

Chapter 3.3

Planning for and Reducing Wildfire Risks to Communities



Some communities are especially prone to loss of life and property from wildfire. Local or state laws, regulations and ordinances, landowner attitudes and priorities, and public policies all play important roles in managing fire risk near communities. Assessments should identify communities where State and Private programs can substantially mitigate the risk of catastrophic wildfire occurrence and associated risks to human safety and property (excerpted from the U.S. Forest Service State and Private Forestry Farm Bill Requirement and Redesign Strategies).

KEY FINDINGS

Current Status and Trends

- California's long history of wildfire and population growth has led to a set of state laws, regulations and programs that address community wildfire safety. These include state and local planning laws, Fire Hazard Severity Zones and related building standards, defensible space requirements, various fuel reduction programs, the California Fire Plan and CAL FIRE Unit Fire Plans and the State Hazard Mitigation Plan.
- Community fire protection is also addressed by federal laws and programs such as the Disaster Mitigation Act, National Fire Plan, Healthy Forests Restoration Act, and Firewise Communities Program.
- Local agencies and non-profits play a key role in community fire protection planning through county fire plans, county general plan safety elements, and through involvement of local fire districts, Fire Safe Councils, the California Fire Alliance, and also consortia such as the Forest Area Safety Taskforce (FAST) and Mountain Area Safety Taskforce (MAST) in San Diego, Riverside, and San Bernardino Counties.

- Community planning is a collaborative effort that typically includes various federal, state and local agencies, CAL FIRE units, Resource Conservation Districts, local fire districts and private organizations.

Community Analysis

In the analysis presented here, the priority landscape was identified where wildfire threat coincided with human infrastructure such as houses, transmission lines and major roads. The priority landscape was summarized to identify priority communities. The analysis then examined which priority communities are currently covered by a Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP). In addition, the analysis looked at which priority communities not covered by a CWPP have the necessary planning resources to create one. The area of priority landscape was identified for each community as a starting point for further determination of the extent of wildfire risk and subsequent fine-scale assessments of fuel hazard reduction needs and treatment types. From the analysis:

- It is estimated there are at least 317 communities protected by Community Wildfire Protection Plans throughout California. Even more are covered by a countywide CWPP.
- A total of 404 priority communities were identified, representing about 2.6 million people living on about 1.1 million acres in high or medium priority landscapes. With the assumption that all priority communities in a county with a countywide CWPP are covered by that CWPP, at least 234 (or about 58 percent) of the priority communities are covered by a Community Wildfire Protection Plan (see Data and Analytical Needs in the Appendix).
- About 250 Fire Safe Councils or their equivalent were identified (which included homeowner associations, resource and fire protection districts, local government organizations, advisory groups, CAL FIRE units, Indian Tribes and others). Of these, 47 are countywide in geographic scope. Others are community-centric or regional. There are 38 recognized Firewise Communities. These numbers are growing.
- Priority communities were present in all bioregions, with 62 percent occurring in the South Coast and Sierra bioregions.

CURRENT STATUS AND TRENDS

California's long history of wildfire and population growth has led to a multi-faceted set of laws, policies and programs addressing community safety and wildfire risk. These include:

- Federal government (particularly since 2000) and interagency efforts
- State and local agencies/communities
- Non-profit organizations

The current status of wildfire planning, community wildfire planning in particular, can be described generally by this extensive set of resources.

Federal and Interagency Efforts

Federal agencies administer about 46 percent of the land surface area of California (GreenInfo Network,

2009), with substantial portions in a “checkerboard” of public and private land ownership. This interwoven ownership pattern underscores the need for interagency wildfire planning and cooperative fire agreements. There are many components at work, including the following key elements.

Disaster Mitigation Act (2000–present)

Section 104 of the Disaster Mitigation Act of 2000 (Public Law 106-390) enacted Section 322, Mitigation Planning of the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act, which created incentives for state and local entities to coordinate mitigation planning and implementation efforts, and is an important source of funding for fuels mitigation efforts through hazard mitigation grants.

California updates its Multi-Hazard Mitigation Plan in accordance with mitigation planning regulations cited in the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Title 44, Chapter 1, Part 201 (44 CFR Part 201).

Feinstein – Herger/Quincy Library Group (1998, 2003, 2007)

The Feinstein-Herger Quincy Library Group Forest Recovery Act is being implemented across approximately 1.5 million acres in the northern Sierra bioregion as a demonstration of community-based consensus forest management. It covers much of the Lassen and Plumas National Forests and the Sierraville Ranger District of the Tahoe National Forest. The Quincy Library Group, a grassroots citizen group that helped author and promote the act, was formed to promote local economic stability, forest health and fire resiliency.

Communities at Risk (2001)

At the request of Congress, states submitted lists of all communities within their borders where there was a high level of wildfire risk from adjacent federal lands. A national list of “Communities at Risk” was published in the Federal Register in 2001. California’s analysis (CAL FIRE, 2001) included the entire extent of the state’s wildland urban interface (not just those adjacent to federal lands). A list is available from the California Fire Alliance website (http://www.cafirealliance.org/communities_at_risk/).

There are currently 1,272 communities at risk in California, ranging in size from large cities such as San Diego and Los Angeles, to small unincorporated areas with few residents (Figure 3.3.1). Bioregionally, 78 percent of these communities are found in the Sierra, South Coast, Klamath/North Coast and Bay/Delta bioregions (Table 3.3.1).

