



SANTA CRUZ  
COUNTY  
GRAND JURY

Santa Cruz Grand Jury <grandjury@scgrandjury.org>

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## Revised response to the 2021-2022 Grand Jury Report "Reducing Our Community's Risk From Wildfire"

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Caitlin Smith <Caitlin.Smith@santacruzcounty.us>

Mon, Nov 7, 2022 at 4:15 PM

Good Afternoon,

Please see attached for the revised Board of Supervisors response to the 2021-2022 Grand Jury Report "Reducing Our Community's Risk From Wildfire – It Will Take Money, Time, and Serious Cooperation."

Best,

Caitlin C. Smith

County Supervisors' Analyst

Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors

[701 Ocean Street, Room 500](#)

[Santa Cruz, CA 95060](#)

831-454-2200 main

831-454-3516 direct

[caitlin.smith@santacruzcounty.us](mailto:caitlin.smith@santacruzcounty.us)

To email all five members of the Board of Supervisors at once,

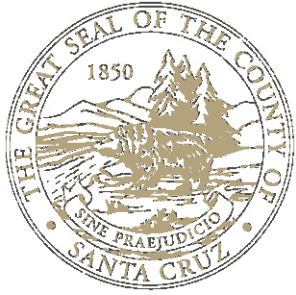
please use: [BoardOfSupervisors@santacruzcounty.us](mailto:BoardOfSupervisors@santacruzcounty.us)

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### 2 attachments

 **Grand Jury Report Response Cover Letter - Reducing Our Community's Risk from Wildfire - Revised.pdf**  
38K

 **Grand Jury Response - Reducing Our Community's Risk from Wildfire - Revised.pdf**  
324K



# County of Santa Cruz

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## BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

701 OCEAN STREET, SUITE 500, SANTA CRUZ, CA 95060-4069  
(831) 454-2200 • FAX: (831) 454-3262 TDD/TTY - Call 711

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SECOND DISTRICT

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FOURTH DISTRICT

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FIFTH DISTRICT

November 2, 2022

The Honorable Syda Cogliati  
Santa Cruz Courthouse  
701 Ocean Street  
Santa Cruz, CA 95060

**RE: Response to the 2021-2022 Grand Jury Report "Reducing Our Community's Risk from Wildfire – It Will Take Money, Time, and Serious Cooperation"**

Dear Judge Cogliati:

The purpose of this letter is to formally transmit the revised response of the Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors to the 2021-2022 Grand Jury Report titled "Reducing Our Community's Risk from Wildfire – It Will Take Money, Time, and Serious Cooperation."

Sincerely,

MANU KOENIG, Chair  
Board of Supervisors

MK: cs  
Attachment

CC: Clerk of the Board  
Santa Cruz County Grand Jury



The 2021–2022 Santa Cruz County Civil Grand Jury  
Requires the

**Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors**

to Respond by September 22, 2022

to the Findings and Recommendations listed below  
which were assigned to them in the Report Titled

**Reducing Our Community’s Risk from Wildfire**  
It Will Take Money, Time, and Serious Cooperation

Responses are **required** from elected officials, elected agency or department heads, and governing boards, councils, and committees which are investigated by the Grand Jury. You are required to respond by the California Penal Code [\(PC\) §933\(c\)](#).

Your response will be considered **compliant** under [PC §933.05](#) if it contains an appropriate comment on **all** findings and recommendations **which were assigned to you** in this report.

Please follow the instructions below when preparing your response.

## Instructions for Respondents

Your assigned [Findings](#) and [Recommendations](#) are listed on the following pages with check boxes and an expandable space for summaries, timeframes, and explanations. Please follow these instructions, which paraphrase [PC §933.05](#):

1. **For the Findings, mark one of the following responses with an “X” and provide the required additional information:**
  - a. **AGREE with the Finding**, or
  - b. **PARTIALLY DISAGREE with the Finding** – specify the portion of the Finding that is disputed and include an explanation of the reasons why, or
  - c. **DISAGREE with the Finding** – provide an explanation of the reasons why.
2. **For the Recommendations, mark one of the following actions with an “X” and provide the required additional information:**
  - a. **HAS BEEN IMPLEMENTED** – provide a summary of the action taken, or
  - b. **HAS NOT YET BEEN IMPLEMENTED BUT WILL BE IN THE FUTURE** – provide a timeframe or expected date for completion, or
  - c. **REQUIRES FURTHER ANALYSIS** – provide an explanation, scope, and parameters of an analysis to be completed within six months, or
  - d. **WILL NOT BE IMPLEMENTED** – provide an explanation of why it is not warranted or not reasonable.
3. **Please confirm the date on which you approved the assigned responses:**

We approved these responses in a regular public meeting as shown  
in our minutes dated October 18, 2022.

