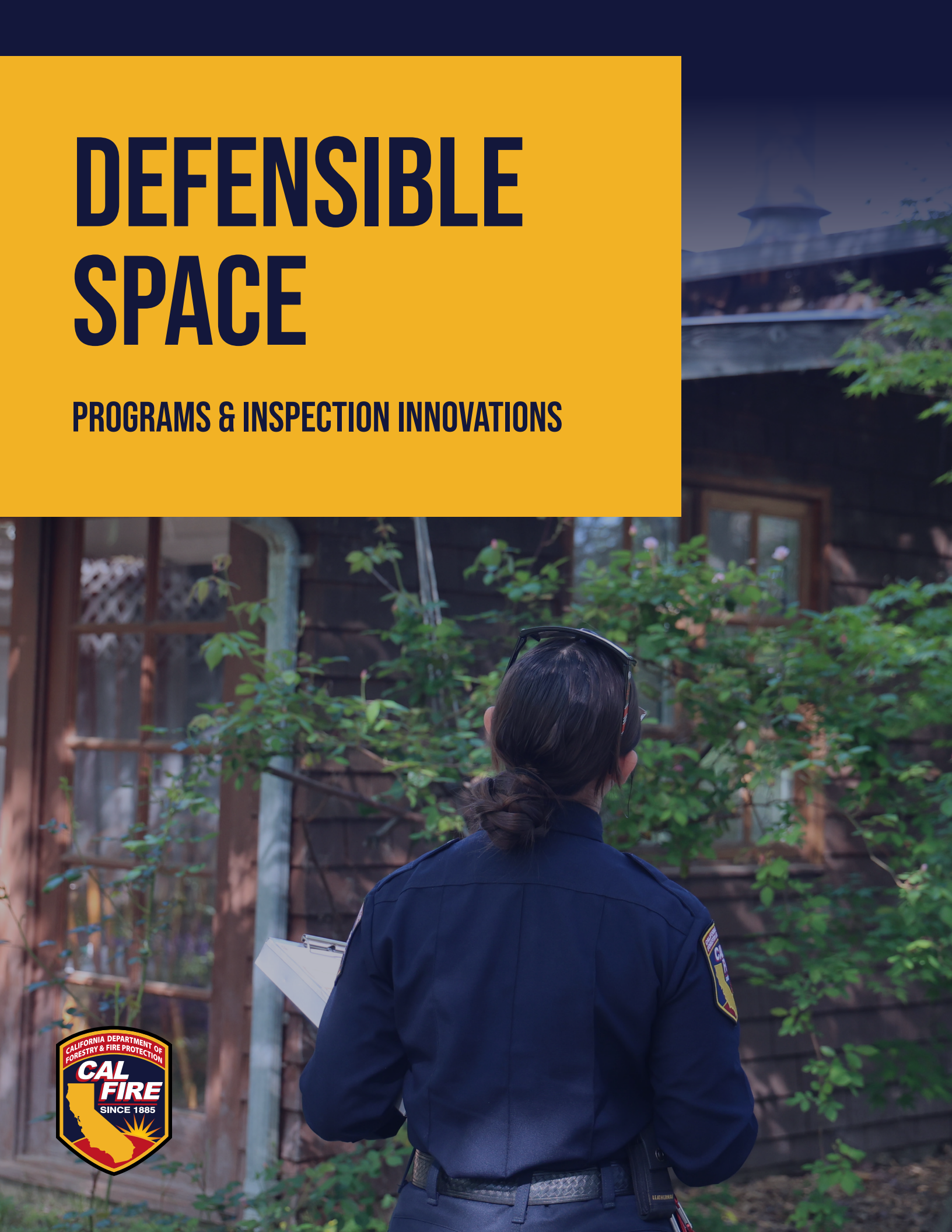
DEFENSIBLE SPACE

PROGRAMS & INSPECTION INNOVATIONS



LOS ANGELES COUNTY'S ENGINE STRIKE TEAM INSPECTION MODEL

Los Angeles County has developed an efficient process that leverages a weekly designated Engine Strike Team (ST) to conduct Defensible Space inspections throughout the peak fire season.

How the program works:

- A designated Engine Strike Team is assigned to Defensible Space inspections Monday through Friday, from 0800 to 1700.
- Crews bring lunches to maximize productive time in the field and minimize travel interruptions.
- Each engine company member conducts individual inspections using a smart device for documentation, allowing multiple inspections to occur simultaneously rather than pairing personnel together.
- The Defensible Space Inspection (DSI) Coordinator directs the Strike Team to priority target areas until annual inspection objectives are achieved.
- The Strike Team serves as the first wave of inspectors, while DSI personnel focus on second inspections and follow-up activities. This approach allows limited DSI staffing to be used where it provides the greatest value.