National Fire Plan (2002–present)

The extensive wildland fires of 2000 led to the request and submittal of a report by the Secretaries of the Interior and Agriculture entitled *Managing the Impact of Wildfires on Communities and the*

Environment, A Report to the President In Response to the Wildfires of 2000. Following this report were substantial new appropriations for wildland fire management, resulting action plans and agency strategies, and the Western Governors’ Association’s *A Collaborative Approach for Reducing Wildland Fire Risks to Communities and the Environment – A 10-Year Comprehensive Strategy-Implementation Plan*. Collectively, this is known as the National Fire Plan. This Plan addresses the issues of firefighting and wildfire preparedness, rehabilitation and restoration, hazardous fuels reduction, community assistance and accountability.

Healthy Forests/CWPPs (2003–present)

The Healthy Forests Restoration Act of 2003 (HFRA) was a response to the widespread forest fires during the summer of 2002. Since passage of the HFRA, federal land management agencies have treated about 26 million acres of federal lands for fuel hazard reduction, in the wildland urban interface and beyond (Healthy Forests Report, June 2008).

Placing a renewed emphasis on community planning, the HFRA extended benefits to communities that prepare a CWPP in collaboration with public fire agencies and affected non-governmental interests (especially local community residents). CWPPs identify hazardous fuel reduction treatment priorities, recommend measures to reduce structural ignitability and address issues such as wildfire response, hazard mitigation, and community preparedness and structure protection. CWPPs must be approved by the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE), local government and local fire authorities (National Wildfire Coordinating Group, 2009).

The California Fire Alliance and others endorse the creation of CWPPs through community grassroots organizations, such as local, county, and regional Fire Safe Councils. CAL FIRE Unit and County Fire Plans can serve as a de facto CWPP if they meet the collaborative requirements for community involvement. CWPP workshops are taking place throughout

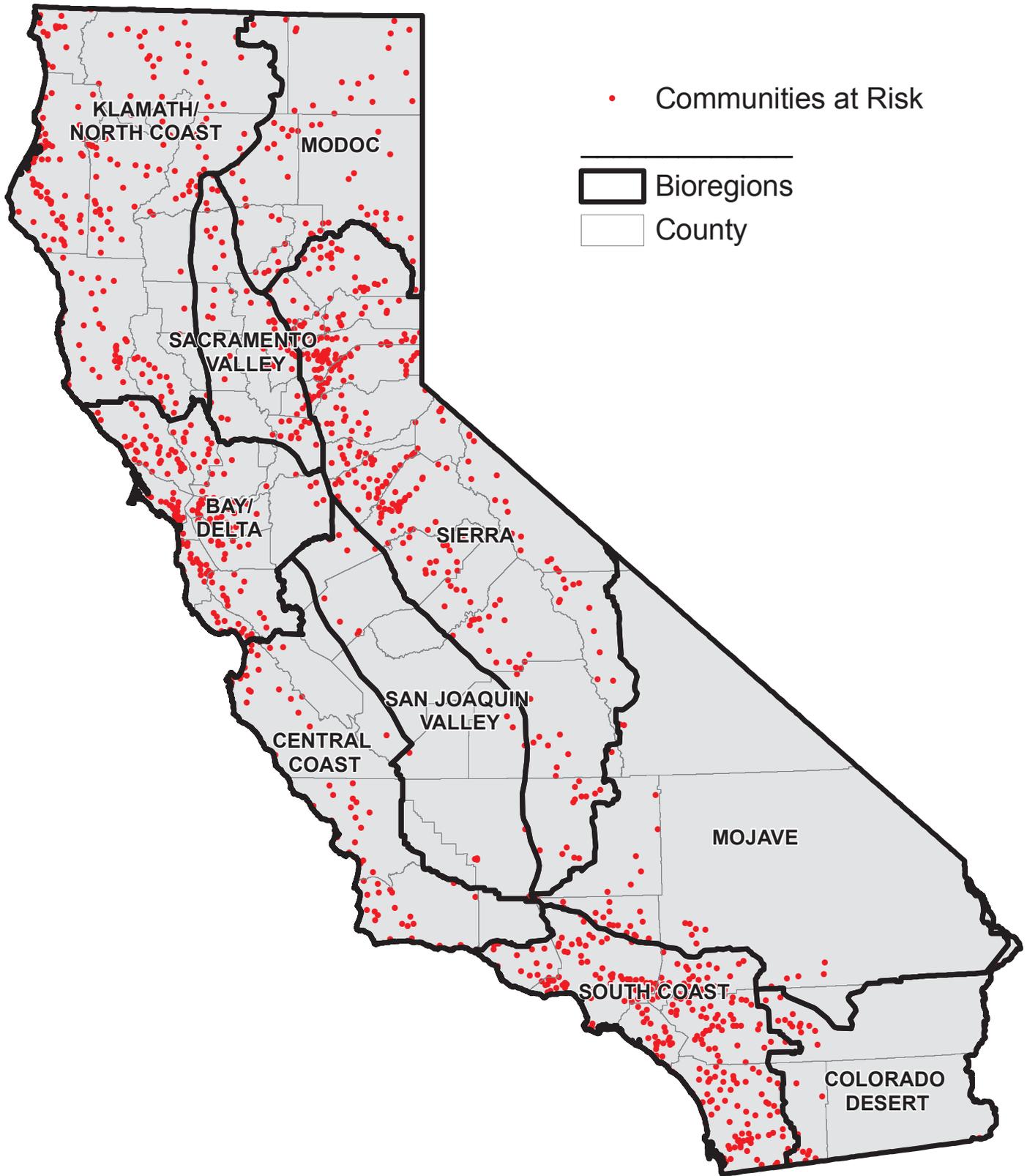


Figure 3.3.1.
Communities at risk (2001) by bioregion.
Data Source: *Communities at Risk, FRAP (2009 v1)*

Table 3.3.1. Communities at risk by bioregion

Bioregion	Number of Communities at Risk	Percent of Communities at Risk
Sierra	314	25
South Coast	269	21
Klamath/North Coast	226	18
Bay/Delta	177	14
Central Coast	72	6
Modoc	66	5
Sacramento Valley	61	5
Mojave	41	3
Colorado Desert	28	2
San Joaquin Valley	18	1
Total	1,272	100

the state. Conservation principles, in addition to fire safety, can be considered, and materials are available to guide the creation of “Conservation Community Wildfire Protection Plans” (<http://www.forever-greenforestry.com/fire.html>). Currently, work on a large scale CWPP for the Santa Monica Mountains region in Southern California draws from these conservation principles.

