

# Provide County-Level Leadership for CWPP Development and Implementation



Counties play an important role in providing safe and resilient communities by leading wildfire planning processes, including the development and implementation of Community Wildfire Protection Plans (CWPPs) for unincorporated areas. “County leadership” refers to coordination at the county level to organize county staff, emergency services, community leaders, businesses, residents, and other stakeholders to develop and implement countywide and local CWPPs. Such leadership helps create robust CWPPs that effectively address the unique challenges that communities face when addressing wildfire risk. While this best practice is focused on CWPP leadership using county examples, it can be adapted for use at the local government level

## County Leadership Key Strategies

Strategies that counties can employ to lead the development and implementation of successful CWPPs include:

- **Assign a leadership or coordinator role.** Designating a point person or team for the CWPP process can help establish accountability, facilitate effective communication, and drive coordination. The leadership or coordinator role could be assigned to one person, such as a designated CWPP Coordinator staff position, or rolled into an existing job. In some cases, a shared leadership approach may be desirable.
- **Coordinate countywide working groups.** County government agencies, including fire, land management, natural resource, planning, and public works departments, can tap into their resources and knowledge to coordinate CWPP working groups and activities. Including non-county organizations, such as fire agencies, adjacent local governments and adjacent tribal governments, and volunteer groups in the working group can create a



multidisciplinary approach to CWPP development and implementation that ensures the plan considers the various aspects of diverse, and possibly conflicting, goals. Such coordination can also help reduce duplication and provide consistency to the CWPP process.

- **Leverage existing leadership and networks.** Local leaders can lend credibility to the CWPP process and provide valuable information about the communities they serve. They can also identify and bring the right people to the table. Examples of where local leaders can be found include homeowners' associations, religious organizations, special districts and councils, resource conservation districts, water districts, watershed councils, prescribed fire associations, and volunteer organizations. Informal leaders (i.e. those who hold influence and authority without having a formal position within a group, such as social media influencers and community organizers) can also make valuable contributions to the CWPP process and should be included. Pre-existing networks can help bring coordination, expertise, and resources to the process.
- **Work with tribal governments and communities.** Tribal communities often have significant traditional territory, interest in and knowledge of their ancestral lands, specialized concerns, traditional land management practices (e.g., cultural burns) and cultural and historical resources that are at risk. They are frequently on the front lines of wildfire events, especially in remote areas. Counties can work with tribal

governments, organizations, and members to build partnerships and represent tribal perspectives throughout the CWPP. The result is a more effective and culturally relevant CWPP.

- **Involve the County Board of Supervisors in the CWPP process.** The participation of the County Board of Supervisors in CWPP development is crucial for ensuring that the plan aligns with local priorities, receives necessary support and resources, and is integrated into broader county-level strategies. Board members can be involved in a multitude of ways, such as policy direction, plan oversight, resource allocation, review and approval, community outreach and education, and CWPP monitoring and evaluation.
- **Provide CWPP guidance, templates, and resources for local unincorporated communities.** Developing processes and tools for local unincorporated communities seeking to create their own CWPPs helps ensure there is a consistent and coordinated approach to wildfire mitigation across the county as well as integration with the countywide CWPP. Additionally, standardized templates can help local communities meet CWPP minimum requirements, including those wildfire mitigation funding and assistance programs. Counties can also support the development and maintenance of neighborhood assessments and action plans or other wildfire resilience plans and work to integrate their development and implementation with other relevant local and countywide plans.



- **Secure funding and resources.** County leadership can be instrumental in obtaining funding and resources for CWPP implementation. By advocating for financial assistance at the various levels of government, county leaders can ensure that the CWPP initiatives (e.g., fuel reduction projects, infrastructure improvements, public education efforts) are adequately funded and implemented. Having a countywide purview means county leaders are also well positioned to build coalitions of partners for project implementation that are attractive to grant funders.
- **Monitor and track progress.** For a county to work effectively with a multitude of stakeholders, it is crucial to use a tracking mechanism to document the many activities taking place. Refer to the best practice [Employ Robust CWPP Project Implementation and Tracking Methods](#) for more information.

### County Leadership in Action

Counties across California are showcasing their leadership in CWPP development and implementation through different techniques and strategies that work best for their communities.

Some counties, for example, develop a broad, countywide CWPP and then help local communities develop their own more detailed plans. [The Fire Safe Council of San Diego County](#) leads the development of the countywide CWPP and empowers over 40 local fire safe councils, as well as tribes and

other groups, to draft and update their own separate, detailed CWPPs. The Fire Safe Council of San Diego provides local communities with a wealth of resources:

- A standardized development process that is outlined in an online writer's guide,
- Annual writers' workshops,
- A standardized CWPP template,
- GIS mapping,
- A review and approval process,
- An online repository of local CWPPs that anyone can peruse, and
- Fiscal sponsorship for CWPP projects, if needed.

