

Grand Jury Report Findings and Recommendations

“Wildfire Preparedness: A New Approach”

January 13, 2020

**RESPONSE TO GRAND JURY REPORT FINDINGS AND
RECOMMENDATIONS**

REPORT TITLE: “Wildfire Preparedness: A New Approach”

REPORT DATE: April 18, 2019

RESPONSE BY: Stinson Beach Fire Protection District

GRAND JURY FINDINGS

- We agree with the finding(s) numbered: **F1, F2, F3, F4, F7, F8, F9, F14, F15, F18, F22**
- We disagree wholly or partially with the finding(s) numbered: **F5, F6, F10, F11, F12, F13, F16, F17, F, 19, F20 and F21**

GRAND JURY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Recommendation(s) numbered **RX** has/ve been implemented.
- Recommendation(s) numbered **R1, R2, R3, R4, R5, R6, R9, R11, R12** have not yet been implemented, and will be implemented in the future.
- Recommendation(s) numbered **R7, R8, R10, R13 and R15** requires further analysis.
- Recommendation(s) numbered **R14** will not be implemented because it is not warranted or reasonable.

Grand Jury Report Findings and Recommendations

“Wildfire Preparedness: A New Approach”

January 13, 2020

RESPONSE TO GRAND JURY FINDINGS

F1. Existing vegetation management codes are both inconsistent and inconsistently enforced.

Response: **Agree**

Fire agencies policies differ as well as inspection and enforcement procedures.

F2. There are not enough trained vegetation inspectors or fuel reduction crews.

Response: **Agree**

There are over 59,000 parcels in the Wildland Urban Interface Areas within Marin County agencies are utilizing a variety of methods and resources to inspect as many structures as possible but are only pro-actively inspecting a small percentage of the total.

F3. Current vegetation enforcement procedures are slow, difficult and expensive.

Response: **Agree**

Each municipality has their own code enforcement procedure. The time from first notice to abatement is arduous at best.

F4. Government agencies and safety authorities cannot currently manage vegetation on public lands.

Response: **Agree**

Currently there are inadequate resources to manage vegetation on private and public lands.

F5. All property owners are responsible for vegetation management on their property, yet they are not sufficiently educated about vegetation management and many do not have the physical and financial resources to create defensible space.

Response: **Partially Disagree**

Education has been provided through firesafe Marin and the fire agencies. There are regular community meetings and updates including online resources (Fire Safe Marin) and social media campaigns. We agree there is an aging population that may not have the physical or financial means to complete necessary work.

F6. Wildfire preparedness education is inconsistent and fails to reach most citizens, especially parents of young children.

Grand Jury Report Findings and Recommendations “(Exact Title of Report)”
(Report Date)

Response: **Partially Disagree**

Grand Jury Report Findings and Recommendations

“Wildfire Preparedness: A New Approach”

January 13, 2020

The messages and information are consistent countywide amongst the fire agencies and Fire Safe Marin. We agree the demographics of our hosted meetings/forums and exercises generally lack a younger demographic especially those with kids.

F7. The most effective method of education is person to person in neighborhoods.

Response: **Agree**

Defensible space home evaluations with a trained professional is the preferred and best method for educating the public and greater community.

F8. Although Marin has 30 plus Firewise neighborhoods, the most in California, they only cover a small percentage of population and land.

Response: **Agree**

Firewise Communities are a great mechanism for bringing communities/neighborhoods together. They provide an organized approach to reducing hazards and risks.

F9. Sufficient public funds have not been provided to sustain comprehensive wildfire preparedness education.

Response: **Agree**

Generally, fire agencies are funded for the response and mitigation of emergency incidents. Development into the WUI, climate change and recent major fires are requiring resources greater than those available by local municipalities.

F10. Educating the public requires a different set of skills than firefighters usually have.

Response: **Partially Disagree**

Firefighters have experiences that add value to educating the public; however, they also have other pressing responsibilities. Dedicated public education staff and defensible space home evaluators can spend more quality time on task than Firefighters.

F11. Any hesitation to use the WEA system can be deadly even if its alerts might reach people outside of its intended target zone.

Response: **Disagree**

The WEA system is not geographically specific and can bleed over to areas where evacuations are not necessary. Adding unnecessary traffic to already congested roadways impeding egress of those most affected. We agree it is a useful tool but must be coordinated between the incident commander and Sheriff OES.