According to a survey by the National Association of State Foresters, CWPP coverage of Communities at Risk was substantially higher in the west, as compared to the south or northeast regions of the United States (National Association of State Foresters, 2010).

The 2001 FRAP analysis identified 317 communities by name on the California Fire Alliance website as having a CWPP. Many others are covered by county-wide CWPPs. Reporting is voluntary and new CWPPs are forming continually. CWPP coverage is now found in every bioregion in California.

Although there are a number of countywide CWPPs, individual communities are still encouraged to create their own local CWPPs. For example, in El Dorado County, which has a countywide CWPP, some 17 communities have been creating their own CWPPs supported by the El Dorado County Fire Safe Council (Joint Fire Science Program, 2009).

Joint Fire Science Program

This interagency program conducts various research projects, and has studied communities that are developing CWPPs. Through case studies, they look for insights into collaborative efforts and community strategies. In their report entitled *Community Wildfire Protection Plans: Enhancing Collaboration and Building Social Capacity*, the Joint Fire Science Program found a need for “a significantly higher quality of CWPP monitoring...at the state level.”

Firewise Communities (2003–present)

The Firewise Communities program (<http://www.firewise.org/>) is part of the National Wildland/Urban Interface Fire Program and directed by the National Wildfire Coordinating Group’s Wildland/Urban Interface Working Team. The interagency consortium includes numerous federal agencies as well as state forestry organizations. The program reports that as of November 9, 2009 there are 535 Firewise Communities recognized sites in 38 states. Of the 535 Firewise Communities, thirty-eight are in California (Table 3.3.2). These communities are found clustered in the Klamath/North Coast, and also in the Bay/Delta, South Coast, Modoc and Sierra bioregions (Figure 3.3.2).

U.S. Forest Service

The national forests in California are involved with local communities in addressing regional and local wildfire issues and promoting volunteerism. The U.S. Forest Service is investigating mitigation of impacts on rural communities and economies (Thompson, 2007). In cooperative programs with the State of California and many other private and government entities, federal grant money is leveraged in programs for timber and other forest products, wildlife, water resources, rural economies and conservation practices (CFR, 2007).

Forest Legacy Program

The federal Forest Legacy Program partners with states to protect environmentally sensitive forestlands by focusing on the acquisition of partial interests in privately owned forestlands, and by helping

Table 3.3.2. Firewise Communities in California

Community	Firewise Community
Auburn Lake Trails	Cool
Beverly Hills	Beverly Hills
Big Bar and Big Flat	Lewiston
Big Bear City	Big Bear Lake
Big Bear Lake	Big Bear Lake
Carbon Canyon	Chino Hills
Circle Oaks	Napa
Coffee Creek	Lewiston
Concow/Yankee Hill	Yankee Hill
Day Lassen Bench	McArthur
Douglas City	Lewiston
Fawnskin	Fawnskin
Forest Meadows	Murphys
Fountaingrove II	Santa Rosa
Grizzly Flats	Grizzly Flats
Hawkins Bar	Lewiston
Hayfork	Lewiston
Hyampom	Lewiston
Janesville	Susanville
Junction City	Lewiston
Lake of the Pines	Nevada County
Lake Wildwood Association	Penn Valley
Lewiston	Lewiston
Logtown	El Dorado County
Mad River	Lewiston
Marinview	Mill Valley
Nashville–Sandridge	El Dorado
Post Mountain	Lewiston
Salyer	Lewiston
Sea Ranch	Sonoma County
Stones–Bengard	Susanville
Susanville	Susanville
Talmadge	San Diego
Trinity Center	Lewiston
Volcanoville	Georgetown
Walden Woods	Granite Bay
Weaverville	Lewiston

the states develop and carry out their forest conservation plans which generally involve conservation easements which restrict development, require sustainable forestry practices and protect other values.

Bureau of Land Management (BLM)

The BLM’s grants for wildfire protection projects totaled \$3 million in 2008, and grant applications exceeded \$20 million. To date, BLM has assisted more than 450 communities at risk in 51 of California’s 58 counties (BLM Fire Protection, 2009)

The Bureau of Land Management’s “Take Responsibility” Campaign emphasizes stakeholder involvement and community outreach, and promotes the development of information resources. The priority areas include Trinity, Shasta, Butte, Nevada, Placer, El Dorado, Amador, Calaveras, Tuolumne, Mariposa, San Benito and Kern counties (<http://www.firesafecouncil.org/articles.cfm?article=344>).

Secure Rural Schools and Community Self Determination Act (2000)

Title II and Title III funds from the Secure Rurals and Community Self Determination Act (HR 2389) funded Fire Safe Councils in certain counties, helping to cover staff, operations and outreach.

Emergency Economic Stabilization Act of 2008

The Emergency Economic Stabilization Act of 2008 reauthorized the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self Determination Act through 2012. However, changes reduced the funding, and monies can no longer be used to cover the administrative costs of Fire Safe Councils. Several councils that depended on this funding are now struggling to survive.

