



DATE: 27 December 2018

TO: WRA Board Members
Corporate Officers
WRA General Membership
San Marcos Pass Community Residents

FROM: Michael S. Williams, President-Executive Director

RE: FY 2019 Focus Realignment

As we advance into a new year, it seems appropriate to reflect on our good fortune and success and to understand and appreciate that some of it was just luck and that luck is not a plan.

Without question, 2018 was a good year for the Wildland Residents Association (WRA) and San Marcos Pass communities. The WRA enjoyed a successful membership drive and fund raiser at the Cold Spring Tavern. Our public education radio program “*Community Alert*” entered its tenth year of broadcasting and received additional funding for another two years. Amy Love is working on upgrading our website, streamlining content and making it more user friendly. WRA membership continues to grow as indicated by the proliferation of green yard signs.

Unfortunately, many California communities were not so fortunate and it would be unwise to not heed the lessons to be learned from their experiences. Undoubtedly, we will have our own significant wildfire: It is not an issue of if - but when.

We can see the result of poor preparation, mismanagement of resources and lack of evacuation planning that impacted many of these communities. Yet, we can also see the success of those that were prepared and had effective plans in place. As a community we owe it to ourselves, our families and businesses to learn from the unfortunate circumstances of others. It is also a matter of respect to those who lost it all to avoid repeating the same mistakes.

This next year is going to bring significant changes to federal, state and local fire service agencies including the Santa Barbara area. The county, city and several local districts will have, or now have, new fire chiefs. The director of CalFIRE and many immediate executive staff officers will be new as will the Director of the Governor’s Office of Emergency Services and CalOES fire chief. There will be a new state fire marshal and changes within their management that will impact codes, training and fees. No doubt, many other state and local executives will be changing as the new governor takes office. These changes, coupled with recent wildfire events, will change the direction and priorities of California’s fire service.

With staffing changes we can anticipate a reevaluation of priorities regarding the prevention, management and response to California's wildfires. Local agencies will no doubt give more attention to prevention, mitigation and code enforcement. Moreover, residents should expect significant changes in property insurance practices, fees and coverage availability.

As WRA President, I would like to propose a shift in our own priorities to further focus on planning, preparation and prevention. The "*Community Wildfire Protection Plan*" (CWPP) planning committee has the prevention element well in hand. However, the community needs to become fully engaged in the planning and preparation component if we are to survive what may be a historic wildfire within our own neighborhood perhaps as soon as today. Anyone who doubts the impact of wildfires on local communities need only look at Montecito, Goleta, Malibu, Santa Rosa, Weed, Paradise, Redding, Oakland, and Bel Air to name just a few.

To this end, I would like to propose the following seven efforts for WRA Board discussion, approval and incorporation into this year's WRA community wide programs:

Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) Training: CERT is a 20-hour FEMA training program that is promoted at the state level utilizing local program managers at no charge to participants. The WRA is a member of the Santa Barbara County Executive CERT Committee and already approved for a 2019 class. I am suggesting that the WRA sponsor one complete CERT program to be held locally that would include as part of the sanctioned program a fire evacuation drill. The program would include instructors from Santa Barbara County Fire, Santa Barbara City Fire, City of Goleta, UCSB and City of Carpinteria. Our graduates would also participate in the county wide drill later in the year.

Community Education and Outreach: Rocky Siegel is the WRA CWPP Committee representative and Phil Seymour is our representative on the Santa Barbara Fire Safe Council. Phil's recommendation, based on Page 179 of the CWPP, is for the WRA to proceed with the development of an ongoing educational program for all area residents on structure hardening and maintenance of defensible space. This would be in cooperation with the Santa Barbara County Fire Department and supplement the statewide program, "*Ready! Set! Go!*" The elements of this outreach would include:

- Update *wildlandresidents.org* to include comprehensive and current information on home vulnerability analysis, structure hardening options, defensible space requirements, evacuation planning and preparedness, local emergency plans, and contact information for further inquiries.
- Develop a "newcomer" style outreach program for new area residents that would include written information and face-to-face contact by experienced residents or firefighters regarding fire danger, evacuation planning, defensible space maintenance and structure hardening options. This program would encourage new residents to sign up for emergency alerts.
- Update the WRA *20 Weeks to Preparedness* booklet list of supplies and publish updated local information sheets and pamphlets for distribution at community events, on *wildlandresidents.org* or upon specific requests.

