



# Planning, Funding, and Implementing Fuels Reduction and Wildfire Education in Butte County

## Special Report on the North Complex Wildfire

By Butte County Fire Safe Council

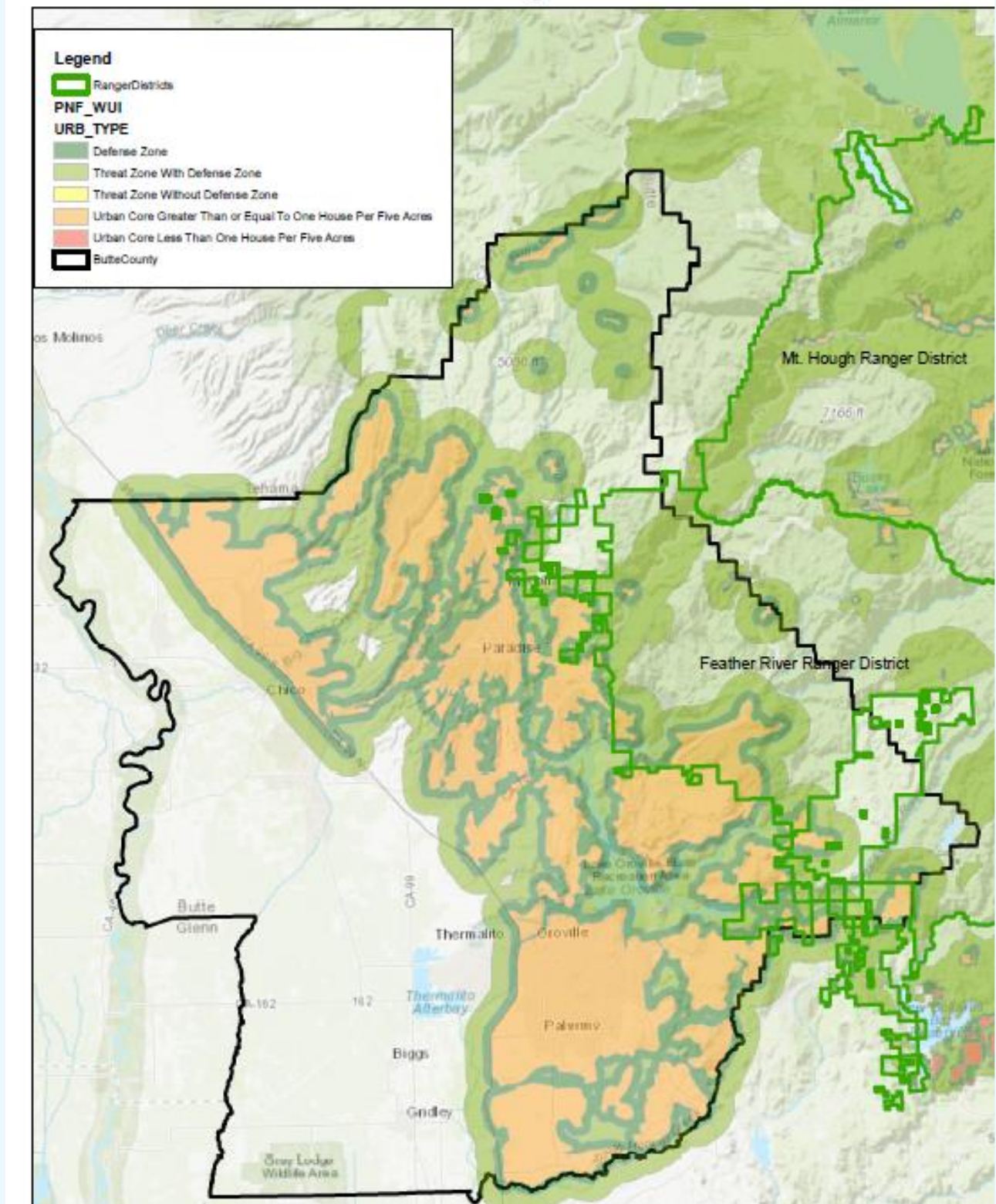
10/7/2020

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*Map of the Wildland Urban Interface in Butte County*



## ***1. Problem Statement***

In the past 20 years there have been 400,000 acres burned and 20,000 structures destroyed due to wildfire in Butte County (Appendix 1). If you calculate an average of 4 people per structure that equals 80,000 people impacted with structure loss alone, not to mention the loss of community resources, air quality, family impacts and forest loss. There are 7 primary ridge tops in Butte County, 4 of those have now burned in the south county, creating a "Fire Scar" area (some with very high frequency of high severity fires) and 3 are unburned creating a "Green" area. Butte County Fire Safe Council (BCFSC) began in 1998 and is a non-profit 501(c)(3) grass roots organization which has been implementing its mission of wildfire education, mitigation and recovery over the past 22 years (<https://buttefiresafe.net/>).