American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (2009)

This federal legislation will result in four projects located in forested lands in California receiving \$10.7 million for forest health protection. This funding, which totals \$89 million for 78 projects in 20 states, will be used to restore forest health conditions on federal, state and private forests and rangelands recovering from fires and forest insects and disease outbreaks.

FAST/MAST – Bark Beetle Infestation in Southern California, Sierra

Over the past decade, increasing damage from a major bark beetle infestation has alarmed private landowners over the number of dead and dying trees on their property and in their communities. The outbreaks, occurring mainly in Southern California and the Sierra, are being addressed by a dozen land management agencies ranging from federal, state, county and local municipalities.

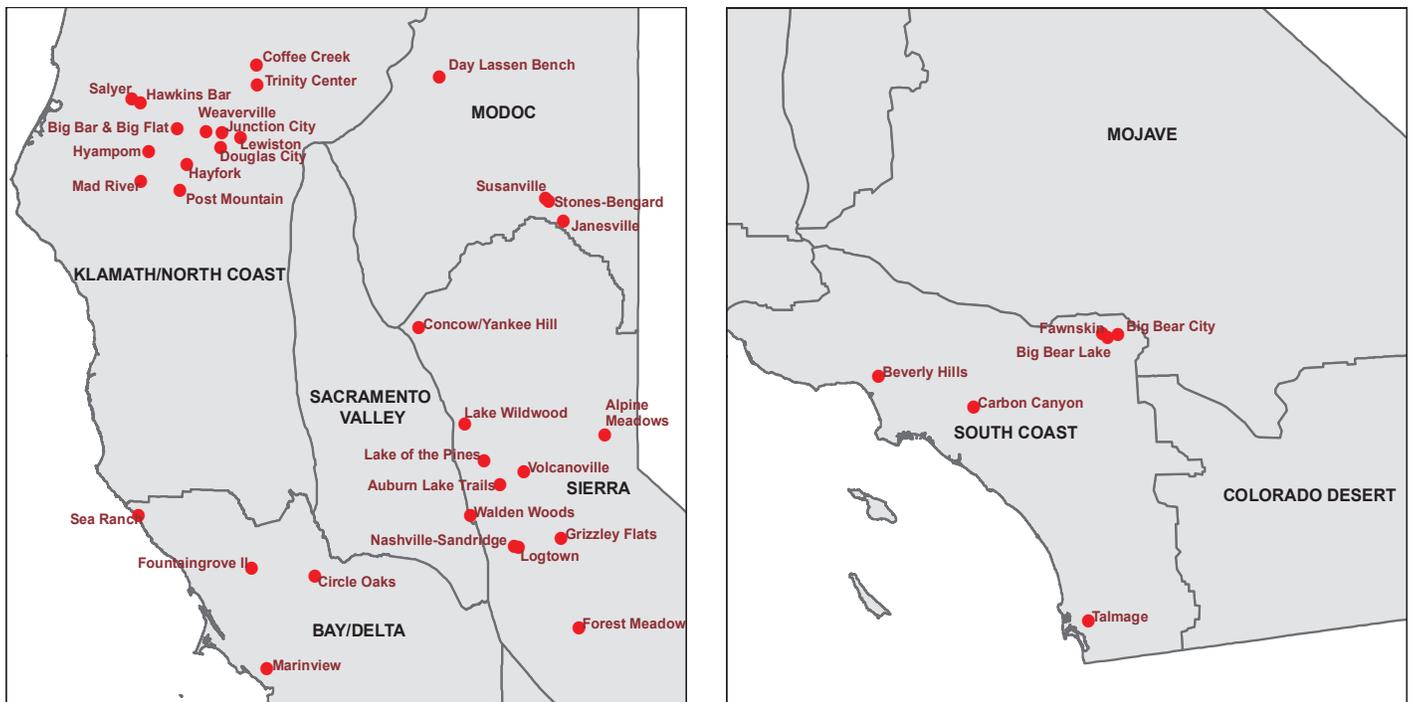


Figure 3.3.2. Firewise Communities in a) Northern and b) Southern California. Data Source: Firewise Communities / USA, 2009

Foresters have issued a “call to action” to prevent further spread of a major bark beetle epidemic, with targeted land including the Lake Tahoe area and other parts of the Sierra bioregion. About 2.4 million acres of “high priority” landscapes are at risk of being overrun by beetles and have been identified for potential treatment by the Council of Western State Foresters. Much of the land is near communities where widespread tree mortality could produce extreme fire danger.

In Southern California, the counties organized into Mountain Area Safety Task Forces (MAST) in San Bernardino and Riverside counties, and the Forest Area Safety Task Force (FAST) in San Diego County. The FAST and MAST efforts were originally developed to address significant threat posed by bark beetle infestations through the removal of dead trees. They have since taken on a much broader role in hazardous wildlands fuels management, including identification of priority landscapes for treatment using an “all lands approach”, treatment and maintenance of priority landscapes, and education for communities and homeowners with respect to defensible

space and fire resistant building materials. For more information on MAST and FAST, see <http://www.calmast.org> and <http://www.sandiegofast.org>.

State and Local Efforts

Various state laws and policies establish a framework that largely utilizes local planning and citizen action.

General Plan Safety Element

Each city and county in California must prepare a comprehensive, long term general plan. The general plan expresses a community’s development goals. Mandated elements listed in Government Code Section 65302(g) include a Safety Element, which aims to reduce the potential risk of death, injury, property damage and economic and social dislocation resulting from fires and other hazards. The Safety Element reflects input from public health and safety agencies and includes substantial public review and comment.

