CALIFORNIA FOREST STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM

Forestland STEWARD

The Future of Forestry

SERIES **PART TWO**

INSIDE

This newsletter was produced under a grant from CAL FIRE.

FORESTLAND STEWARD IS A JOINT PROJECT OF CAL FIRE, PLACER COUNTY RESOURCE CONSERVATION DISTRICT, UC COOPERATIVE EXTENSION, AND USDA FOREST SERVICE TO PROVIDE INFORMATION ON THE STEWARDSHIP OF PRIVATE FORESTLANDS IN CALIFORNIA

Rekindling our Relationships WITH FIRE

Most of California's ecosystems are fire-dependent or fire-adapted. The plants, animals, and humans have historically co-evolved with fire, developing traits to withstand heat or requiring fire for seed dispersal. However, fire suppression policies enacted in the early 20th century have left many forests in California overcrowded and unhealthy, with massive amounts of fuel primed for ignition. Making matters worse, the effects of climate change, prolonged drought, and human population dynamics have elevated the intensity and devastation associated with wildfires.

In response, grassroots groups called prescribed burn associations (PBAs) are developing and expanding throughout the state. A PBA is a group of landowners and other interested people who come together to pool their knowledge, equipment, and other resources to use prescribed burns to create safer communities and healthier forests. Lenya Quinn-Davidson, Fire Advisor, and Jeff Stackhouse, Livestock and Natural Resources Advisor, both with the UC Cooperative Extension in Humboldt, have spearheaded the movement of community-driven prescribed fire groups throughout the state.

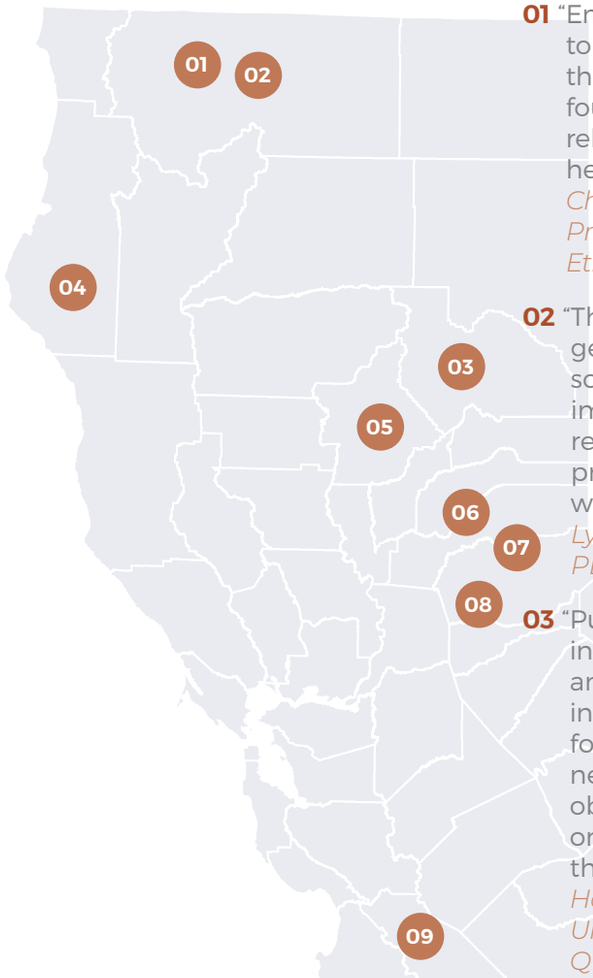
> "Our relationship to fire is profoundly symbiotic. We are the one species that can start and, within limits, stop fires. Historically, the first ability has enabled the second; the best way to control fire is with controlled fire; humans prevented wildfires by igniting their own."
>
> – STEPHEN PYNE, *Flame & Fortune 1996*

Expansion and Growth

Many groups are following Humboldt County's lead. Currently, there are more than 20 community-based prescribed fire groups in California and many more in development. However, the paradigm shift surrounding the use of fire is relatively new. "When we started, it seemed like it was a fight at every turn," Stackhouse reflected. "Now, there is support from regulators, financial support from CAL FIRE, and a more informed public on the laws and regulations surrounding prescribed fire. Overall, we're seeing much more support for private burners than there was just 5 years ago."