The purpose of this report is to share information about what types of projects have been planned, funded and reasons for delays in implementation throughout Butte County and in the North Complex West Zone area of Berry Creek and Feather Falls. The North Complex Fire began on August 17, 2020 and entered Butte County's WUI on September 8, 2020 with the collective result of a loss in 2,342 structures and 15 lives.

### **How Much Funding Has Been Spent on Wildfire Mitigation?**

The awarded grant amounts for wildfire education and mitigation are less than \$20,000 million over a 20-year period which pales in comparison to the costs of suppression and pending recovery in Butte County. For example, the Camp Fire's recovery cost is estimated at \$15 billion.

Funding for wildfire education and mitigation projects was very limited prior to the release of the California Climate Investments (CCI) Funding in 2018. Once the CCI funds were made available in 2018, the BCFSC was able to bring much needed funding to its WUI communities. The total of private, state, and federal dollars leveraged in the past two years is \$10,098,426 (Appendix 3). This amount is more than was awarded in the prior 15 years combined and was the beginning of having access to funding to truly make a difference in increasing the pace and scale of fuels reduction and forest thinning.

#### **North Complex Zone Example:**

In the two communities most impacted by the North Complex in Butte County; Feather Falls had received roughly \$484,780 in grant funding and Berry Creek roughly \$185,371 prior to 2018 (Appendix 2).

Following the 2018 time period, the BCFSC and its partners had developed a County wide planning approach to project development and were awarded several CCI grants including one for Berry Creek. Unfortunately, no grants were awarded for Feather Falls (Appendix 2). Prior fuels reduction and education efforts in Feather Falls had leveraged a number of prevention

investments and resulted in many successes “Ponderosa Fire Success Story”  
<https://buttefiresafe.net/lessons-learned-success-stories/>.

### **How Many Projects are Listed?**

There is no shortage of planned and listed wildfire safety projects in Butte County. The list of projects submitted to the Sierra East Side Forest Management Task Force identified \$16,180,000 in project need in Butte County. BCFSC worked closely with the Community Wildfire Protection Plan Working Group (CWPP) and multiple partners to have projects listed in three key locations and provided to two funding partners.

#### *Projects Listed Key Locations:*

- Butte County Local Hazard Mitigation Plan (LHMP)
- Butte Unit Plan/CWPP
- Upper Feather River IRWM

#### *Project Lists Provided to Funding Partners:*

- Sierra East Side Forest Management Task Force
- Sierra Nevada Conservancy

These planning documents can be accessed at:

1. LHMP <http://www.buttecounty.net/oem/mitigationplans> page 5-20
2. And LHMP Butte County Fire Safe Council Annex  
<http://www.buttecounty.net/Portals/19/LHMP/2019/Annexes/AnnexKButteCountyFireSafeCouncil.pdf?ver=2019-11-13-124025-960>
3. CWPP [https://osfm.fire.ca.gov/media/11516/2020\\_btu\\_fireplan.pdf](https://osfm.fire.ca.gov/media/11516/2020_btu_fireplan.pdf)

### **What is the Future of Funding?**

The future of grant funding to help with making projects shovel ready implement them has been a roller coaster since the year 2000 when the National Fire Funding began being applied to fuels reduction through CWPP projects across the United States. State funding has ebbed and flowed based on various bonds and the recent CCI funding. There is great uncertainty to funding.

#### Pending Grants

BCFSC submitted a project Notice of Interest to CAL OES/FEMA for a Hazard Mitigation Grant in spring 2019 post Camp Fire:

- The project was invited to submit a full proposal and has been through many iterations of update and totals \$10,549,060.
- A year and half later BCFSC is unclear at this time if the project will be awarded but is hopeful.