- The WRA should sponsor an annual preparedness workshop for the entire San Marcos Pass community with subjects including long-term fire weather forecasts, updates on fuel management, evacuation, local firefighting, available assistance for structure hardening, chipping program and defensible space.
- Establish a speaker list of qualified local representatives from fire agencies and the scientific community to speak at events regarding wildfire safety issues, structure hardening and fuel management planning.

Evacuation Planning: Currently, evacuation planning is minimal - perhaps more reactionary than planned - at the county and local community level. Historically, the county has utilized telephonic notifications coupled with door-to-door contacts by Search and Rescue and/or sheriff's deputies. These efforts have been enhanced by the WRA utilizing the "*San Marcos Pass Emergency Radio Systems*" (SMPERS AM-1040) and our website: *wildlandresidents.org*. Massive ember showers with ensuing spot fires and people becoming trapped in their vehicles are real threats of profound importance that we as a community need to address. I would like to propose a WRA sponsored community workshop to develop a more formal evacuation plan that includes how to help disabled and medically assisted individuals, children and animal care.

Evacuation and Safety Zones: The CWPP addresses the need for safety zones and assistance for those potentially trapped or that cannot evacuate safely. Locations need to be identified and proper authorization obtained to use them. This effort needs to include a drill to ensure that everyone knows what is involved in reaching them in a timely manner. This would be modeled after the yearly drills conducted at Hollister Ranch. I would also like to obtain grant funding or private donation(s) for a passenger van that could be used to assist in evacuations and during prolonged closures, to transport residents to and from their homes to pick-up medications and check on personal assets. This vehicle could also be utilized by our mitigation teams and for local firefighter support.

Emergency and Public Information Communications: The WRA has established a formal communications group (KI6HFQ) under the supervision of Trustee Phil Brittain. We have signed a formal Agreement with the local Amateur Radio Relay League (ARRL) Amateur Radio Emergency Services (ARES) teams within Santa Barbara County to provide mutual aid assistance as may be required. The intent is to provide reliable, local and updated information during an emergency. We need to explore how to best utilize these resources and how to deploy the necessary assets effectively and efficiently.

UAV Program: Under the leadership of Yesi Thomas and with significant support from FLIR, the WRA has developed a formal Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV or "Drone") program. The primary objective is to provide training and incident support. This can include aerial video of conditions such as traffic, fire activity, community security and reconnaissance. Training and further policy development is continuing but how to best incorporate this technology to support the community is essential. Coupled with our website and SMPERS, the UAV can be an important advancement in our ability to disseminate accurate and timely information based on real time observations.

Local Water Resource Management: Water resources and their management is a profound challenge confronting the entire state. Major changes have already occurred with more in the immediate future that will include small private well systems. The WRA could assist local water

companies and purveyors in appreciating the importance of remaining informed regarding regulations and testing mandates. As a community, we need to have a better understanding of what our total water resources are in the event of an emergency. I would propose a WRA sponsored one day workshop for all local water companies and individual operators to come together and discuss issues of mutual concern.

In conclusion, I do not foresee any of these proposals as being expensive or demanding of new funding except for the purchase of a transportation van. However, this effort would be time consuming and perhaps require some additional community members to participate. These individuals would be involved in the planning and development aspects of building a functioning plan with community participation in testing its functionality. This community commitment would require strong WRA leadership from the directors to ensure that all the San Marcos Pass communities are represented.

I urge each of you to consider the opportunity we all have to be proactive in supporting our community by planning for what we all know is going to happen one day and to be as prepared as we can utilizing the resources and assets we have available. Together, let us avoid the prospects of one day meeting to discuss what we could have, or should have, done to avoid a tragedy.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I welcome your thoughts, comments and concerns.