Grand Jury Report Findings and Recommendations “(Exact Title of Report)”
(Report Date)

“Wildfire Preparedness: A New Approach”

January 13, 2020

F12. Alert Marin sends the most accurately targeted warnings to endangered populations, but it reaches too few residents because it is not well publicized. Both Alert Marin and Nixle require opt-in registration, a serious design flaw.

Response: **Partially Disagree**

Alert Marin information is advertised and spoken about at almost any event hosted by Fire Departments, information is available on most if not all agencies web-sites. Additionally, information on Alert Marin is included in property. Tax mailings. Nixel and Alert Marin are two very different systems. Nixel by design is an opt-in solution providing general information to the public. Alert Marin is an Opt-out system by design used to provide instruction or direction to the public. Hardline and voice over internet protocol (VOIP) data is purchased and requires residents to Opt-out. Currently cellular data is not available to purchase. State Law will need to change for cellular information to be an Opt-out component.

F13. Sirens could be a useful and reliable warning system if their numbers and locations were increased to broaden their reach and if they were enhanced with a customized message through LRAD.

Response: **Partially Disagree**

Long Range Acoustical Device (LRAD) is the name brand of one type of acoustical notification system. This system may have limited reach and limited ability to be heard inside a building. Local testing has provided mixed results based on topography and other outdoor existing noise. This type of system does have valuable application in some areas within the County.

F14. In the WUI and in many town centers, infrastructure and roads are inadequate for mass evacuations.

Response: **Agree**

F15. Evacuation routes are dangerously overgrown with vegetation and many evacuation routes are too narrow to allow safe passage in an emergency.

Response: **Agree**

Marin County has many narrow roads with limited access and overgrown vegetation. Much of the vegetation encroachment into the road right of way is the responsibility of homeowners. Public works agencies regularly work with fire agencies identifying and working in the most critical areas.

F16. Emergency planners often do not publicize evacuation routes due to their mistrust of the public.

Response: **Disagree**

Disagreed; it's not an issue of mistrust with the public. In 2009 the Marin County Fire Agencies

Grand Jury Report Findings and Recommendations

“Wildfire Preparedness: A New Approach”

January 13, 2020

developed mutual threat zone maps, pre-identifying primary and secondary evacuation routes

Grand Jury Report Findings and Recommendations “(Exact Title of Report)”
(Report Date)

as well as evacuation zones. This information is available for first responders to access in conventional paper maps or online. It has also been made available to mutual aid responders outside of Marin County. The fire agencies are in the process of making these maps publicly available. We do caution residents to take personal responsibility and identify and regularly travel different routes away from their home. Wildland fires can be very dynamic and depending on wind and topography can change direction with little to no warning.

F17. Town councils, planners, and public works officials have not addressed traffic choke points and, in some instances, they have created obstacles to traffic flow by the installation of concrete medians, bumpouts, curbs, speed bumps, and lane reductions.

Response: **Partially Disagree**

Need to confer with city officials and DPW officials. The Chief's believe that traffic calming devices have negative impacts on the evacuation routes.

F18. No studies have been performed to determine how long it would take to evacuate entire communities via existing evacuation corridors.

Response: **Agree**

The fire chiefs are exploring opportunities with technology companies and higher educational institutions studying this type of work. Large scale evacuation planning needs further development within Marin.

F19. The implementation of traffic-light sequencing and coordination to allow mass egress, and the conversion of two-way roads into one-way evacuation routes to ease traffic congestion, are dangerously delayed and years away from being implemented.

Response: **Not Applicable**

F20. Public transit is a neglected asset of emergency response preparedness: all operators except one transit agency are left out of the command structure and none is integrated into the emergency radio communication system MERA.

Response: **Partially Disagree**

This is a matter that needs to be explored. At the present time there is minimal public transit in this jurisdiction.

“Wildfire Preparedness: A New Approach”

January 13, 2020

F21. A bureaucratic culture of complacency and inertia exists in Marin. Government often fails to act quickly to repair known gaps in emergency preparedness, to think flexibly, and to prioritize safety in its planning and policies.