Figure 1: Overgrown roadside fuels in Berry Creek, CA

The project would provide for defensible space and fuels reduction within 300' of evacuation routes throughout the WUI.

### **Why is CEQA a Challenge?**

The process to comply with CEQA in the WUI has been very slow and caused many delays to the point of projects burning before implementation as was the case in the community of Berry Creek in the North Complex (Appendix 5 – CEQA Talking Points).

**The current process of obtaining grants and then completing CEQA takes too long. For example, in Magalia it took 5 CEQA documents to complete 270 acres over 10 years.**

This is primarily due to the relationship of funding and compliance. There is a lack of funding and or process to complete CEQA at a landscape level in WUI communities. The result is a piecemeal approach that takes place by applying for individual grants and then completing CEQA for each grant independently. In this piecemeal approach time impacts are extensive as there are separate timelines for; the length of time in getting landowner enrollments, length of document preparation, and length of time in agency review. The hope is that the CAL VTP EIR would help resolve this piecemeal approach issue, however it is not anticipated to be the case as projects are undergoing litigation.

**The best solution will be an exemption for fuels reduction and forest thinning along evacuation routes and around homes.**

**With wildfires burning distances up to 12 miles in a matter of 24 hours we need community level fuels reduction projects which could be around 2,000-6,000 acres. There are 7 primary WUI community ridges in Butte County and therefore 14,000-42,000 acres of CEQA required move at the necessary pace and scale. There is no funding source at the state level to pay for CEQA documents of this size.**

#### ***2. Examples: Challenges in implementing fuels reduction***

- Residents who participate in state funded projects within and extending beyond the 100' zone may need to wait six-to-nine months for a one or two-day fuels project. This is due to the length of the review process.
- CEQA process is not flexible in adding landowners to existing projects. A tremendous amount of work goes into getting neighbors engaged, and some do not sign up until they see the project results. They then often want to participate but can not since permission must be obtained prior to environmental review.
- There is a need to implement larger fuels treatments in the WUI. We need to have environmental compliance met at a larger scale in order to protect each of our communities; ideally projects ranging in size from 2,000-5,000 acres. The Sierra Nevada Conservancy funding has historically

allowed for large scale CEQA planning projects however the funding is very competitive and is only available every few years. And by the time secondary funding is found to implement the project may have burned in catastrophic wildfire as was the case in Magalia.

**Example comparison of regular CEQA compliance and Timber exemption from two funding sources:**

	<b>CEQA Compliance</b>	<b>Timber Exemption</b>
<b>Method</b>	Outreach - Education, Sign Up, Wait for CEQA Compliance	Outreach to 1 landowner - File Exemption, begin work on single property and add-as-you-go
<b>Timeline</b>	3-8 Months of landowner outreach and then 3-6 months of agency review for a total of up to a year + of compliance processing	1-2 Months landowner outreach and the project can start
<b>Example 1: CCI Funds</b>	CCI Funds: Berry Creek 5GG171279	CCI Funds: My Sierra Woods
<b>Example 1: Outcome</b>	Acres Treated = 0 Cost of CEQA: \$30,000	Acres Treated = Roughly 1,500 Cost of Exemptions = Roughly \$18,000
<b>Example 2: PG&amp;E Funds</b>	None	100' Clearance around Homes
<b>Example 2: Outcome</b>	None	Acres Treated = 22 Home hardening completed Cost of Exemptions: \$2,200.00

**How Can CEQA Be Streamlined for Fuels Reduction in the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI)?**

Focus projects and a streamlined environmental review in the WUI along roads and around homes in high hazard areas by allowing an categorical exemption for fuels reduction. Treatments that should be categorically exempt include hand thinned, pile burned, cool season prescribed fire and grazing. Mastication and other equipment might warrant a greater level of review.

## DRAFT – DISCUSSION PURPOSES ONLY

### Example from discussion with James Gallager’s staff

SECTION 1. Section 21080.12 is added to the Public Resources Code, to read:

21080.12. (a) For purposes of this section, a “wildfire defense vegetation management project” means a project to improve forest health and to reduce fuel loading that involves thinning of overgrown brush, of trees that are 16 inches or less in diameter at breast height or 1.37 meters above the average ground level [may which to specify the measurement point for this (i.e. height of the diameter measurement)], or of trees exhibiting signs of disease or pest infestation by mechanical thinning, piling, pile burning, chipping, prescribed fire, cultural fire, or grazing.