Results: This innovative deployment model contributed to more than 120,000 Defensible Space inspections during Fiscal Year 2025–2026, demonstrating how existing operational resources can be leveraged to dramatically expand inspection capacity.

Additional Benefits: Beyond increasing inspection numbers, the program provides valuable operational experience by:

- Familiarizing engine companies with new response areas.
- Creating hands-on training opportunities for Strike Team Leaders (STL/T), TaskForce Leaders (TFL/T), and Division/Group Supervisors (DIVS/GRP(T)).
- Strengthening operational readiness while supporting community wildfire resilience.

Thank you to Los Angeles County for sharing this successful approach. Programs like this provide valuable ideas that other units and contract counties may be able to adapt to meet their own Defensible Space goals.

BUTTE UNIT VOLUNTEER IN PREVENTION PROGRAM WITH THE CALIFORNIA CONSERVATION CORPS, CHICO CENTER

The Butte County Fire Volunteers in Fire Prevention Program began recruiting through the California Conservation Corps, Chico center in 2021. In 2021 The volunteer program was at the end of an era. The program was phasing out the old way of utilizing the VIP's for the emergency call center, as a result all the VIP's resigned. In order to continue a VIP program, we reached out to the CCC Chico Center. Our focus was to create a new VIP program that could help us meet our defensible space and public outreach goals. In turn the program has led to new recruitment into the defensible space program.

We began the proposal with letters to each agency outlining what a new VIP program would look like and the benefits to both agencies. Both agencies accepted the proposal, and it has been a success ever since.

A primary goal for our department was to add extra volunteer personnel to our defensible space inspection program during the off season (fall, winter, and spring).



VIP's staffing a booth for public outreach.

The VIP's assist with conducting inspections with qualified inspectors, in communities throughout the county. They also assist with public events and assemble packets of fire prevention and emergency preparedness literature. These packets are a resource that we hand out to residents during the defensible space inspection.



VIP's conducting defensible space inspections.

How the program works:

Once or twice a year in the fall and spring CAL FIRE, Butte County Fire is invited to present the VIP program at the CCC Chico center. The candidates are required to submit a volunteer application as well as a cover letter. Once they are accepted into the program, they must sign the oath and Code of Conduct for the department as well as adhere to a dress code. Once they have been accepted into the program, they are issued a VIP shirt and name tag that represents the department.

Results:

Both agencies continue to benefit from this partnership. First, we are gaining personnel that assist our defensible space inspectors in conducting inspections. The VIP's have contributed to the number of inspections, as well as an added element of safety in numbers for our team. The Corp members gain valuable skills in learning the defensible space program and process. Volunteers are trained to document inspections in Field Maps, LE-100 or QE-100 forms. They receive annual training from our department in order to educate the public in defensible space and fire prevention.

This idea to bring together these two agencies was a simple and effective way to maintain our VIP program. This grassroots idea eventually gave way to the Qualified Entities program. Our Chico Center CCC were the first



Qualified Entity Assessments for a Firewise community.



Qualified Entity Assessment on a state facility.

to receive the training as a Qualified Entity. Today they have an entire crew that are trained as Qualified Entity Assessors. This crew has the ability and support from their department to conduct the assessments as well as performing the mitigation required on state facilities.

This year and last year the Chico center assessed and mitigated all the required work on state properties within Butte County. Additionally, they have mitigated fire hazards on state facilities in other units. Their knowledge in defensible space has strengthened their program and understanding of why defensible space is important and the reasons behind the fuel reduction projects that they perform.

The volunteer service hours have additional benefits to the Corp members. Corp members who serve 48 hours will receive a scholarship at the end of their service time in the program. Additionally, in order to receive the rank of crew supervisor they must achieve 100 hours of volunteer service, and a second scholarship. Our VIP program allows them to achieve this requirement in a short amount of time. A single inspection day will give them 6-8 hours of volunteer hours.

The benefits to both departments are undeniable. The program has provided a way for Corp members to network with our department and observe the different positions our agency has to offer. Since our program began, we have mentored young people who became fire fighters, forestry technicians, and peace officers. One of our own defensible space inspectors began his career with the CCC, Chico center.

TUOLUMNE-CALAVERAS UNIT VOLUNTEERS IN PREVENTION PROGRAM

For more than four decades, the Tuolumne-Calaveras Unit (TCU) Volunteers in Prevention (VIP) Program has demonstrated the power of community partnerships in wildfire preparedness. Established in the 1980s, the program has evolved into one of the Unit's most valuable prevention resources, empowering local residents to educate their neighbors while supporting CAL FIRE's Defensible Space Program.