Response: **Partially Disagree**

Marin’s fire agencies work exceptionally well together; most recently a coordinated effort between the cities, towns and fire agencies to hire a countywide disaster coordinator is evidence of this success.

F22. No countywide comprehensive, coordinated policies have been made and no funds have been allocated to prepare for wildfires.

Response: **Agree**

There are several coordinated documents, policies or procedures within Marin County including: mutual threat zone plan, Community Wildfire Protection Plan and the 2017 north bay lessons learned report. Additionally, Marin has a comprehensive countywide disaster mitigation plan.

RESPONSE TO GRAND JURY RECOMMENDATIONS

The Marin County Civil Grand Jury recommends the following:

R1. Create a comprehensive, countywide vegetation management plan that includes vegetation along evacuation routes, a campaign to mobilize public participation, and low-income subsidies.

This recommendation has not been implemented and will be in the future.

Through a coordinated and collaborated approach the Marin cities, towns, County and fire agencies are addressing this recommendation through a county wide wildland initiative. This initiative includes but not limited to:

Vegetation Management and fire fuel reduction
Defensible space home evaluations & education
Evacuation planning, public education, Firewise community support, Alert and Warning enhancements

Pursuit of grant funds for countywide efforts as well as grant funding for Seniors, financially disadvantaged and those with access and functional needs (populations most impacted by recent mega fires).

Funding will be pursued after public input with a potential ballot initiative in March of 2020. Without additional resources any efforts to mitigate wildfire threat and risks will be insufficient.

“Wildfire Preparedness: A New Approach”

January 13, 2020

R2. Hire at least 30 new civilian vegetation inspectors and at least eight fire/fuels crews focused on fuel reduction in the high risk areas of the county, including federal, state and local public lands.

This recommendation has not been implemented and will be in the future.

Through a coordinated and collaborative approach the Marin cities, towns, County and fire agencies are addressing this recommendation through a countywide wildland initiative. Fire Prevention officers throughout the county are working on a countywide streamlined approach updating codes and processes with streamlined implementation and enforcement:

Agencies agree defensible space evaluations and face to face public education are essential for overall success. Working groups of Fire Chiefs, City Managers, County Executives are weighing options to ensure the most appropriate and cost effective solution is proposed.

Funding will be pursued after public input with a potential ballot initiative in March of 2020. Without additional resources any efforts to mitigate wildfire threat and risks will be insufficient.

R3. Develop and implement a fast, streamlined procedure to enforce vegetation citations.

This recommendation has not been implemented and will be in the future.

Through a coordinated and collaborative approach, the Marin cities, towns, County and fire agencies are addressing this recommendation through a countywide wildland initiative. Fire Prevention officers throughout the county are working on a countywide streamlined approach updating codes and processes. It is the intention of the group to implement some items as part of regular code adoption cycle this fall. Larger scale collaboration and a more streamlined approach will be addressed as part of the Countywide wildland fire initiative.

Without additional resources any efforts to mitigate wildfire threat and risks will be insufficient.

R4. Adopt and deliver a comprehensive education program focused on action for all residents of Marin on a regular schedule by a team of expert trainers.

This recommendation has not been implemented and will be in the future.

Through a coordinated and collaborated approach the Marin cities, towns, County and fire agencies are addressing this recommendation through a county wide wildland initiative. This initiative includes but not limited to:

Defensible space home evaluations & education

Evacuation planning, public education, Firewise community support, support of Fire Safe Marin

Alert and Warning enhancements and education

“Wildfire Preparedness: A New Approach”

January 13, 2020

Funding will be pursued after public input with a potential ballot initiative in March of 2020. Without additional resources any efforts to expand public education will be insufficient.

R5. Promote the creation of Firewise Communities in every neighborhood by all local jurisdictions.

This recommendation has not been implemented and will be in the future.

Through a coordinated and collaborated approach the Marin cities, towns, County and fire agencies are addressing this recommendation through a county wide wildland initiative. This initiative includes but not limited to:

Firewise community support,

Support and funding for Fire Safe Marin

Public education

Funding will be pursued after public input with a potential ballot initiative in March of 2020. Without additional resources any efforts to expand Firewise communities will be insufficient.

R6. Employ individuals with skills in public speaking, teaching, curriculum design, graphics, web design, advertising, community organization, community relations, and diplomacy to educate the public.