California Environmental Quality Act (1970)

Projects undertaken by a public agency, such as state and local agencies and special districts, are subject

to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). CEQA requires an Environmental Impact Report be created where a project may significantly affect the environment, or to adopt a negative declaration if the project will not have significant impacts.

Categorical Exemption

As documented in a Notice of Exemption, CEQA's Categorical Exemption requires limited analysis and restrictions to ensure that environmental impacts will not occur. The following classes of activities are generally considered to be exempt from the requirement to conduct further environmental analysis. An abbreviated checklist is used to document the steps taken to ensure that impacts will not occur.

Examples of fuels treatment projects found to be Categorically Exempt in the past:

- Existing Facilities (e.g., maintenance or re-establishment of existing fuel breaks)
- New Construction (e.g., new fuel breaks)
- Minor Alterations to Land (e.g., minor vegetation removal, shaded fuel breaks)
- Information Collection (e.g., environmental studies prior to project implementation)
- Inspections (e.g., for project compliance)
- Actions to Protect Resources/Environment (e.g., chipper programs)

Fire Hazard Severity Zones, Building Codes (1985–Present)

Fire Hazard Severity Zones (FHSZ) define the application of various mitigation strategies such as building standards to reduce risk associated with wildland fires. California Public Resources Code 4201-4204 and Govt. Code 51175-89 direct CAL FIRE to map areas of significant fire hazards based on specified factors. These zones are delimited for areas where the state has financial responsibility for fire protection, State Responsibility Areas (SRA) and areas where local governments have responsibility for fire protection, Local Responsibility Areas (LRA). CAL FIRE updated FHSZ in SRA in 2007 and will have completed revised recommendations for Very

High FHSZ in LRA by early 2010. These updates use models that include the spread of wildfire from wind-driven embers.

Since 2005, building codes have established minimum standards for materials and material assemblies, and provide a reasonable level of exterior wildfire exposure protection for new structures in SRA and where local governments have adopted ordinances for Very High FHSZ in LRA.

Defensible Space (and related laws)

California Public Resources Code 4290 sets the requirements for the creation and maintenance of defensible space, building standards and vegetation management guidelines for wildfire prevention and risk reduction on State Responsibility Area (SRA) lands. The guidelines include regulations on road standards for fire equipment access, standards for signs identifying streets, roads and buildings, minimum private water supply reserves for emergency use and standards for fuel breaks and greenbelts.

The requirement of a defensible space is mandated by California Public Resources Code 4291. Effective January 1, 2005, minimum clearance (defensible space) for structures is 100 feet.

Fuel Reduction Programs

Hazardous fuels reduction programs are administered and implemented at many of the same levels as the defensible space programs.

CAL FIRE's Vegetation Management Program is a cost-sharing program that uses prescribed fire and mechanical means to address wildland fuel hazards and other resource management issues on State Responsibility Area lands.

California Forest Improvement Program provides cost-share assistance to private forest landowners, Resource Conservation Districts, and non-profit watershed groups. Cost-shared activities include management planning, site preparation, tree purchase and planting, timber stand improvement, fish and

wildlife habitat improvement and land conservation practices.

Additionally, CAL FIRE utilizes local government agencies or nonprofit organizations, (any California corporation organized under Section 501(c)(3)) to implement Community Assistance Grants. CAL FIRE assists local agencies and councils in the wildland urban interface grant process.

California State and Related Local Fire Plans (1996–present)

The California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, in cooperation with the State Board of Forestry and Fire Protection (BOF), produces the statewide California Fire Plan. The focus is on reducing the risk of wildfire in the State Responsibility Area, reducing firefighting costs and property losses, firefighter safety, and protecting watershed values and ecosystem health. The Fire Plan is now being updated by the BOF and CAL FIRE, with input from stakeholders, and is scheduled for public release in 2010.

There are 27 Unit Fire Plans, one for each of the 21 CAL FIRE Units and the six counties with which the state contracts for wildland fire protection on State Responsibility Areas (Kern, Los Angeles, Marin, Orange, Santa Barbara and Ventura). The unit plans vary in level of detail and stakeholder involvement. Typically they identify assets at risk, areas of concern and focus of fuels reduction and other efforts. In some cases, the Unit Fire Plan can function as the CWPP.

State Hazard Mitigation Plan (2007–present)

Updated every three years by the California Emergency Management Agency, the State Hazard Mitigation Plan outlines California's evaluation of hazards and the plans to address them and is consistent with a federal requirement under the Disaster Mitigation Act of 2000. The next update will be finished in 2010. California receives federal funds from various disaster assistance grant programs.

Local Hazard Mitigation Plans

Through the preparation and adoption in the past several years of over 400 Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) approved Local Hazard Mitigation Plans, local governments have encouraged grassroots organizations, public and private agencies, and the general public to directly participate in planning for increased safety and sustainability of their own communities (Governor's Office of Emergency Services, 2007).

Role of Resource Conservation Districts

A number of the 100 Resource Conservation Districts (RCDs) are involved in fire planning. For example, the Resource Conservation District of Santa Cruz County and the San Mateo Resource Conservation District are both on a steering committee to coordinate CWPP development as an update to the CAL FIRE San Mateo-Santa Cruz Unit Fire Plan.

Local Fire Districts

The majority of SRA lands have local fire districts that provide life and property protection and other public safety services (CAL FIRE, 2003). Fire districts play an important role in community wildfire planning, in addition to traditional urban fire services. Fire district approval is required for a federally recognized Community Wildfire Protection Plan.

