

Wildfire Strategy

December 2020

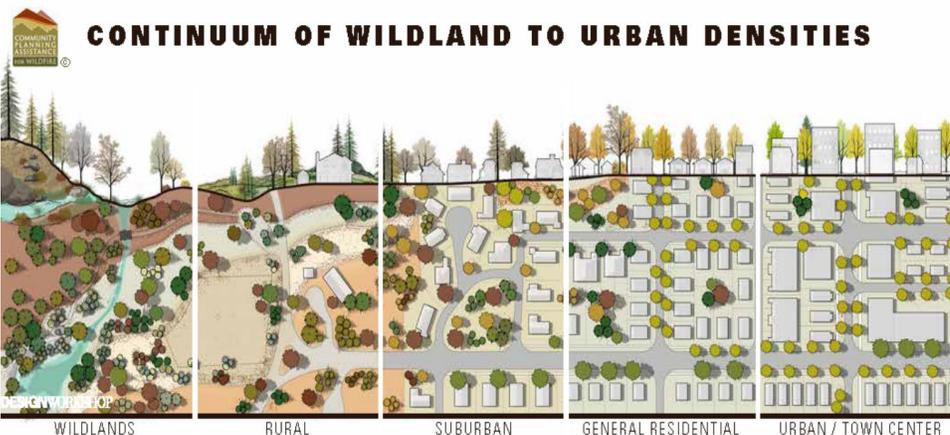
Wildfire risk is increasing in size, intensity, frequency, and duration across a broader range of communities and landscapes. Wind-driven fires as a result of Diablo wind patterns (rather than fuel-dominated wildland ground and crown fires) are also increasingly common, leading to structure fires in urban communities that originate in the wildland urban interface (WUI) or wildlands. This pattern has gradually outpaced our efforts to allocate resources to prevention and adaptation. Out of necessity, an increasing share of resources is being allocated to mitigation through emergency response.

To adapt to the increased incidents of wildfire, it will be important to look at the problem as one across multiple landscape types, from urban to wildland, and develop strategies that simultaneously address risk at each location along the community wildfire transect.



Sierra Business Council sees a need for response in three primary areas:

- 1. Alignment of local, state and federal strategy:** currently, wildfire mitigation, forest management, and forest restoration are managed across multiple local, state, and federal agencies and programs with varying levels of capacity and funding. The state should lead an effort to align resources strategically to address needs across the entire community wildfire transect. This would require the development of community specific strategies prioritized by risk and vulnerability, the alignment of program investments to meet the highest need, and streamlining program application processes and grant processes to meet broader long term strategic objectives.
- 2. Increase and stabilize funding:** wildfire mitigation, forest management, and forest restoration programs are currently often funded through state bond funding approved by voters. Bond funding is important and should continue for capital investments in land protection and restoration to mitigate wildfire risk. However, the lack of permanent stable funding leads to inconsistencies in program implementation, making strategic and long-term investment in wildfire mitigation impossible since local and state agencies cannot depend upon future funding. An increasing share of wildfire mitigation funding must be secured through the general fund budget processes and new sources of dedicated funding. In addition, based on the recently approved MOU for shared stewardship between California and the USFS, significant effort should go into scaling federal investment to meet the California Forest Carbon Plan (CFCP) objectives of thinning or treating 1,000,000 acres per year.



Graphic courtesy *Headwaters Economics*

3. **Deploy resources across the community wildfire transect:** successful deployment of a long-term strategy will require different approaches to implementation.
- a. **Community and Built Environment:** increase deployment of home hardening resources, development and deployment of fire safe building materials. Increase emphasis on defensible space, deployment of community monitoring and community alert systems, and development of infrastructure to act as safe refuges in wildfire incidents.
 - b. **Wildland Urban Interface (WUI):** shift housing development patterns to incentivize density in community centers and reduce development in the WUI, increase investment in multi-purpose community buffers that can act as strategic fuel breaks and shaded fuels breaks, streamline vegetation management in the WUI (utilizing the Cal VTP), increase use of prescribed fire to manage vegetation within the WUI, identification and development of escape routes in the most at risk communities.
 - c. **Landscape Scale:** increase emphasis on large landscape forest restoration planning modeled on projects (like the Tahoe Central Sierra Initiative) that focus on restoring forests to a fire adapted state by gradually scale thinning to 1,000,000 acres per year. Increase use of prescribed fire, streamlined permitting and waiver processes for deployment of prescribed fire, scale the deployment of value-added wood products such as bioenergy, biofuels, and mass timber products to utilize forest waste materials removal needed to get back to fire adapted forests.

LANDSCAPE SCALE STRATEGIES

- Large Landscape Planning
- Forest Thinning
- Biomass Utilization
- Prescribed Fire

WILDLAND URBAN INTERFACE (WUI)

- Strategic Fuel Breaks
- Shaded Fuel Breaks
- Prescribed Fire
- Escape Routes

COMMUNITY AND BUILD ENVIRONMENT

- Home Hardening
- New Materials
- Defensible Space
- Community Infrastructure
- Alert Systems
- Monitoring



These longer-term strategies should not impede state lawmakers from making the immediate short-term investments proposed for this year. These include a \$500 million emergency budget allocation in the 2020-2021 budget, a \$1.5 billion allocation in the 2021-2022 budget, and approval this year of a climate resilience bond to be placed on the 2022 ballot.