At its peak, the program consisted of more than 150 dedicated Volunteers in Prevention who completed nearly 10,000 defensible space inspections annually. While volunteer numbers have naturally fluctuated over the years, the program remains highly effective. In 2025 alone, TCU VIPs completed more than 3,300 defensible space inspections, providing thousands of homeowners with education and guidance that helps make communities safer from wildfire.

A Community-Driven Approach



One of the unique strengths of the TCU VIP Program is its grassroots structure. Local Homeowners Associations (HOAs) serve as coordinators within their respective neighborhoods, developing customized outreach letters for residents while utilizing the LE-100A Defensible Space Inspection Form as the primary inspection documentation.

Volunteers typically conduct the first and second defensible space inspections, focusing on education



and homeowner engagement. When additional follow-up or enforcement is necessary, the inspections are coordinated with the TCU Prevention Bureau, creating an efficient partnership between volunteers and CAL FIRE personnel.

This community-centered approach has strengthened relationships between residents and CAL FIRE while fostering a culture of wildfire preparedness throughout Tuolumne and Calaveras counties.

More Than Inspections

Although defensible space inspections are the cornerstone of the program, TCU VIPs contribute in many other ways throughout the year. Volunteers regularly assist with:

- Community education events
- Fire Safe Council and Firewise Community outreach
- Team teaching and public presentations
- Call center operations
- Special events
- Community meetings and public education opportunities

Like CAL FIRE inspectors, VIPs play an important role in the defensible space process. Their primary mission is education—helping residents understand how proactive vegetation management and home hardening reduce wildfire risk before enforcement ever becomes necessary.

Recruiting the Next Generation

The program continues to attract volunteers from organizations already dedicated to wildfire preparedness, including Fire Safe Councils and Firewise Communities. More recently, TCU has expanded recruitment efforts to engage younger community members seeking career development opportunities and hands-on experience in wildfire prevention.

The Units Fire Prevention Specialist II actively recruits potential volunteers at:

- Career fairs
- High schools
- Community meetings
- County fairs
- Public events featuring CAL FIRE
- The Tuolumne County Volunteer Fair

While many volunteers join simply to give back to their community, the program also provides valuable professional experience and knowledge that can serve as a stepping stone toward future careers with CAL FIRE and in fire preparedness.

Word of mouth continues to be the program's most successful recruitment tool. As volunteers share their experiences, they naturally encourage neighbors, friends, and family members to become involved, creating a cycle of continued growth and community engagement.

Adapting to New Technology

Like many long-standing programs, TCU experienced challenges during the transition from paper inspections to tablet-based inspections using Field Maps. Some longtime volunteers found adapting to new technology difficult, resulting in the loss of many experienced VIPs.

Despite these challenges, the transition has significantly improved program efficiency. Field Maps provides better inspection tracking, streamlines documentation, and allows CAL FIRE personnel to quickly identify properties requiring follow-up inspections or enforcement actions.



The technology has strengthened coordination between volunteers and Prevention Bureau staff while improving accountability throughout the inspection process.

A Simple Commitment with Lasting Impact

Becoming a Volunteer in Prevention requires only a modest commitment. Volunteers receive a VIP polo shirt, hat, identification badge, and participate in annual spring training conducted by the Unit. The training closely mirrors the instruction provided to CAL FIRE Defensible Space Inspectors, ensuring volunteers are well-equipped to educate homeowners and conduct quality inspections.

Once trained, VIPs become trusted ambassadors for wildfire preparedness within their communities. Their local knowledge, personal connections, and passion for service create a ripple effect—sharing information, encouraging defensible space, and inspiring others to volunteer.





Looking Ahead

The Tuolumne-Calaveras Unit continues exploring new ways to recognize and appreciate its Volunteers in Prevention, with an emphasis on improving volunteer retention and celebrating the countless hours these individuals contribute to public safety.

The continued success of the VIP Program demonstrates that wildfire resilience is built through strong partnerships between CAL FIRE and the communities it serves. What began as a grassroots effort more than 40 years ago has grown into a model of community engagement, proving that informed, dedicated volunteers can make a lasting difference in protecting lives, homes, and California's natural resources.

The Tuolumne-Calaveras Unit's Volunteers in Prevention Program stands as a testament to the impact of community service—neighbors helping neighbors create safer, more fire-resilient communities, one inspection at a time.