The Governor's Wildfire and Forest Resilience Task Force has set ambitious goals of treating a million acres a year in California by 2025 to improve wildfire resilience across the state. Since about 40% of forestland in California is privately-owned, landowners are critical players in the state's success. Prescribed burn associations (PBAs) are filling important roles providing necessary education, outreach, and technical assistance to equip landowners and others with the knowledge and skills to implement safe and effective prescribed burns in their own communities. To expand these opportunities, CAL FIRE recently awarded Fire Forward a $2 million dollar Workforce and Business Development Grant to expand on key statewide initiatives.

Those interested in learning more should visit **calpba.org** to find the nearest group!



01 "Empowering communities to get good fire back onto the land inspired the PBA's founding. Our current relationship with fire is not healthy nor is it working." *Charnna Gilmore, Siskiyou Prescribed Burn Association; Etna, CA*

02 "The only way we will get to the pace and scale of prescribed fire implementation necessary to restore our landscapes and prevent severe wildfires is by working together." *Lyndsey Lascheck, Siskiyou PBA; Yreka, CA*

03 "Putting the use of fire back in the hands of citizens and tribal land stewards increases the potential for the holistic restoration necessary to meet collective objectives, reduces the onus on agencies, and increases the agency of individuals." *Hannah Heppner, Plumas Underburn Cooperative; Quincy, CA*

04 "The biggest challenge has been spontaneity and taking advantage of burn windows. We have to make sure landowners are prepared when the weather window becomes available." *Jeff Stackhouse, UC Cooperative Extension, Humboldt PBA, Eureka, CA*

05 "There needs to be a cultural shift from fire being something that only a highly trained professional can do, to being something that's a community responsibility." *Wolfy Rougle, Butte Prescribed Burn Association; Chico, CA*

06 "Many landowners have experienced severe trauma from wildfire. It is inspiring to watch them regain control and confidence using prescribed burns to manage their land through the PBA." *Cordi Craig, Placer PBA; Auburn, CA*

07 "The process of organizing community members who participate in cultural burning will establish a better prepared community that can contribute to wildfire management and land development policies." *Frances Ragle, Todd's Valley Miwok Maidu Cultural Foundation; Foresthill, CA*

08 "PBAs are demonstrating the effectiveness of the community model to impact at a meaningful scale." *Kestrel Grevatt, El Dorado/Amador PBA; Georgetown, CA*

09 "PBAs across the state are working together to make prescribed burning accessible to Californians." *Devii Rao, UC Cooperative Extension, Central Coast PBA; Hollister, CA*

10 "Land management used to be an art that more people engaged with and had regular access to. I'd like to think we can go back to that and that we don't have to rely on public agencies to manage the land around us." *Matthew Shapero, UC Cooperative Extension, Ventura PBA, Buellton, CA*

11 "I believe that having landowners in the PBA affords greater access to tools and resources compared with going at it on their own." *Stan Hill, San Diego PBA; Lakeside, CA*

A statewide PBA Leader's meeting was held in May 2022, *where leaders from all corners of the state gathered to discuss challenges, successes, and learn how to find solutions to make California's land and communities more fire resilient from a grassroots level. Representatives and leaders from community-led fire groups described the enthusiasm, challenges, and successes that they are experiencing.*

Other counties with PBAs not featured in this map include Calaveras, Klamath, Lake, Marin, Mendocino, Monterey, Nevada, Santa Barbara, San Benito, Santa Cruz, Sonoma, Trinity, Tuolumne, and Yolo.

WHAT IS

Forest Resilience IN CALIFORNIA'S FUTURE?

Guest Author: Ryan Tompkins

Ryan Tompkins is the UC Cooperative Extension Forest and Natural Resources Advisor for Plumas, Sierra, and Lassen counties and is a California Registered Professional Forester (No. 3108). His research interests include forest & fire ecology and management in the Sierra Nevada, silviculture for ecological restoration, and post-fire reforestation. His 18-year federal career included working as a forester and certified silviculturist with the USDA Forest Service and working in the Fire Effects program at the National Park Service.

At the beginning of the year, the US Forest Service launched "Confronting the Wildfire Crisis: A Strategy for Protecting Communities and Improving Resilience in America's Forests." While many forest landowners across the west are familiar with the threat of wildfire, particularly increasing proportions of high severity fire, we also must recognize that fire is an endemic and essential part of the process and function of dry mixed conifer forest ecosystems of California. In fact, research (Westerling and Bryant 2008, Goss et al 2020) indicates that in our current century of changing climate, active wildfire will be a reality far more than a crisis.

So in this brave new future of wildfire, what can we do about this?