State Proposition 40 (2002)

The California Clean Water, Clean Air, Safe Neighborhood Parks, and Coastal Protection Act of 2002 (Proposition 40) provides funds for local assistance grants.

CAL FIRE implemented their Proposition 40 grants with the administrative assistance of the Sierra Coordinated Resource Management Council. These efforts supported vegetation projects on private land through the existing California Forest Improvement Program which provides cost-share assistance to private forest landowners, Resource Conservation Districts and non-profit watershed groups.

State Proposition 84 (2006)

Proposition 84, known as the Safe Drinking Water Bond Act, provides funding that can be used for fire planning and fuels reduction projects in the Sierra bioregion. The Sierra Nevada Conservancy, a state agency that focuses on the environmental, economic and social well-being of the region and its communities, administers the grants.

Non-profit Organizations

Fire Safe Councils (1993–present)

Fire Safe Councils organize and educate groups on available programs, projects and planning. The Councils work closely with the local fire agencies to develop and implement priorities. Much of the value in the Fire Safe Councils lies in their close ties to the communities. Members of the community educate their neighbors and plan Fire Safe projects that fit the needs of the local area. Local councils have made great strides in areas where agencies and governing bodies have struggled. Many communities have their own defensible space programs, with neighbors inspecting and educating neighbors.

The coverage of Fire Safe Councils is extensive. There are currently over 250 Councils or their equivalent (which includes homeowner associations, resource and fire protection districts, local government organizations, advisory groups, CAL FIRE units, Indian Tribes and others). Of these, forty-seven are countywide in geographic scope. Others are community-centric or regional. Figure 3.3.3 indicates countywide Fire Safe Council coverage and also a sample of 170 community Fire Safe Councils. This is approximate, as new Fire Safe Councils are being formed continually.

County and state Fire Safe Councils also assist with the award and administration of grants through the State Clearinghouse which may come from federal agencies such as BLM or the U.S. Forest Service. FEMA provides assistance to communities that have identified wildfire hazard mitigation needs in the form of fuel reduction and planning grants.

Fire Safe Council inspections are conducted with the support of grant dollars, homeowner's association dues and county funds.

California Fire Alliance (2001–present)

The California Fire Alliance is a cooperative organization whose member agencies include CAL FIRE, U.S. Forest Service, California Fire Safe Council, U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs, U. S. Bureau of Land Management, California Emergency Management Agency, Los Angeles County Fire Department, National Park Service and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The focus is on community safety, cost and loss minimization, and environmental quality. The California Fire Alliance works with communities, providing information and education outreach to increase awareness of wildland fire protection program opportunities, and encourages the formation of local Fire Safe Councils. California Fire Alliance maintains the Fire Planning and Mapping Tools website

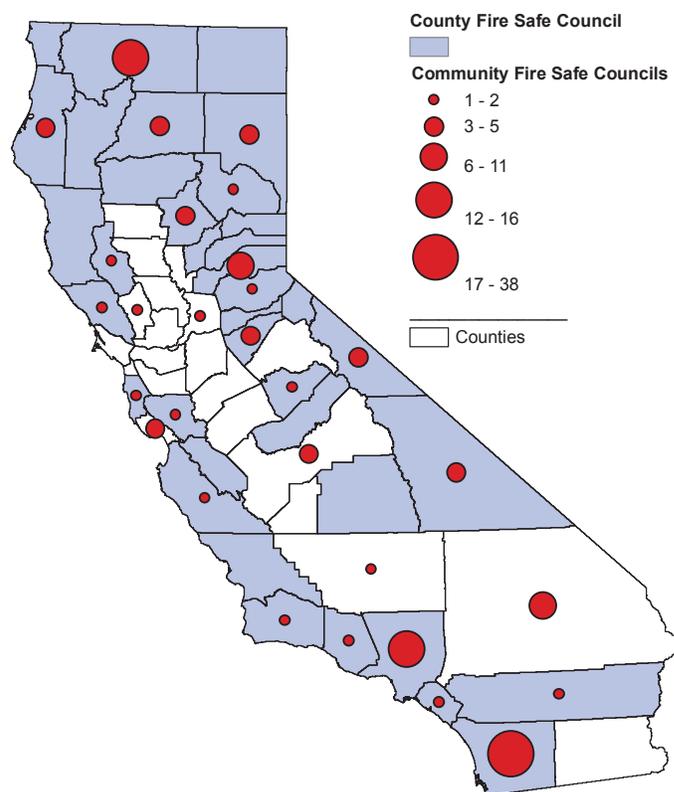


Figure 3.3.3.
Local and county Fire Safe Councils.
Data Source: California Fire Safe Council, Inc., 2009

(<http://wildfire.cr.usgs.gov/fireplanning/>), a useful tool for accessing wildfire planning data.

Property Insurance

The link between effective public fire mitigation capabilities and lower insured property loss is unquestioned, according to the Insurance Service Organization, a leading source of information about property and casualty insurance. It may be possible to lower insurance premium rates by taking preventative measures such as installing a non-combustible roof, clearing the brush around the home or landscaping with fire-retardant plants.

EVALUATING COMMUNITIES FOR WILDFIRE RISK

The analysis in Chapter 2.1 identified a priority landscape where wildfire threat coincides with human infrastructure such as houses, transmission lines and major roads. This chapter uses that priority landscape to identify priority communities meeting minimum area or population criteria as a starting point for identifying extent of risk and subsequent fine-scale assessments of fuel hazard reduction needs and treatment types. The analysis then examines which of these priority communities have CWPPs, are Firewise Communities, or meet other criteria suggesting the presence of community planning resources and experience.

Communities

As detailed above, community wildfire planning occurs over land areas ranging from a housing subdivision or small rural community, to one or more larger communities or fire districts, to an entire county.