4. **When your responses are complete, please email your completed Response Packet as a PDF file attachment to both**

The Honorable Judge Syda Cogliati [Syda.Cogliati@santacruzcourt.org](mailto:Syda.Cogliati@santacruzcourt.org) and  
The Santa Cruz County Grand Jury [grandjury@scgrandjury.org](mailto:grandjury@scgrandjury.org).

**If you have questions about this response form, please contact the Grand Jury by calling 831-454-2099 or by sending an email to [grandjury@scgrandjury.org](mailto:grandjury@scgrandjury.org).**

## Findings

- F1.** Vegetation reduction must become a major priority for the County to adequately protect communities, critical infrastructures, and ingress/egress routes from increasing wildfire risk.

**AGREE**

**PARTIALLY DISAGREE**

**DISAGREE**

**Response explanation** (required for a response other than **Agree**):

The County does not carry the sole responsibility for vegetation reduction. It must share this responsibility with private landowners, other governmental entities, and non-profits that the County has no authority over. The County's purview is limited to County rights-of-way, education, and coordination management with partners on private property. The County applied for two grants to build capacity for hazardous fuel reduction along County maintained roads for improved evacuation safety. To bolster partner agency coordination efforts, the County hired a Wildfire Resilience Manager. The County also strengthened local education efforts by devoting scarce discretionary dollars to the Fire Safe Council to help education private landowners on wildfire preparation.

**F2.** Currently, there is not a countywide strategy for prioritizing vegetation-reduction projects.

**AGREE**

**PARTIALLY DISAGREE**

**DISAGREE**

**Response explanation** (required for a response other than **Agree**):

Santa Cruz County and San Mateo have a joint Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) that prioritizes and maps priority areas for vegetation reduction projects. The Santa Cruz Mountains Stewardship Network (a County partner) is in the process of building more specific maps that prioritize vegetation reduction projects based on the life safety, property, and environment. Prioritization of hazardous fuel reduction may vary depending upon the partner agency, the County will work to support the development of robust project evaluation criteria for project prioritization.

**F3.** County residents are not sufficiently informed of vegetation-management strategy, planning, and implementation.

**AGREE**

**PARTIALLY DISAGREE**

**DISAGREE**

**Response explanation** (required for a response other than **Agree**):

There has been a significant expansion of FireWise communities in Santa Cruz County. FireWise communities are volunteer neighborhood groups who reside in the Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI) that work together to reduce wildfire risk through education and collaboration using a national framework. In 2019, there were five Firewise communities, and now there are 31 Firewise communities. The County has made financial contributions to the FireSafe Council that facilitates the forming of these neighborhood groups.

**F4.** No single agency guides the County vegetation-reduction programs and projects, a situation that contributes to the observed lack of strategic planning.

- AGREE**
- PARTIALLY DISAGREE**
- DISAGREE**

**Response explanation** (required for a response other than **Agree**):

CalFIRE CZU Resource Management personnel, who cover both San Mateo County and Santa Cruz County, partner with all fire safety-related agencies. Combined, these agencies are currently managing \$14.4 million in vegetation-reduction grants within Santa Cruz County. Additionally, the County was awarded an 18-month \$175,000 grant from the California FireSafe Council to begin strategic planning and coordination for several fire safety and wildfire resilience activities. This grant will continue the County's strong partner network coordination with the help of the new Wildfire Resilience Manager position in the Office of Response, Recovery, and Resilience.



**F5.** The grants process is competitive, fragmented, and opaque, and lacks the published priorities and governance to ensure the money is well spent.

**AGREE**

**PARTIALLY DISAGREE**

**DISAGREE**

**Response explanation** (required for a response other than **Agree**):

Each grant has published priorities and established governance to ensure the efficiency of the funding. Santa Cruz County and its partners have been generally very successful in obtaining grant funding. However, the County is collaborating with its partners to deliberately reduce competition among Santa Cruz County groups to avoid duplication of efforts.