(b) This division does not apply to a wildfire defense vegetation management project if both of the following are met:

(1) The project consists of a treatment area that is within 300 feet of structures, such as a home, school, or hospital, or within 300 feet of either side of a roadway. (2) The project occurs within an area designated by the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection as a high, or very high fire hazard severity zone in accordance with Section 51178 of the Government Code or Section 4202.



*Figure 1: Cattle grazing in Plumas National Forest before and after the North Complex fire. Photo courtesy of Dave Daley.*

### 3. Supporting Information

#### Appendix 1.

#### Large fires within Butte County between - 1999 & 2020

Date	Fire Name	Community	Acres	Structures
7/1/1999	Lightning Complex	Various	33407	17
9/19/2000	Concow	Concow	1835	16
9/6/2001	Poe	Concow/Yankee hill	8333	133
8/11/2004	Oregon	Cherokee	2030	4
6/10/2008	Ophir	Ophir/Palermo	1600	41
6/11/2008	Humboldt	Paradise/Butte Valley	23344	87
6/21/2008	Camp/Lightning	Concow	57616	119
8/3/2008	Craig	Feather Falls	2001	2
7/29/2015	Swedes	East Oroville	400	16
9/11/2015	Lumpkin	Feather Falls/Forbestown	1042	0
7/7/2017	Wall	East Oroville	6033	98
9/5/2016	Saddle	Paradise/Pentz rd	850	3
8/29/2017	Ponderosa	Feather Falls	4016	54
10/8/2017	Cherokee	Cherokee	8417	3
10/9/2017	La Porte	Bangor	6151	74
9/16/2017	Honey	Paradise	150	0
11/8/2018	Camp Fire	Concow/Yankee/Paradise Magalia	153336	18431
8/17/2020	North Complex	Berry Creek/Feather Falls	77479	865
<b>Totals</b>			<b>388040</b>	<b>19963</b>

#### Appendix 2:

##### A. Summary of Funding Leveraged in Berry Creek and Feather Falls Prior to 2018

Community	Evacuation Plans	Firewise USA Community Status	Wildfire Education Funding Prior to 2020	Funding for Fuels Reduction and Road Side Evacuation Projects	Chipper Program Funding Leveraged (estimated)	Total
Berry Creek	Yes	Yes	\$ 15,371.00	\$ 80,000.00	\$ 90,000.00	\$ 185,371.00
Feather Falls	Yes	Yes		\$ 412,780.00	\$ 72,000.00	\$ 484,780.00

##### B. Summary of Funding Leveraged in Berry Creek and Feather Falls After 2018

Berry Creek	2018 CCI Fuels Reduction Grant	Funded	\$ 836,365.00
Feather Falls	2019 CCI Fuels Reduction Grant	Unfunded	\$ 509,762.00



**Appendix 3: Summary of Funding Leveraged in the past two years**

BCFSC Active Grants September 2018-2020

Grant Agency	Grant #	Budget
USFS	18-DG-11051100-024	\$ 89,090.00
USFS	19-DG-11051100-024	\$ 90,526.48
USFS	20-CA-11051100-026	\$ 200,000.00
Subtotal		\$ 379,616.48
CA Dept. of Forestry	5GG17124	\$ 258,188.00
CA Dept. of Forestry	5GG17125	\$ 599,642.00
CA Dept. of Forestry	5GG17126	\$ 423,519.00
CA Dept. of Forestry	5GG17127	\$ 636,262.00
CA Dept. of Forestry	5GG17128	\$ 143,195.00
CA Dept. of Forestry	5GG17129	\$ 836,365.00
CA Dept. of Forestry	5GG18102	\$ 3,702,029.00
CA Dept. of Forestry	5GG19108	\$ 509,762.00
CA Dept. of Forestry	5GG19109	\$ 509,762.00
CA Dept. of Forestry	5GS16141	\$ 168,075.31
Subtotal		\$ 7,786,799.31
Sierra Nevada Conservancy	SNC846	\$ 325,773.31
Sierra Nevada Conservancy	SNC1024	\$ 499,100.00
Sierra Nevada Conservancy	SNC1126	\$ 100,000.00
Sierra Nevada Conservancy	SNC1225	\$ 100,000.00
Sierra Nevada Conservancy	SNC1236	\$ 439,040.00
Subtotal		\$ 1,463,913.31
Dept. of Water Resources	4600011629	\$ 100,000.00
Dept. of Water Resources	4600013252	\$ 100,000.00
Subtotal		\$ 200,000.00
PG&E	Butte-01 2018	\$ 28,097.06
PG&E	RAP Fuels 2019	\$ 100,000.00
PG&E	Media 2019	\$ 10,000.00
PG&E	Mission Support 2019	\$ 15,000.00
PG&E	CBO Direct 2020 (Media)	\$ 10,000.00
PG&E	Mission Support 2020	\$ 5,000.00
PG&E	Chipper 2020	\$ 100,000.00
Subtotal		\$ 268,097.06
<b>Total Grants</b>		<b>10,098,426.16</b>