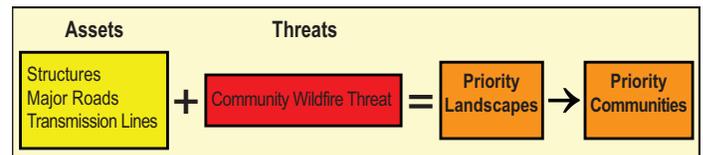
A GIS dataset of communities was developed based on incorporated city boundaries and Census Designated Places for unincorporated communities. Communities were tagged according to several criteria:

- Listed as a Community at Risk
- Served by a local Fire Safe Council
- Served by a county or regional Fire Safe Council

- Served by a County Fire Plan
- Firewise Community
- Covered by a CWPP

For the community analysis, county CWPPs listed on the California Fire Alliance website were assumed to apply to all communities within the respective counties, which may result in overestimation in some counties. Therefore this information was summarized at the bioregional scale.

Analysis



Assets

Community assets are defined as residential and commercial structures, major roads and transmission lines, and represent the human infrastructure assets potentially at risk from wildfire. The methods for ranking and combining these assets are discussed in detail in Chapter 2.1.

Threats

Wildfire threat to communities is derived using Fire Hazard Severity Zone data. This is identical to stand-level wildfire threat discussed in detail in Chapter 2.1.

Priority Communities

This analysis defines priority communities as communities with at least 500 people or 1,000 acres in either medium or high priority landscape. The purpose of the priority communities designation is to provide a way of identifying possible communities for outreach and further strategy development.

The very small communities on the Communities at Risk list which are not represented as areas in the Communities dataset are assumed to have at least a high level of wildfire risk, as was determined from the Communities at Risk methods developed in

2001. However, because the current analysis requires an accurate area representation of communities to quantify the area and population within priority landscape, they are not included in these results. The Communities at Risk methods, which only require an approximate community location point, will continue to be used in a general way to evaluate new submissions by communities wishing to be included on the Communities at Risk list.

Results

Figure 3.3.4 shows the location of priority communities and CWPP status, with bioregion and county boundaries. To be as inclusive as possible, the assumption is made that all priority communities within counties that have a countywide CWPP are covered by those CWPPs.

From this analysis 404 priority communities emerged, which include:

- 2.5 million people and 1.1 million acres
- 355 communities already classified as Communities at Risk
- 16 recognized Firewise Communities
- 234 communities covered by a CWPP

Bioregional Findings

Table 3.3.3 shows the number and percent of priority communities by bioregion and the population and acres.

- Priority communities are in all bioregions, but over 78 percent are in the South Coast, Sierra and Bay/Delta bioregions.
- The Sierra bioregion has substantial population growth in wildland areas and ecological concerns are emphasized in community planning efforts.

The Mojave, Colorado Desert, Sacramento Valley, San Joaquin Valley and the Modoc bioregions together account for only eight percent of priority communities.

Discussion

Planning Resources and Experience

Planning resources which may be available to communities are widespread and can include local, county and regional Fire Safe Councils, CAL FIRE units, USFS and other federal agencies and non-profit organizations. These can provide organizational support for addressing community concerns regarding wildfire protection and planning.

CWPPs

California's long history responding to wildfire has led to a multitude of planning efforts which are approximately equivalent to a CWPP, and for the purposes of analysis, it is assumed that the presence of planning resources and experience, including a CWPP, reduces risk from wildland fire.

The estimated percent of priority communities covered by a CWPP within a particular bioregion, as determined by this analysis and shown in Table 3.3.4, should be viewed with the knowledge that not all CWPPs were included in the analysis. In addition, given the wide range of laws, plans and programs in place, not all communities may need a CWPP.

- CWPPs are helping to protect a large number of the communities in the relatively rural, forested bioregions. In the Sierra, Klamath/North Coast, and Modoc bioregions, 72, 82, and 78 percent of medium or high priority communities, respectively, are covered by CWPPs. In terms of population, 69, 59, and 73 percent, respectively, are covered.
- The populous South Coast bioregion includes the largest share of priority communities (42 percent). Fifty-nine percent of these communities are covered by a CWPP. In terms of population, 42 percent are covered. Thus, an additional million people could benefit from new CWPP coverage, augmenting the already strong wildfire planning programs in Southern California counties. For example, an extensive CWPP is being developed for about 100,000 acres of the Santa Monica Mountains.

Community Wildfire Protection Plans Coverage: 58% of Priority Communities (Estimated*)