The fire behavior triangle describes the three foundational drivers of fire behavior: Topography, Weather, and Fuel. Over our lifetimes, topography doesn't change much, but weather has been. Well-documented increases in fire season (Swain 2021), fire weather (Collins 2012, Balch 2022), and landscape level drought (Mann and Gleick 2015) are largely out of forest managers' influence. This leaves fuels – both dead surface fuels and live fuels (trees and other forest vegetation) as the only variable that land stewards can manage. Considering this, perhaps our wildfire crisis – particularly increases of problematic high severity fire behavior and effects – is symptomatic of far deeper-rooted issues: the alignment of drought and forest fuels.

This is important for several reasons: 1) Live tree densities can contribute to forest fuels as ladder and canopy fuels but also generate dead fuels through deposition of foliage and branches (Lydersen et al 2015). 2) High densities of trees across forested landscapes increase tree competition and are particularly vulnerable to drought induced tree mortality (Fettig et al 2019); these dead and dying trees contribute to uncharacteristically large fuel accumulations (Stephens et al 2018). 3) High densities of dead and live fuels contribute to high severity fire effects (Coppoletta et al 2016).

During the 2012 to 2016 drought, high tree densities across forested landscapes in the central and southern Sierra Nevada not only contributed to unprecedented tree mortality (Young et al 2017), but recent research (Stephens et al 2022) on the drivers of the 2021 Creek Fire in this region found that extensive tree mortality and high tree density contributed to mass fire behavior. As a result, our only way to mitigate the problematic drought and fire effects we're currently experiencing is to better manage forest tree density and fuel accumulations.

Why does forest density matter?

California's dry frequent fire forests are far too dense. A recent study by North and others (2022) compared historic forest data collected soon after the establishment of the national forests in 1911 to contemporary conditions in 2011 with a particular focus on tree density, tree size, and levels of tree competition. The study found that historical forests were far less dense (20-30 trees per acre) and had greater proportions of larger fire and drought tolerant trees. Contemporary forest densities were on average 6 to 7 times denser in terms of tree stocking (140-170 trees per acre) and, consequently, average tree size was reduced by 50%.

These differences in density and tree size lead to different levels of tree competition, growth, and vigor. In historic forests, 73% to 85% of forested stands were at densities where competition for resources was very low. This allowed trees to grow large, tolerate drought, and develop fire resistant characteristics related

to tree size. Conversely, most contemporary forests (82% to 95%) were at levels of full competition or greater, where competition for resources limits tree growth and vigor, increases tree vulnerability to fire, drought, insects, and disease, and contributes as a driver of tree mortality.

What does resilience look like in the future?

Forest restoration goals in dry frequent fire forests are often focused on promoting resilience to wildfires and drought, but it's often discussed in broad qualitative terms. Low densities of large diameter drought and fire tolerant trees are the "backbone" of dry mixed conifer forest ecosystems and were resilient to a range of stressors beyond solely fire. This study suggests that the foundation of resilience in these forests is rooted in the low competition environment which serves as the "habitat requirement" for large tree development and maximizes resistance to fire, drought, insects, and disease.

Open, low-density forests are in alignment with California's warmer, drier, and more active wildfire predictions for the future. A recent study by Bernal and others (2022) examining biomass stocks in the Sierra Nevada/southern Cascade region suggests that under projected climate, hotter sites will become more prevalent which would favor low tree densities and higher pine dominance. These projections indicate that within 50 years, these forests may only be able to support 25% of the current above ground live biomass!

Half a century of state and federal forest policy and management practice has focused on retaining minimum levels of density, stocking, or canopy cover which has normalized forests that are much denser than historic conditions and far less resilient. In many cases, managing forests to minimize competition and increase resilience would require drastically reducing tree density by as much as 80% or greater. This would necessitate a fundamental shift in perspective of our forests, where contemporary minimum stocking levels should more appropriately represent maximum stocking levels. As a result, far greater proportions of forested landscapes would need be treated with greater intensity to meet forest resilience and restoration objectives.

For more information visit the **California Fire Science Consortium.**

Historical data and recent research on forest structure suggest that open, low density forests of fire and drought tolerant species such as pine may be most resilient to disturbance in a changing 21st century climate. Small clumps of trees are interspersed with openings and areas of individual trees.

Citations:

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After more than a century of fire suppression, our forests are overstocked and vulnerable to natural disasters such as drought and fire.