## Appendix 4: Project List Submitted to the Sierra East Side Forest Management Task Force April 2020 - \$16,180,000 in project requests

NEPA/CEQA required or completed	FMTF Regions in project area	Part of existing stakeholder group plan? If so, what group?	Part of RFFCP Process	Barriers for completion? If so, what are the key barriers?	Coordinating agencies	Project data format?	Primary contacts for project information - E-mail and phone	Funding Need	Anticipated Start Year	Anticipated Duration (Years)	Data/Project info Private or Public
Needs CEQA	Sierra Eastside	CWPP	Sierra Eastside	no	CAL FIRE - GUS	GIS - Shapefile	[gus.boston@fire.ca.gov]	\$ 200,000.00	2021	3	Public
Needs CEQA	Sierra Eastside	CWPP	Sierra Eastside	no	CAL FIRE - GUS	GIS - Shapefile	[gus.boston@fire.ca.gov]	\$ 200,000.00	2021	3	Public
Completed	Sierra Eastside	CWPP	Sierra Eastside	no	DWR - Kryssy	GIS - Shapefile	Kryssy Mache, DWR, (530) 534-2575,	\$ 1,600,000.00	2021	3	Public
Completed	Sierra Eastside	CWPP	Sierra Eastside	no	BCFSC - Calli-Jane	GIS - Shapefile	firesafe@buttefiresafe.net	\$ 500,000.00	2021	3	Public
Needs NEPA and CEQA	Sierra Eastside	CWPP	Sierra Eastside	no	BCRCD - Wolfy	GIS - Shapefile	"Wolfy Rougle" <wolfy@bcrd.org>	\$ 2,000,000.00	2021	3	Public
Completed	Sierra Eastside	CWPP	Sierra Eastside	no	BLM - Jeremy	GIS - Shapefile	Jeremy Straight, jstrait@blm.gov	NA	2020	1	Public
Completed	Sierra Eastside	CWPP	Sierra Eastside	no	BCCER - Eli	GIS - Shapefile	.edu <egoodsell@csuchic	\$ 600,000.00	2021	3	Public
Completed	Sierra Eastside	CWPP	Sierra Eastside	no	SPI - Ben	GIS - Shapefile		\$ 500,000.00	2021	3	Private
Completed	Sierra Eastside	CWPP	Sierra Eastside	no	BCFSC - Calli-Jane	GIS - Shapefile	firesafe@buttefiresafe.net	\$ 250,000.00	2021	3	
	Sierra Eastside	CWPP	Sierra Eastside	no	BCFSC - Calli-Jane	GIS - Shapefile	firesafe@buttefiresafe.net	\$ 400,000.00	2021	3	
	Sierra Eastside	CWPP	Sierra Eastside	no	BCFSC - Calli-Jane	GIS - Shapefile	firesafe@buttefiresafe.net	\$ 1,000,000.00	2021	3	Public
Needs CEQA	Sierra Eastside	CWPP	Sierra Eastside	no	BCFSC - Calli-Jane	GIS - Shapefile	Calli-Jane DeAnda - firesafe@buttefiresafe.net	\$ 500,000.00	2021	3	Public
Completed	Sierra Eastside	CWPP	Sierra Eastside	no	BCFSC - Calli-Jane	GIS - Shapefile	Calli-Jane DeAnda - firesafe@buttefiresafe.net	\$ 300,000.00	2021	3	Public
Needs CEQA	Sierra Eastside	CWPP	Sierra Eastside	no	BCFSC - Calli-Jane	GIS - Shapefile	Calli-Jane DeAnda - firesafe@buttefiresafe.net	\$ 500,000.00	2021	3	Public