Additionally, the Fire Safe Council of San Diego helps connect local communities who want to develop a CWPP with the appropriate resources and fire agencies. Morgan Dioli, their Fire Prevention and Forest Programs Coordinator, says these connections are one of the most valuable contributions that her organization provides, resulting in the sharing of information and expertise between local landowners and fire and county personnel, as well as consistency across CWPPs.

Like San Diego County, Humboldt County also has a [countywide CWPP](#), but they've incorporated 14 detailed planning unit action plans to cover local areas. The action plans each follow the same template while leaving room for community-directed modifications. Each action plan contains a brief introduction, overview of the area, a discussion on community preparedness, wildfire-protection capabilities, evacuation issues and options, and priority action recommendations that are



*Community members in Humboldt County review county maps. Photo credit: Humboldt County Fire Safe Council*

unique to the local areas. If a local community prefers, Humboldt County staff are available to collaborate with local fire safe councils, tribes, and other local organizations to create local CWPPs and/or Firewise assessments and action plans and facilitate the process of getting local CWPPs certified by the Board of Supervisors.

Cybelle Immitt, Natural Resources Planning Manager for Humboldt County Public Works, says their county encourages local fire safe councils and tribes to take ownership over their fire mitigation efforts and tie into the planning unit action plans if there isn't already a local CWPP in place. However, if a local organization chooses to develop their own CWPP, the County is ready and willing to help. Immitt says, "We want to work really hard to have the local CWPP speak to the countywide without duplicating efforts or stepping on anyone's toes." Julia Cavalli, Senior Environmental Analyst for Humboldt County Public Works, adds, "We've made it clear that we defer to local CWPPs where they exist because that really has the most

grassroots input of community priorities. We want to make that front and center."

Humboldt County demonstrated this philosophy when they worked with the Yurok Tribe on the countywide CWPP. The County included Tribal staff and members in the planning and implementation process, and they worked to identify values-at-risk and specific tribal cultural resources to include in the countywide CWPP. Margo Robbins of the Cultural Fire Management Council explains, "There are cultural resources on the landscape that are very valuable to us. Should a wildfire come, it could really be detrimental to those values." For example, Robbins shares that if a wildfire occurred in areas where they collect materials for basket making, they might not have the ability to create baskets for several years. Other cultural resources important to the Tribe include Tanoak groves for acorns, shaded fuel breaks and similar areas that provide berry, mushroom and other food sources, and water quality.



*A Yurok elder protecting his home from Wildfire. Photo credit: Margo Robbins*



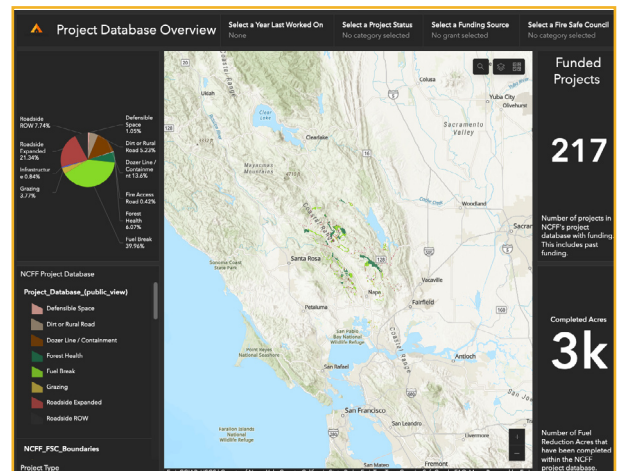
John Patton hosts a community meeting in Mariposa County. Photo credit: Lacey Sharp

Other counties working with tribes include Tuolumne County, which has a representative of the Tuolumne Band of Me-Wuk Indians on the County’s CWPP steering committee. While the Tribe is creating their own local CWPP, Diana Beasley, Planning and Development Manager for the Tribe, appreciates how the two plans will influence one another in an iterative way. “We can push more localized concerns up to the County plan and gain that higher-level view, and then get more specific in the tribal plan. The tribal plan is going to be really valuable and enhanced by the groundwork already laid through the county plan,” shares Beasley.