**F6.** Santa Cruz County is obtaining significant vegetation reduction funding through the grants process but not sufficient to complete high-priority vegetation reduction areas in a reasonable time.

**AGREE**

**PARTIALLY DISAGREE**

**DISAGREE**

**Response explanation** (required for a response other than **Agree**):

Funding is only one part of the solution to successful hazardous fuel reduction projects. Several factors outside of the County's control inhibit the expediency of projects such as environmental reviews, overlapping authorities (including the significant WUI area located in the Coastal zone), resisting private property owners, and workforce capacity issues. There is a clear need for more funding, and the County and partner agencies will continue to seek fuel reduction funding.

**F7.** County residents do not have easy access to grant prioritization and project selection criteria.

**AGREE**

**PARTIALLY DISAGREE**

**DISAGREE**

**Response explanation** (required for a response other than **Agree**):

Federal, State, and Non-profit granting agencies are responsible for grant prioritization, project selection criteria, and ensuring efficiency. The County has no control over granting agencies. However, the FireSafe Council of Santa Cruz County holds public meetings where the public may submit comment and requests. Some community groups are working directly with partner agencies, the Resource Conservation District as an example, to accomplish specific priority projects.

**F8.** Neither County Fire nor the Office of Response, Recovery & Resilience have staff or funding that are charged with creating, managing, and reporting on vegetation-reduction strategy, planning, and execution for the benefit of County residents.

**AGREE**

**PARTIALLY DISAGREE**

**DISAGREE**

**Response explanation** (required for a response other than **Agree**):

As previously mentioned in this response, the Office of Response, Recovery & Resilience hired a Wildfire Resilience Manager who is coordinating vegetation-reduction efforts among other fire safety duties.

**F9.** The County Fire/CAL FIRE Chief reporting to General Services does not give vegetation reduction sufficient priority and visibility.

**AGREE**

**PARTIALLY DISAGREE**

**DISAGREE**

**Response explanation** (required for a response other than **Agree**):

Like other fire districts in the County, vegetation reduction is not part of the primary mission of County Fire. The mission of County Fire is to protect the life, property and natural resources of its citizens and visitors through effective emergency response, preparedness, education and prevention. Although specific project-based vegetation reduction is not the primary mission, Chief Armstrong reported on several vegetation reduction efforts conducted by County Fire at the annual update to the Board of Supervisors on June 28<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

**F10.** The Office of Response, Recovery & Resilience reporting to the County Administrative Officer does not give vegetation reduction sufficient priority and visibility.

- AGREE**
- PARTIALLY DISAGREE**
- DISAGREE**

**Response explanation** (required for a response other than **Agree**):

The Office of Response, Recovery & Resilience (OR3) hired a Wildfire Resilience Manager to address vegetation reduction among other fire safety priorities. Many efforts need to be simultaneously worked to address fire safety. Vegetation management is only one part of the package that creates safe environments and is also the most expensive. The OR3 office applied for over \$1.5 million in grant funding to address wildfire risk reduction through hazardous fuel reduction. They are waiting on final award determination of these grants.

## Recommendations

- R1.** By September 30, 2022, the Board of Supervisors should designate the appropriate lead agency to work with other local fire agencies to produce and publish the County Strategic Plan for Safe Movement and Community Protection in the Wildland Urban Interface by June 30, 2023. This document should include up-to-date wildfire risk levels across the County, along with prioritization and selection criteria for projects, and how completing them will reduce the wildfire risk to County residents. The criteria should emphasize public safety, including safe movement, community protection, and infrastructure fire resilience. (F1, F2, F4, F6, F8)

- HAS BEEN IMPLEMENTED** – summarize what has been done
- HAS NOT YET BEEN IMPLEMENTED BUT WILL BE IN THE FUTURE** – summarize what will be done and the timeframe
- REQUIRES FURTHER ANALYSIS** – explain the scope and timeframe (not to exceed six months)
- WILL NOT BE IMPLEMENTED** – explain why

### Required response explanation, summary, and timeframe:

This recommendation conflates two separate topics that each have established information in the Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) and the County emergency evacuation plan.

