



Staff Report

Wildfire Season Preparation Update

May 17, 2022



Informational Item

TO: Board of Directors

FROM: Shaun Horne, Watershed Resources Manager

THROUGH: Ben Horenstein, General Manager

DIVISION NAME: Watershed

ITEM: Wildfire Season Preparation Update

SUMMARY

At the February 16, 2021, Board of Directors meeting, the final Wildfire Resilience Study 2021 (Study) was presented to the Board. Since that time, the District has been actively implementing the wildfire preparedness and mitigation actions outlined in the Study. Staff will provide a presentation that provides an overview of work that has been underway to prepare for the upcoming wildfire season.

DISCUSSION

California is facing unprecedented wildfire conditions as a result of decades of fire suppression and increasing impacts associated with climate change. In many California ecosystems, biodiversity, carbon stability and overall ecological resilience are dependent on the regular occurrence of fire. However, the wildfire seasons over the past few years have brought record impacts to communities, critical infrastructure and ecosystems. In an effort to establish a more resilient water supply system, watershed, and community, Marin Water developed the Wildfire Resilience study to identify proactive hazard reduction actions. The Draft Plan was completed in March of 2020 and the final Study was presented to the Board on February 16, 2021.

Wildfire Resiliency Project Updates

The Study identified potential hazard reduction actions that would improve wildfire resilience. The hazard reduction actions vary in terms of cost, ability to mitigate risk, and implementation timeframes. Some of the identified actions are part of ongoing initiatives and operations and some require advanced planning, technical studies and capital investments. Staff has successfully implemented many of the hazard reduction actions including, but not limited to, the following:

Community Coordination

- Participation in Fires Safe Marin monthly Board meetings.
- Participation in Marin Wildfire Prevention Authorities (MWPA) Advisory Technical Committee.

- Participation in Marin Conservation League’s Fire and Environment Working Group and the Ecological Sound Practices (ESP) Partnership.
- Participation in One Tam Forest Health Strategy and Resource Advisor planning meetings.
- Participation in Fire Chief Meetings to coordinate and prioritize fire flow projects
- Participation in Fire Safe Marin’s Ember Stomp Event on May 28th.

Facilities

- Initiated construction of a permanent generator at the San Geronimo Water Treatment Plant. The project will provide permanent backup power to mitigate the impacts of PG&E’s Public Safety Power Shutoff (PSPS) events and other power failure events at the District’s largest treatment plant.
- Designing and installing new manual transfer switch to allow for generator to power the Marin Water Administration building.
- Working on the San Geronimo Treatment Plant roof evaluation to inform roof options and life cycle cost analysis for replacement of the existing roof at San Geronimo Treatment Plant.
- Vegetation work completed around water distribution facilities:
 - 35 sites received tree pruning to reduce fuel loads, elevate canopy and remove hazardous trees. Planning to complete 5 additional sites by June 2022.
 - 60 sites (pump stations and tanks) received broom management and/other ladder fuel management work. Planning to complete 15 additional sites by June 2022.
 - 45 sites received defensible space work targeting fine fuels. Planning to complete 155 additional sites by June 2022.

Water Resources

- Developed and finalized the Local Hazard Mitigation Plan. This critical document will enable the District to pursue federal cost-share grants to mitigate natural hazards including those associated with seismic events, flooding, and wildfires.
- Operations and lab completed bench-scale study to understand treatment dosing necessary to handle ash loading from a wildfire.
- Developed Watershed Hydrological Model.

Watershed

- In 2019 the Board adopted the Biodiversity Fire and Fuels Integrated Plan. Since that time watershed forest restoration and vegetation management has been scaled up and over the past year the following work has been completed:
 - 282 acres of Fuelbreak maintenance,
 - 146 acres of forest restoration and fuel reduction,
 - 524 acres of broom management, and
 - 218 acres of priority weed management.

- Completed Potrero Meadows fuels modeling of completed forest restoration work to evaluate how work changed fire behavior. Initiated watershed wide fuels model with Tuckman Geospatial to assess vegetation management treatments and inform future work priorities.
- Expanded fuel reduction and forest restoration activities around the Bon Tempe Treatment Plant and Lake Lagunitas.
- Prescribed burn planning and coordination with County Fire to support future implementation.
- Removed barbecues from Larurel Dell, Riffle Camp, and Potrero Camp.
- PG&E coordination and environmental compliance support for power-pole infrastructure maintenance, replacement and vegetation work for the following:
 - 52 acres of vegetation management under power lines,
 - 1 power pole replacement project,
 - 3 guy wire replacement projects,
 - 3 other hardware replacement projects, and
 - 1 pole repair project.

Fundraising

- In 2021 the District received an \$800,000 grant from the California Coastal Conservancy's Wildfire Resiliency Program.
- In 2021 the Districted received a \$3.1 million grant from the Cal Fire's Forest Health Program.
- In 2022, the District submitted a second grant with One Tam Partners to the California Coastal Conservancy's Wildfire Resiliency Program in the amount of \$800,000.
- In 2022, the District submitted a grant with One Tam to the Cal Fire Forest Health Grant in the amount of \$1.7 million.
- District submitted a federal funding request for Wildfire hardening of the San Geronimo Treatment Plant and three pump stations.

Rangers

- Improved response capabilities by upgrading the District's Type IV engine with one purchased from Marin County Fire.
- Replaced one Rangers Type VII truck and one wildfire suppression water tank.
- Installed emergency alert signs at major watershed entrances to improve emergency communication with visitors.
- Wildfire seasonal staff training refresher and ongoing monthly trainings underway.
 - Staff completed wildfire pump training.
- Increased enforcement of illegal parking on the watershed.
- Two Rangers completed Drone Pilot License training and testing.
- Completed inter-agency training and hosted the Sherriff Departments Drone training.

FISCAL IMPACT

None

ATTACHMENT(S)

None