Counties are also in a prime position to establish countywide initiatives that can assist local communities in CWPP development and implementation. The [Mariposa County Fire Advisory Committee](#), created by the county’s Board of Supervisors, is developing a program to be adopted by the county in which volunteer Community Leaders will conduct granular wildfire risk assessments within their local areas. John Patton, Wildfire Mitigation Coordinator for Mariposa County Fire, will coordinate the program and work with the

California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) to train the Community Leaders to assess and understand wildfire risk in their areas. The collected information will then be used to help build local wildfire threat awareness and community engagement, as well as inform the County about local risks and concerns.

In addition to providing expertise, processes, and programs that help local communities develop and implement CWPPs, counties can use technology to provide easily accessible information and feedback channels, enabling two-way communication that fosters information sharing and community involvement. For example, Napa County’s online [Fuel Reduction Project Database Dashboard](#) lets residents see projects by type and location. The Dashboard is part of an online hub where users can find the county CWPP and accompanying maps. Sonoma County also provides an [online CWPP hub](#) where landowners and organizations can submit projects for consideration in the County’s CWPP project list.



The Napa County Firewise Foundation Fuel Reduction Project Database Dashboard shows projects by type and location.



### Additional Tips for Success

- When possible, hire a dedicated part- or full-time employee to act as the countywide CWPP coordinator. This elevates the importance of the CWPP as a planning document and implementation program. Depending on volunteers or adding the responsibility to an existing employee's full plate can make it challenging to keep the CWPP prioritized and maintained with regular progress.
- Provide internal oversight and review when allowing external feedback from online CWPP project websites. One county found that giving the public direct access to providing input on proposed CWPP projects into a priority list resulted in some conflicting priorities. The county established a review board that now evaluates each proposed project before adding it to the list.
- If providing county templates and guides for local CWPPs, allow for some flexibility. Some local areas may need or want additional or different CWPP sections to help address specific, local concerns. For example, a tribe may want to include a section that identifies and plans for the protection of specific cultural resources.

### Key Resources

#### California Fire Safe Council County Coordinator Program

The [CAL FIRE County Coordinator Grant Program](#) is intended to educate, encourage, and develop county-wide collaboration and coordination among various wildfire mitigation groups. Many of these coordinators have been instrumental in leading or participating in new or updated CWPP development processes and organizing other local resources that can support CWPP implementation.

#### California Regional Resource Kits

[Regional Resource Kits](#) are sets of tools and data created to help regional partners plan, prioritize, and monitor wildfire and forest resilience projects. These resource kits were created through interagency collaboration as part of the California Wildfire & Forest Resilience Task Force.

#### National Association of Counties

The National Association of Counties' [County Wildfire Playbook: A County Leadership Guide to Help Communities Become More Fire Adapted and Learn to Live with Wildland Fire](#) offers guidance to county leaders who are helping their communities become more resilient and adapted to living with wildfire. The recommendations are based on a community's level of wildfire awareness and capacity to implement risk-reducing actions.

#### International Association of Fire Chiefs

The International Association of Fire Chiefs developed [a guide for leaders who are implementing CWPPs](#). The guide is intended as a supplement to [one of the first resources](#) to provide step-by-step instructions for conforming to the Healthy Forests Restoration Act (HFRA) of 2003.



### Federal Emergency Management Agency

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) outlines a [seven-step process](#) for creating a fire-adapted community and offers a wealth of resources to support it. For example, [Creating a Community Wildfire Protection Plan](#) includes form-fillable templates that leaders can use for identifying stakeholders, assessing risk, and determining forest health issues. There are also [outreach materials](#) that can be shared to build wildfire awareness and knowledge amongst community members.

### Joint Fire Science Program's Quick Guides

The Joint Fire Science Program is an applied research collaboration between the U.S. Forest Service and several universities that aims to improve the ways communities are collaborating to address wildfire risk. Quick Guide #2, [Existing Leadership / Prior Coordination](#), provides examples of how leadership can contribute to the CWPP process.

Interested in more CWPP best practices and guidance? Explore the entire CWPP Toolkit [here](#).

## About the California CWPP Toolkit

The California CWPP Toolkit was co-developed by CAL FIRE's Community Wildfire Preparedness and Mitigation Division, Community Wildfire Planning Center, Fire Adapted Communities Learning Network, and California Fire Safe Council.

## Acknowledgements

We wish to thank the following people for their support of the development of this best practice:

Diana Beasley, Tuolumne Band of Me-Wuk Indians

Julia Cavalli, Humboldt County Public Works

Morgan Dioli, Fire Safe Council of San Diego County

Cybelle Immitt, Humboldt County Public Works

John Patton, Mariposa County Fire Department

Margo Robbins, Cultural Fire Management Council