This recommendation has not been implemented and will be in the future.

Through a coordinated and collaborated approach the Marin County cities and towns are addressing this recommendation through a county wide wildland initiative.

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Defensible space home evaluations & education

Evacuation planning, public education, Firewise community support, support of Fire Safe Marin

Alert and Warning enhancements and education

Funding will be pursued after public input with a potential ballot initiative in March of 2020. Without additional resources any efforts to expand public education will be insufficient.

R7. Collect Marin residents' information and add it to Alert Marin and Nixle databases to make them opt-out systems.

“Wildfire Preparedness: A New Approach”

January 13, 2020

This recommendation requires further analysis.

Nixel and Alert Marin are two very different systems. Nixel by design is an opt-in solution providing general information to the public, agencies are not permitted to add personal information into this system. Alert Marin is an Opt-out system by design used to provide instruction or direction to the public. Hardline and voice over internet protocol (VOIP) data is purchased and requires residents to Opt-out. Currently cellular data is not available to purchase. State Law will need to change for cellular information to be an Opt-out component thus making Alert Marin a fully opt out system. Marin Agencies are supporting State Legislation

R8. Expand the use of sirens with LRADs.

This recommendation requires further analysis.

Sirens and LRAD’s have limited reach and limited ability to be heard inside a building. Local testing has provided mixed results based on topography and other outdoor existing noise. This type of system does have valuable application in some areas within the County. Some communities are moving forward replacing existing sirens with LRAD’s and or expanding the use of sirens or LRAD’s where appropriate.

Funding will be pursued after public input with a potential ballot initiative in March of 2020. Without additional resources any efforts to expand public education will be insufficient.

R9. Research, develop, and publish plans for the mass movement of populations along designated evacuation routes.

This recommendation has not been implemented and will be in the future.

Large scale evacuation planning needs to identify which corridors would benefit greatest from contra-flow. The use of experts in this field specifically universities studying this concept should be engaged. Coordination with public works agencies will be a critical component to our success.

Funding will be pursued after public input with a potential ballot initiative in March of 2020. Without additional resources any efforts to expand public education will be insufficient.

R10. Give the highest priority to mitigating known choke points and to maximizing the capacity of existing evacuation routes.

This recommendation requires further analysis.

Large scale evacuation planning needs to identify “choke points”. The use of experts in this field specifically universities studying this concept should be engaged. Coordination with public works agencies will be a critical component to our success.

“Wildfire Preparedness: A New Approach”

January 13, 2020

Funding will be pursued after public input with a potential ballot initiative in March of 2020. Without additional resources any efforts to expand public education will be insufficient.

R11. Incorporate and prioritize plans for mass evacuations in all pending and future traffic/road projects along major escape routes.

This recommendation has not been implemented and will be in the future.

Stinson Beach is in training for a mass evacuation and will be implemented by summer 2020.

An example of this District compliance with this topic are the ongoing evacuation drills.

R12. Educate, prepare, and drill for evacuations in all communities.

This recommendation has not been implemented and will be in the future.

Through a coordinated and collaborated approach the Marin cities, towns, County and fire agencies are addressing this recommendation through a county wide wildland initiative. This initiative includes but not limited to:

Evacuation planning, public education, Firewise community support,

Alert and Warning enhancements

Pursuit of grant funds for countywide evacuation planning and mitigation.

Vegetation Management and fire fuel reduction along evacuation routes

Funding will be pursued after public input with a potential ballot initiative in March of 2020. Without additional resources any efforts to mitigate wildfire threat and risks will be insufficient.

R13. Fully integrate public transit into the MERA communications system without further delay.

This recommendation requires further analysis.

R14. The Transportation Authority of Marin must convene all stakeholders no later than December 31, 2019, to address congestion on escape routes in an evacuation.

This recommendation will not be implemented because it is/they are not warranted or reasonable.

R15. Establish in the form of a Joint Powers Authority an umbrella organization for wildfire planning and preparedness (vegetation management, public education, alerts, and evacuation), funded by a 1/4 cent sales tax.

Grand Jury Report Findings and Recommendations

“Wildfire Preparedness: A New Approach”

January 13, 2020

This recommendation has not been implemented, and will be implemented in the future.