Needs CEQA	Sierra Eastside	CWPP	Sierra Eastside	no	BCFSC - Calli-Jane	GIS - Shapefile	Calli-Jane DeAnda - firesafe@buttefiresafe.net	\$ 500,000.00	2021	3	Public
Completed	Sierra Eastside	CWPP	Sierra Eastside	no	BCFSC - Calli-Jane	GIS - Shapefile	Calli-Jane DeAnda - firesafe@buttefiresafe.net	\$ 500,000.00	2021	3	Public
Completed	Sierra Eastside	CWPP	Sierra Eastside	no	BCFSC - Calli-Jane	GIS - Shapefile	Calli-Jane DeAnda - firesafe@buttefiresafe.net	\$ 500,000.00	2021	3	Public
Completed	Sierra Eastside	CWPP	Sierra Eastside	no	BCFSC - Calli-Jane	GIS - Shapefile	Calli-Jane DeAnda - firesafe@buttefiresafe.net	\$ 500,000.00	2021	3	Public
Need CEQA	Sierra Eastside	CWPP	Sierra Eastside	no	BCFSC - Calli-Jane	GIS - Shapefile	Calli-Jane DeAnda - firesafe@buttefiresafe.net	\$ 500,000.00	2021	3	Public
Need CEQA	Sierra Eastside	CWPP	Sierra Eastside	no	BCFSC - Calli-Jane	GIS - Shapefile	Calli-Jane DeAnda - firesafe@buttefiresafe.net	\$ 500,000.00	2021	3	Public
Need CEQA	Sierra Eastside	CWPP	Sierra Eastside	no	BCFSC - Calli-Jane	GIS - Shapefile	Calli-Jane DeAnda - firesafe@buttefiresafe.net	\$ 700,000.00		4	Public
Need CEQA	Sierra Eastside	CWPP	Sierra Eastside	no	BCFSC - Calli-Jane	GIS - Shapefile	Calli-Jane DeAnda - firesafe@buttefiresafe.net	\$ 700,000.00		5	Public
Needs NEPA and CEQA	Sierra Eastside	CWPP	Sierra Eastside	no	BCFSC - Calli-Jane	GIS - Shapefile	firesafe@buttefiresafe.net	\$ 500,000.00	2021	3	Public
Exempt	Sierra Eastside	CWPP	Sierra Eastside	no	BCFSC - Calli-Jane	GIS - Shapefile	Calli-Jane DeAnda - firesafe@buttefiresafe.net	\$ 100,000.00	2021	3	Public
Exempt	Sierra Eastside	CWPP	Sierra Eastside	no	BCFSC - Calli-Jane	GIS - Shapefile	Calli-Jane DeAnda - firesafe@buttefiresafe.net	\$ 80,000.00	2021	3	Public
Needs CEQA	Sierra Eastside	CWPP	Sierra Eastside	no	BCFSC - Calli-Jane	GIS - Shapefile	Calli-Jane DeAnda - firesafe@buttefiresafe.net	\$ 1,000,000.00	2021	3	Public
Exempt	Sierra Eastside	CWPP	Sierra Eastside	no	BCFSC - Calli-Jane	GIS - Shapefile	holly@sacriver.org <holly@sacriver.org>	\$ 300,000.00	2021	3	Public
Exempt	Sierra Eastside	CWPP	Sierra Eastside	no	BCFSC - Calli-Jane	GIS - Shapefile	Calli-Jane DeAnda - firesafe@buttefiresafe.net	\$ 250,000.00	2021	3	Public
Exempt	Sierra Eastside	CWPP	Sierra Eastside	no	City of Chico	GIS - Shapefile	"Wolfy Rougle" <wolfy@bcrd.org>	\$ 1,000,000.00	2021	3	Public
Subtotal								\$16,180,000.00			