1909

1949

1959

1969

Joint NTMP

PROVIDES **POTENTIAL SOLUTION** FOR SMALL PRIVATE LANDOWNERS

"We are small landowners, and so we are subject to the whimsy of the markets and forest fires," Tom Linville stated, addressing the challenges that he and his neighbor, Mike Small, face managing properties in central Siskiyou County. It's a common sentiment among private forest landowners throughout California who are searching for creative and feasible solutions while working in an environment that's expensive and difficult to predict.

With hazardous fuel loading, warmer winters, and longer peak fire weather due to climate change and drought, small forest landowners face a substantial challenge. Many forests are overstocked and vulnerable to high-intensity wildfires. Harvesting timber is an important part of sustainable forest management that are resilient to disturbances, such as drought and wildfires. Yet, the few operational mills throughout the state are currently saturated from processing the salvaged logs from forests burned in recent wildfires. It's a difficult place to be – landowners need to harvest timber for fire resilience, but the trees can't pay their way out of the forest. Those landowners with small timber stands may find it challenging to harvest timber without incurring costs that outweigh the log revenue. Plus market variability contributes to this challenge.

Enter Registered Professional Forester (RPF) Jim Ostrowski, RPF #2187 and owner of a private forestry consulting company in Mount Shasta. Ostrowski has been the forester for Tom and Jan Linville for many years. He is also the forester for the Linville's neighbors, Mike and Belinda Small. Ostrowski has worked in the region for decades and helped manage the land for Mike Small's late aunt even before they inherited the property. After evaluating management goals and taking a measured approach to the costs and benefits, he pitched the idea of a partnered Non-industrial Timber Management Plan (NTMP) for the nearly 700 combined acres between the two landowners.

A NTMP is a management plan for owners of less than 2,500 acres of timberland who are not primarily engaged in the manufacture of forest products and is designed for uneven-aged stand management. It is similar to the more commonly used Timber Harvest Plan

photo credit: Ryan Tompkins


photo credit: Ryan Tompkins

(THP). Both documents are prepared by a RPF, provide detailed analysis of the potential impacts of the project on the environment, and undergo a thorough interagency environmental review. The primary difference is that, once approved, a NTMP has no expiration date. A THP, on the other hand, has a lifetime of 5 to 7 years. Once a THP has expired and another harvest is planned, it is subject to the same long environmental review process before approval and implementation. A NTMP expedites future harvest operations such that, if there are no substantial changes to the environment, a landowner may begin harvesting as quickly as 3 days after mailing in an accurate Notice of Timber Operations.

A joint or partnered NTMP makes the planning and implementation processes more financially accessible to small private landowners by increasing the timber harvest volumes and significantly reducing regulatory timber harvest costs through working at greater scales. After discussing options with their forester, the Smalls and the Linvilles agreed that a joint NTMP would be cost-effective and capture the long-term management goals that both parties wanted. Overall, combining resources cut the cost of the planning process in half because the work of the RPF wasn't duplicated. Although the upfront cost is a substantial investment, the document now lives in perpetuity and guides sustainable forest management for the future generations of both families. Moving forward, the cost of implementation will also be lower, since the two landowners can work under similar timelines, utilize the same loggers and reduce equipment transportation costs by allowing machinery to remain on-site for both projects.

Grants, People, and Community Reputation

Although Linville, Small, and Ostrowski all recommended the joint NTMP process for other private landowners in the state, they recognized that several variables, including previous grants, personal relationships, and geographic location, influenced this project's particular success. Prior to creating the joint NTMP, the landowners separately applied for and received funding from the California Forest Improvement Program (CFIP), a CAL FIRE cost-share program that incentivizes forest management. The state-funded program helped pay for a California Cooperative Forest Management Plan for both landowners, which was crucial in reducing the preparation cost of the joint NTMP by providing the required inventory and long-term growth projections.

"Landowners should take advantage of the cost-share programs," Linville emphasized. "The reimbursement rate is quite generous." Landowners who apply for funding through CFIP are eligible for up to either 75% or 90% reimbursement rate depending on the acreage of forestland owned in California, and whether the property has been substantially damaged due to fire, floods, or other natural events.

Their relationships both with each other and their forester greatly influenced their decision-making. Agency representatives were also familiar with the area and had worked with Ostrowski in the past, which helped to make the planning and permitting processes efficient. The two properties are contiguous and located within the same watershed, making cultural and biological surveying simpler. Not insignificantly, Siskiyou County supports and encourages harvesting. The county does not require any additional requirements some regions require that go beyond the standard Forest Practice Rules.