**R2.** The production of the strategic plan for vegetation management should be visible to County residents, and public opinion should be sought and included in the final document. (F3, F5, F7)

- HAS BEEN IMPLEMENTED** – summarize what has been done
- HAS NOT YET BEEN IMPLEMENTED BUT WILL BE IN THE FUTURE** – summarize what will be done and the timeframe
- REQUIRES FURTHER ANALYSIS** – explain the scope and timeframe (not to exceed six months)
- WILL NOT BE IMPLEMENTED** – explain why

**Required response explanation, summary, and timeframe:**

The established Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) does take in public outreach. It is County practice to seek community input in all of its strategic planning efforts. An update of the CWPP is expected to be completed in November 2022.



**R3.** By December 31, 2022, the Board of Supervisors should require County Fire to report directly to the Board of Supervisors on vegetation reduction planning and execution every six months. (F1, F9)

- HAS BEEN IMPLEMENTED** – summarize what has been done
- HAS NOT YET BEEN IMPLEMENTED BUT WILL BE IN THE FUTURE** – summarize what will be done and the timeframe
- REQUIRES FURTHER ANALYSIS** – explain the scope and timeframe (not to exceed six months)
- WILL NOT BE IMPLEMENTED** – explain why

**Required response explanation, summary, and timeframe:**

County Fire reports to the Board of Supervisors annually in June after the winter and spring seasons where vegetation reduction efforts are more tenable. While vegetation reduction efforts are possible during the summer and fall seasons, they are typically less efficient. Reporting to the Board of Supervisors after a season where there is less vegetation reduction activity is not a good use of County resources.

**R4.** By December 31, 2022, the Board of Supervisors should require the Office of Response, Recovery & Resilience to report directly to the Board of Supervisors on vegetation reduction planning and execution every six months. (F1, F10)

**HAS BEEN IMPLEMENTED** – summarize what has been done

**HAS NOT YET BEEN IMPLEMENTED BUT WILL BE IN THE FUTURE** – summarize what will be done and the timeframe

**REQUIRES FURTHER ANALYSIS** – explain the scope and timeframe (not to exceed six months)

**WILL NOT BE IMPLEMENTED** – explain why

**Required response explanation, summary, and timeframe:**

The Office of Response, Recovery & Resilience will report to the Board of Supervisors by the end of the calendar year and include updates on the actions of the grant funded Wildfire Resilience Program manager.

**R5.** By December 31, 2022, the Board of Supervisors should allocate funding for the strategic plan and community outreach recommended in this report. (F1, F2, F3, F4, F8)

- HAS BEEN IMPLEMENTED** – summarize what has been done
- HAS NOT YET BEEN IMPLEMENTED BUT WILL BE IN THE FUTURE** – summarize what will be done and the timeframe
- REQUIRES FURTHER ANALYSIS** – explain the scope and timeframe (not to exceed six months)
- WILL NOT BE IMPLEMENTED** – explain why

**Required response explanation, summary, and timeframe:**

As noted several times in this response, the County hired a Wildfire Resilience Manager whose duties involve many aspects of wildfire safety and not just the narrow focus of vegetation reduction.

**R6.** By December 31, 2022, the Board of Supervisors should direct County Fire, with support from the Resource Conservation District and the Office of Response, Recovery & Resilience, to report annually to the public on progress toward published goals for improving safe movement and community protection. The first report should be published by June 30, 2023. (F3, F7, F8)

**HAS BEEN IMPLEMENTED** – summarize what has been done

**HAS NOT YET BEEN IMPLEMENTED BUT WILL BE IN THE FUTURE** – summarize what will be done and the timeframe

**REQUIRES FURTHER ANALYSIS** – explain the scope and timeframe (not to exceed six months)

**WILL NOT BE IMPLEMENTED** – explain why

**Required response explanation, summary, and timeframe:**

It is outside County Fire’s mission to improve safe movement along evacuation routes. The Office of Response, Recovery, & Resilience has been leading a coordinated effort with the Resource Conservation District, Santa Cruz County Fire Safe Council, and others on evacuation management, evacuation route safety, hazardous fuel reduction, and defensible space efforts currently funded by the California Fire Safe Council. The Office of Response, Recovery, & Resilience continues to actively seek out and apply for further grant funding that can bolster these efforts.