



County of Los Alamos

Council Meeting Staff Report

August 30, 2016

Agenda No.:	A.
Indexes (Council Goals):	2016 Council Goal – Quality Governance – Intergovernmental Relations – Strengthen Coordination and Cooperation Between County Government, LANL, and Regional and National Partners
Presenters:	Troy Hughes
Legislative File:	8466-16

Title

Consider Approval of Community Wildfire Protection Plan 2016

Recommended Action

I move that Council approve the 2016 Community Wildfire Protection Plan.

County Manager's Recommendation

The County Manager recommends that Council approve the motion as requested.

Body

Under the Healthy Forests Restoration Act of 2003, the United States Congress set forth guidelines for communities at risk from wildfire to seek funding for mitigating the potential of losses from wildland fire at the urban interface. The act stipulates communities like Los Alamos develop a Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) before applying for grants administered under the Act.

A CWPP must be developed as a collaborative plan that includes the local government, the fire department, and New Mexico Forestry which is the State agency responsible for forest management. Also, the plan must include input from interested parties and the Federal land management agencies managing land in the vicinity of the community.

The Los Alamos CWPP acknowledges that Los Alamos is located in fire-dominated ecosystem and it is not a question of if a wildfire will come but when it will come. To that end, as prescribed by the Healthy Forests Initiative, the CWPP identifies and prioritizes areas for hazardous fuel reduction treatments and recommends the types and methods of treatment on Federal and non-Federal land that will protect the community and essential infrastructure. Acknowledging the critical role of homeowners, the CWPP also recommends measures to reduce structural ignitability of houses and other buildings in the County.

Wildland fire is a landscape-scale process that crosses jurisdictional boundaries. In the Los Alamos area, this requires a coordinated fire prevention and suppression effort between the Department of Energy, Los Alamos National Laboratory, Los Alamos County, Bandelier National Monument, Santa Fe National Forest, and San Ildefonso and Santa Clara Pueblos. The Interagency Wildfire Management Team has served this role since 1996 and was the group through which the CWPP emerged.

The September 2015 CWPP, that was approved by County Council, was denied approval by the Department of State Forestry, the management agency for the State of New Mexico, due to the minimal community involvement in the development of the Plan. The Los Alamos Fire Department partnered with Forest Guild along with other agencies to improve community input. The 2016 CWPP update was developed collaboratively with members of the CWPP core team, County residents, and other stakeholders. A project website was established to announce meetings and share drafts of the

2016 update. The CWPP core team led the collaborative effort and was comprised of County officials, adjacent land management agencies, residents, and other stakeholders. Residents and other stakeholders were also provided with options other than meetings to provide input to the CWPP update.

The core team convened several meetings to discuss progress since the 2009 CWPP, identify priority action items for the 2016 update, and to review drafts of the final document.

Critical to the protection of property in the County is attention to the structural ignitability of homes. In most wildfires, some houses are lost to direct flame contact from the adjacent forest, but more homes are lost as fire spreads from structure to structure or from wind-driven ember showers. The goal of reducing structural ignitability is creating houses more resistant to fire through building materials, vegetation management, and emergency preparedness.

An additional component to the new plan is that of public education. This new CWPP will continue the management plan through 2021. This plan was developed through extensive public input including, three meetings with the Interagency Wildfire Management Team, two community meetings, and a public survey. Comments were incorporated into the final plan.

While the CWPP provides an outline for reducing the threat of wildfire, it also provides the opportunity to seek grant funding for implementation of the priority actions. Such grants could be used to: continue fuel reduction projects on all jurisdictions in the County; continue prescribed burning operations; maintain fire roads and trails; provide continued public education about wildfire through school service learning programs, information packets for new residents, and home evaluations related to structural ignitability; and develop a program to assist homeowners with reducing structural ignitability.

Upon approval by the local government and the fire chief, State Forestry will review and grant final approval of the plan. This plan is to be submitted to the State Forestry in September.

Alternatives

The alternative is to deny the request and not provide the services outlined in the proposed plan.

Fiscal and Staff Impact/Planned Item

The Plan does not obligate the County to expend additional funds, but it does provide the Department with the opportunity to apply for grant funding to accomplish the priorities in the Plan. In addition, the monies in the Fuel Mitigation fund can be spent to implement this Plan.

Attachments

A - Community Wildfire Protection Plan 2016