Considering a Joint NTMP

When asked what landowners should consider if they are interested in a joint NTMP, Linville and Small responded in unison: "What's the management goal?" Fire resilience and sustainability were priorities for both property owners. The status of the timber markets and the forethought of working with and adapting to climate change were influential factors in their decision making.

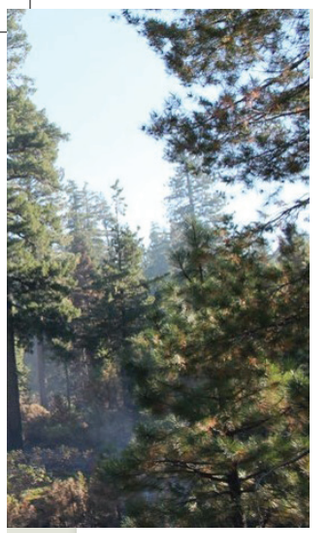


photo credit: Maddison Easley

photo credit: Maddison Easley

"We want to create and maintain a healthy forest for our kids and grandkids to enjoy," Small stated.

Linville nodded in agreement. "For us, it's not about a quick harvest for money anymore. It's about doing what's right for the forest in the long term."

When explaining the value of the NTMP, Ostrowski suggested, "Managing land is like your stock portfolio. Occasionally, you'll have a dividend payment and if you have a long-term plan and broader perspective, you can work to maximize it." A NTMP allows landowners to capture higher log markets in a timely fashion, whereas some landowners may get a THP prepared when market prices are high, only to watch them drop before the plan is approved.

Resources for the Landowner's Toolbox

Although a joint NTMP may not fit the needs of all landowners, it's a potential option to navigate management choices amidst changing markets, mill prices, and wildfires. Several organizations and agencies have resources to assist landowners with technical assistance, management advice and tools, and understanding California's complex forest practice regulations. The Forest Landowners of California and the UC Cooperative Extension offer workshops and provide valuable information to help private landowners make difficult management decisions. Ask your RPF or a UC Forestry Advisor about the potential benefits of a NTMP in your region.

CAL FIRE'S CALIFORNIA FOREST IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM (CFIP)

CAL FIRE is working with landowners across the state to help improve the quality and value of their forestland. The videos below capture the versatility of the program, assisting landowners in both pre- and post-wildfire condition. Check out the videos below to learn more about the financial, ecological, and community benefits of the California Forest Improvement Program (CFIP).

Steve and Casey Boeger, Meadow Vista, CA

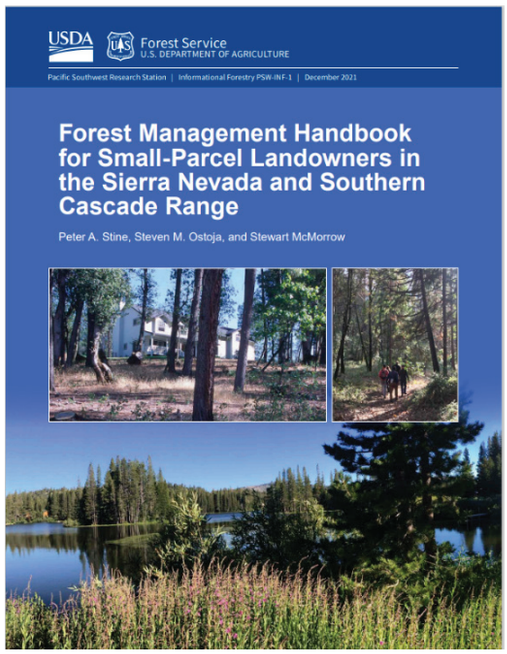
Creek Fire Success Story, Rock Haven, CA

Find more on CAL FIRE's YouTube Channel: **CAL FIRE TV**

Grant & Funding RESOURCES

Landowners interested in other financial assistance opportunities may reference FSN Summer 2021

GRANT NAME	FUNDING AGENCY	ELIGIBILITY	PROGRAM DETAILS	COST SHARE
California Forest Improvement Program (CFIP)	CAL FIRE	Landowners must own 20 to 5,000 acres of forestland (supports 10% or more of tree cover, including oaks)	Technical and financial assistance for forest improvement practices	75% or 90% depending on acreage and other influential factors
My Sierra Woods	American Forest Foundation	Funding is only being distributed to landowners in the Tuolumne focus area (Sonora)	Fuels reduction and wildfire resilience; Other opportunities may be available through AFF: contact Chantz Joyce for details (cjoyce@forestfoundation.org)	Financial assistance is designed to complement existing resources (e.g., CFIP/EQIP)
LA Moran Reforestation Center: Seedling Requests for Post-Fire Restoration	CAL FIRE and USFS	Properties impacted by wildfires between 2019 and 2021	Landowners who are requesting seedlings for post-fire restoration from the LA Moran Reforestation Center	Seedlings are free for eligible landowners