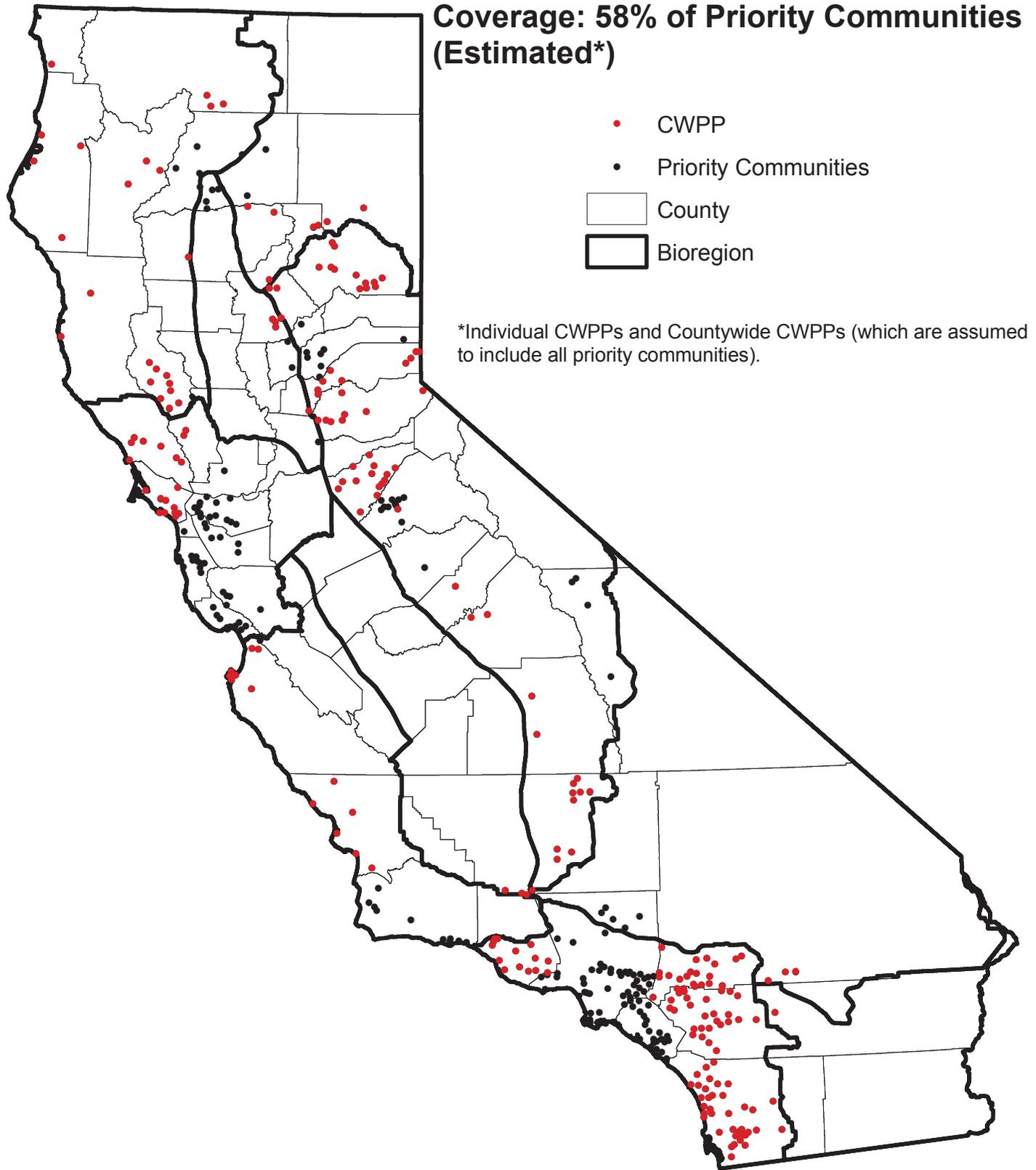


Figure 3.3.4.

Priority communities with CWPP coverage.

Data Sources: Transmission Lines, California Energy Commission (2007); Community Wildfire Protection Plans, California Fire Alliance, (2009); Communities, FRAP (2009 v1); Fire Hazard Severity Zones for SRA, FRAP (2006); Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zones for LRA, FRAP (2010); U.S. Census Bureau (2000); USGS National Land Cover Dataset (2001); Community Wildfire Protection, FRAP (2009, v1)

- BLM has a strong outreach program for desert communities that are CWPP candidates.

Tools

Tools to help build planning resources and experience, the capacity of a county, town or neighborhood to lead and participate in the planning process, should be a priority.

Information

Currently, a large amount of information is available to communities, but for a variety of reasons some communities that would benefit from a CWPP may

not have developed one. A statewide strategy would explore ways to streamline information, data, analysis and communication resources to facilitate local efforts.

Funding

Depending on the size and complexity of a CWPP, start-up costs for a new organization to plan, implement and administer CWPP projects can be substantial. With resources for operations and administrative funding limited, new funding sources and strategies are needed to maintain and improve upon the gains already made.

Monitoring and Evaluation

The California Fire Alliance CWPP website has the capacity to provide links to completed CWPPs. However, reporting is voluntary and maintaining currency in this website will remain challenging. This website could provide additional resources by summarizing CWPPs in such a way as to facilitate analysis and monitor accomplishments.

Table 3.3.3 Priority communities for wildfire risk by bioregion (acres and population in thousands)

Bioregion	Priority Communities	Percent of Total	Acres	People
Bay/Delta	168	17	76	214
Central Coast	83	6	62	93
Colorado Desert	67	0	3	2
Klamath/North Coast	28	7	72	53
Modoc	24	2	31	19
Mojave	12	2	17	57
Sacramento Valley	9	3	18	16
San Joaquin Valley	9	1	5	5
Sierra	3	21	233	220
South Coast	1	42	594	1,900
Total	404	100	1,111	2,578

Table 3.3.4. Priority communities with CWPP coverage by bioregion (Acres and population in thousands)

Bioregion	Priority Communities with CWPP	Percent of Priority Communities	Acres of Priority Communities with CWPP	Percent of Priority Community Acres	People in Priority Communities with CWPP	Percent of Priority Community People
Bay/Delta	19	28	16	20	33	16
Central Coast	13	54	33	53	44	48
Colorado Desert	1	100	3	100	2	100
Klamath/North Coast	23	82	52	72	31	59
Modoc	7	78	17	57	14	73
Mojave	4	44	7	40	5	10
Sacramento Valley	5	42	7	40	10	62
San Joaquin Valley	3	100	5	100	5	100
Sierra	60	72	173	74	151	69
South Coast	99	59	348	59	807	42
Total	234	58	661	59	1,102	43