REFERENCE MATERIAL FOR NEW ENTITIES

MARIN WILDFIRE PREVENTION AUTHORITY

Marin Wildfire Prevention Authority

- Joint Powers Agreement
- Tax Ordinance
- Marin Wildfire Strategic Plan
- Board of Directors Bylaws
- Board of Directors Code of Conduct
- 2017 Lessons Learned
- 2019 Grand Jury Report – Wildfire Preparedness: A New Approach
- 2020 Community Wildfire Protection Plan
- Stanford Case Study – Marin Wildfire Prevention Authority: A Case Study in Fire Resilient Governance

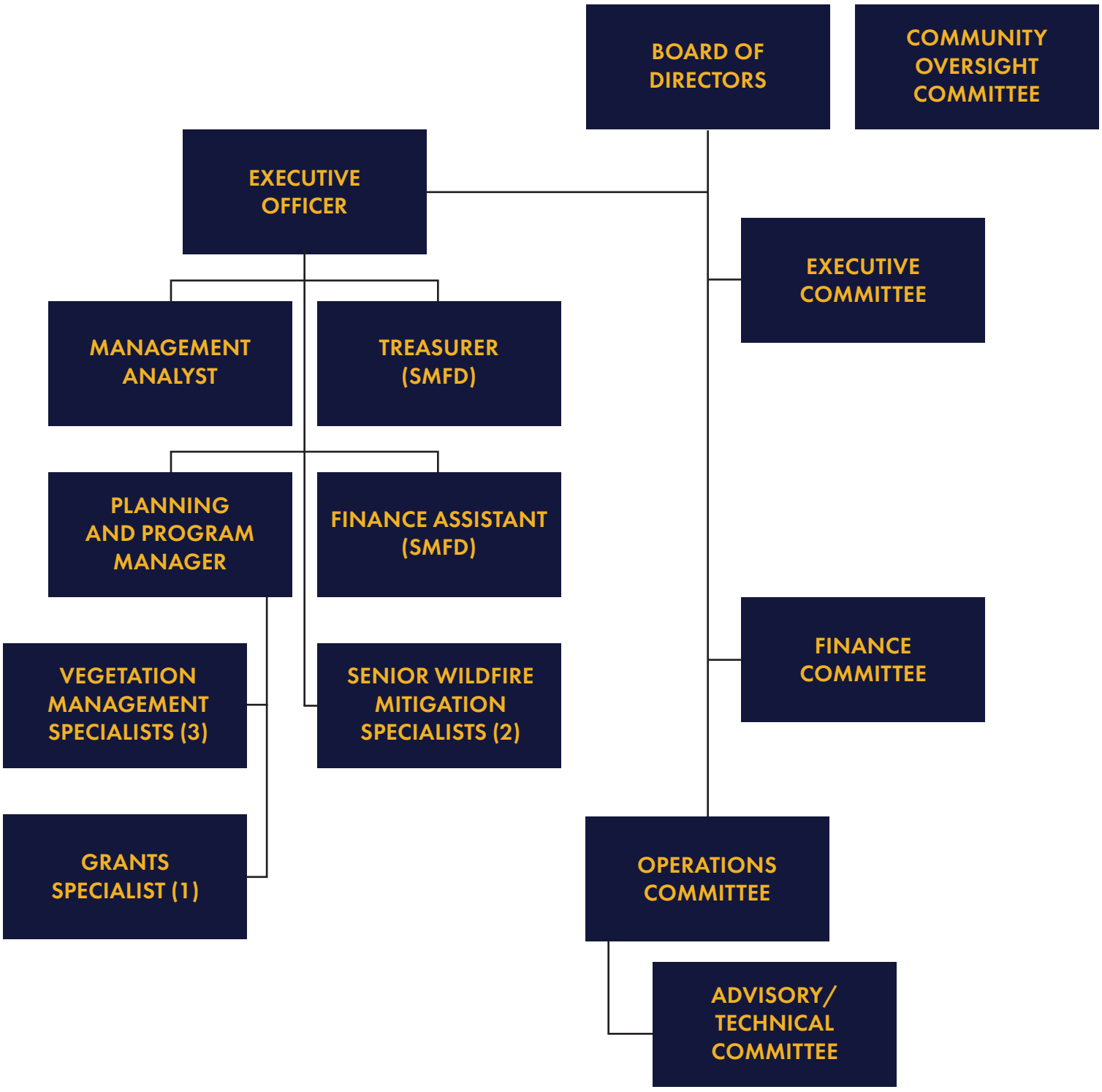
Project Management

- Marin Wildfire Project Webpage
- Easy to access map located
- Vegetation Management Dashboard
- DSpace/Home Hardening Dashboard