USFS PRIVATE FOREST LANDOWNERS HANDBOOK

Forests in the Sierra Nevada and southern Cascade Range are being stressed by many factors that put them at risk. High-severity wildfire, drought stress, insect outbreaks, disease, and a backdrop of changing climate are a few. A significant portion of Sierra Nevada and southern Cascades forests are owned and managed as small parcels (10 to 100 acres) by nonindustrial private landowners. The Forest Management Handbook for Small Parcel Landowners is designed to help landowners determine what, if any, management actions need to be done, and how to obtain technical and financial support to manage private forestland.

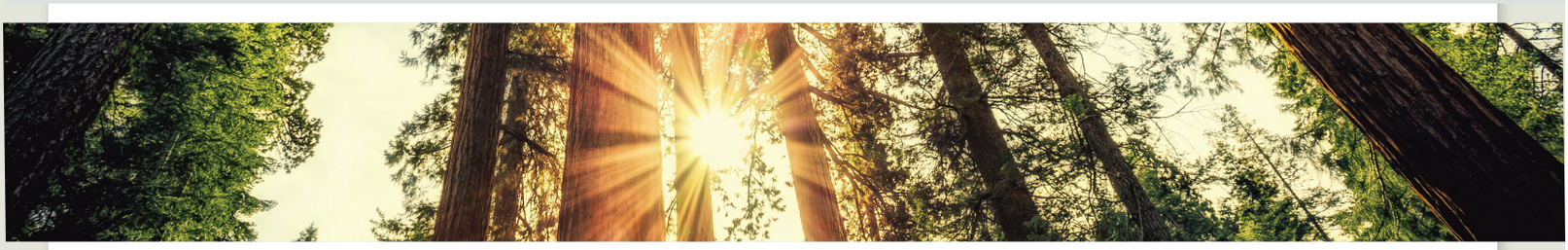
The publication is available to download for free here: **wildfiretaskforce.org/forest-service-releases-handbook-for-small-parcel-landowners**

PLANNING AND PERMITTING FOREST FUEL-REDUCTION PROJECTS ON PRIVATE LANDS IN CALIFORNIA

Y. VALACHOVIC, J. GERSTEIN, AND B. GOLDSTEIN

This publication presents some key considerations and insights into selecting the appropriate permit to facilitate fuel-reduction projects on private lands—and offers insights into permitting larger fuel projects that involve multiple owners or multiple funding sources. The publication is organized around projects that take place before or after wildfires. It is intended for foresters, private owners of both small and large parcels of land, natural-resource professionals, and project developers. The publication includes decision trees to help landowners and resource managers crosswalk projects to permits.

The new publication can be found anrcatalog.ucanr.edu/pdf/8716.pdf and is available for free download.



CAL FIRE

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ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

Events Calendar:

California Wildfire and Forest Resilience Task Force

The Task Force has developed a comprehensive implementation strategy to track goals, actions, and achievements identified in the California Wildfire and Forest Resilience Action Plan.

Upcoming Meetings:
September 27 - 28: Nevada County Fairgrounds, Grass Valley; Agenda may be found here: **wildfiretaskforce.org/meetings**
November 17: Sacramento, 1 pm - 3:30 pm
Archived meetings and videos can be found **here.**

On The Go?

More Forestland Steward subscribers get the latest forestry news in multiple ways – mobile devices, home delivery, office desktops, and social media. It's free!

Visit **placerrcd.org/forestland-steward** or send a request to **cordi@placerrcd.org** to subscribe.

California Forest Stewardship Workshops

Butte – Yuba Counties

Online beginning October 18 - December 14, 2022 and in-person Saturday, November 5, 2022

Napa County

January 2023 – March 2023, Registration coming soon!

Join the workshops to understand and protect your forests by developing a Forest Management Plan. Registration for the workshops is $60. Sign up online. For questions, contact Kim Ingram, **kcingram@ucanr.edu.**

Forest Landowners of California (FLC)

FLC is hosting a Field Day!
November 5, 2022
9 am - 3:30 pm
Cedar Woods Tree Farm, Nevada County

Registration information will be available on the FLC website: **forestlandowners.org.**