Agendas

- Marin Wildfire Record of Meetings

ORGANIZATION CHART



ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Board of Directors

- Setting policies and goals for Marin Wildfire
- Annually reviewing and adopting Marin Wildfire's budget and Work Plan
- Establishing Standing Committees including the Operations Committee, Community Oversight Committee, Executive Committee, Finance Committee and ad hoc subcommittees
- Provide report outs at home agency meetings or through City/Town/District Manager
- The Executive Officer's report is a one page tool to support

Community Oversight Committee

- Review Marin Wildfire's spending on an annual basis and report the extent to which the funds have been spent consistent with the tax measure and provide feedback to the Board of Directors

Executive Committee

- Advise the Board and plan Board activities

Finance Committee

Advise the Board on financial matters

Executive Officer

- Chief administrator of Marin Wildfire, subject to the Board's direction
- Responsible for the day-to-day operations, organization, staff relations and preparation of the annual budget

Planning and Program Manager

- Plans and manages Marin Wildfire's operational and environmental services programs

Treasurer (SMFD)

- Provides budgetary support for Marin Wildfire

Finance Assistant (SMFD)

- Provides administrative support for the Marin Wildfire

Operations Committee

- Responsible for creating a recommended annual work plan and the supporting budget

Advisory/Technical Committee

- Responsible to the Operations Committee to provide expert advice and recommendations regarding how the programs of Marin Wildfire should be developed and implemented

JURISDICTIONAL AUTHORITIES

It is important to understand the jurisdictional authorities in the wildland fire environment as they apply to all wildfire activities including suppression, prevention, defensible space evaluations, pre-fire activities and code enforcement.

There are three jurisdictional authorities, and they intersect with Marin Wildfire in varying ways: Local Responsibility Area (LRA), State Responsibility Area (SRA) and Federal Responsibility Area (FRA).

Local Responsibility Area

- Incorporated cities
- Unincorporated areas that are not SRA or FRA
- The local codes of the jurisdiction having authority apply in each area of the LRA
  - For example – the adopted codes of the City of San Rafael only apply in San Rafael whereas the adopted codes of the Town of San Anselmo only apply in San Anselmo
    - The differences in these codes often cause issues as they share jurisdictional boundaries
- Not all fire agencies have a statutory requirement to provide fire protection or prevention services – not common in Marin
- CEQA – if the agency having jurisdictional authority is funding a project, they are the Lead Agency

State Responsibility Area

- Basic definition – unincorporated areas not federally owned that have watershed or timber values
  - State owned property is not by default SRA – as an example, Angel Island State Park is not SRA
  - Most SRA overlaps other areas of jurisdictional authorities (this is true for all of Marin's SRA)
- CAL FIRE has a statutory responsibility to suppress wildfire in the SRA – this includes prevention, pre-fire activities and to an extent code enforcement
  - Certain applications of code enforcement from the agency having jurisdiction apply in the SRA
- Marin County is a Contract County for CAL FIRE and therefore is responsible to perform CAL FIRE's mission in the County of Marin
- Many Marin Wildfire member agencies have overlapping jurisdiction with MCFD in the SRA
  - Novato, Marinwood, San Rafael (see below for detail), Kentfield, Sleepy Hollow, Southern Marin Fire, Muir Beach, Stinson Beach, Bolinas and Inverness
    - CSA-19, unincorporated San Rafael, by contract has its suppression responsibilities provided by San Rafael Fire, however prevention activities full under MCFD
    - All Marin Wildfire member agencies that do not overlap the SRA border the SRA and projects will often overlap
- CEQA – the agency funding the project in the SRA will be the Lead Agency
  - This can be one, two, or three agencies: the fire department having jurisdiction, MCFD and/or Marin Wildfire
    - As an example, a project on Mount Burdell can be funded by Novato Fire, MCFD and/or Marin Wildfire

Federal Responsibility Area

- All federally owned lands
  - Primarily the Golden Gate National Recreation Area, Point Reyes National Seashore and Muir Woods National Monument
  - Many Marin Wildfire member agencies boarder the FRA
- The National Park Service has contracted with MCFD to provide wildfire suppression response and limited vegetation management funding
- National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) – all projects in the FRA must comply with NEPA and the federal agency having jurisdiction is responsible to complete the process
  - It is likely there will be joint projects receiving funding from a federal agency and Marin Wildfire/local funds – therefore projects may need to comply with both NEPA and CEQA

CAL FIRE STATEWIDE RESOURCES



Statewide Resources

Defensible Space | CAL FIRE

Home | Ready for Wildfire

Partnering Agencies

CAL FIRE Partners | Ready for Wildfire

Interested in the Model Defensible Space or Qualified Entity program developed by the Office of the State Fire Marshal?

Apply today!

Defensible Space Platform Request