**Appendix 5: New Projects Added to the CAL FIRE Butte Unit/Community Wildfire Protection Plan in 2020**

3,863 new project acres in addition to prior identified projects

Bio Char Community Education and Fuels Reduction Project	P	2020	Education and Fuels	50
Eave/Vent Replacement and Education Project	P	2023	Education	N/A
Camp Fire Hazard Tree Removal - Fuels Reduction	A	2023	Fuels Reduction	100
Upper Ridge Fuels Reduction Project				300
	P	2023	Fuels Reduction	
Upper Ridge Fuels Reduction Maintenance	P	2023	Fuels Reduction	150
Concow/Yankee Hill Fuels Reduction Project	P	2023	Fuels Reduction	100
Concow/Yankee Hill Fuels Reduction Maintenance Project	P	2023	Fuels Reduction	150
Berry Creek Fuels Reduction Project	P	2023	Fuels Reduction	400
Berry Creek Fuels Reduction Maintenance Project	P	2023	Fuels Reduction	50
Butte Meadows Fuels Reduction Project	P	2023	Fuels Reduction	100
Cohasset Fuels Reduction Project	P	2023	Fuels Reduction	182
Cohasset Fuels Reduction Maintenance Project	P	2023	Fuels Reduction	97
Forest Ranch Fuels Reduction Project	P	2023	Fuels Reduction	227
Forest Ranch Fuels Reduction Maintenance Project	P	2023	Fuels Reduction	100
Feather Falls Fuels Reduction Project	P	2023	Fuels Reduction	40
Feather Falls Fuels Reduction Maintenance Project	P	2023	Fuels Reduction	50
Forbestown Fuels Reduction Project	P	2023	Fuels Reduction	330
Forbestown Fuels Reduction Maintenance Project	P	2023	Fuels Reduction	50
Berry Creek Fuels Reduction - CCI Funded	A	2021	Fuels Reduction	300
Forest Ranch Fuels Reduction - CCI Funded	A	2021	Fuels Reduction	227
Paradise Fuels Reduction - CCI Funded	A	2021	Fuels Reduction	200
Fobestown Fuels Reduction - CCI Funded	A	2021	Fuels Reduction	250
Cohasset Fuels Reduction - CCI Funded	P	2022	Fuels Reduction	205
Mt Ida Fuels Reduction - CCI Funded	P	2022	Fuels Reduction	205
Butte County Collaborative - Facilitation	P	2024	Fuels Reduction	N/A
Vegetation Management Plan Town of Paradise	P	2024	Fuels Reduction	N/A
Butte County WUI Programmatic Environmental Impact Report	P	2024	Fuels Reduction	N/A
Forest Health Restoration Planning Tool - Data Portal	A	2024	Fuels Reduction	N/A
Forest Health Management Plan - County Wide	P	2024	Fuels Reduction	N/A
				3863

## Appendix 6: TRAGEDY AND TRIUMPH – A Story from Berry Creek by Joan Carter

There is no question that the earth is in a bad way. Megafires, tornadoes, flooding, hurricanes, and the weather in general are sounding the alarm. It is not that we are having so many more fires, but they are increasing in intensity exponentially. It is Mother Nature calling for help. We must heed the call. We are not helpless; we can mitigate these incidents to some degree and protect our lives as well. But we have to put in the work. We must take this seriously, or what kind of world will we leave for our grandchildren. Will there be a habitable world at all. TAKE HEED, please.

I work for the Butte County Fire Safe Council; we are on the front lines of preparedness and education. We may not be firefighters in the real sense, but we are the silent fighters behind the lines. Since I joined the organization, I have been involved in forest clearing, vegetation management, defense planning, and community organization. We have been looking at the first steps in communication, getting out the word in an active fire. We were planning on installing sirens, recommissioning the radio station, getting 2-way radios and neighborhood operators through the CERT program, a telephone tree manned by Firewise captains in each area, and a 1950's style knocking on doors. All were in progress, but the fire would not wait for us. What it did show me was what would work and what would not. Early warning can be done by area captains, some of whom were out of the area, but this takes hands. When people are packing up, they don't have time to take cell phone calls or to make them. Landline phones are stationery and in our case the message machines were not working because PG&E had our power off. This meant



Figure 3: Joan Carter, BCFSC Field Coordinator and community member of Berry Creek, CA.



Figure 4: Example of fuel loads in Lake Madrone, Berry Creek.

the wells were out if you didn't have a generator. In the case of a freight train fire the picture changes. Some people got a warning about 1pm on 9/8/20, most of us got a "get out now" at 3:15pm. Since we have lived in Berry Creek, we have had three evacuations in the 5 years with fires all around us. Unless you experienced the fire of 2008, people were skeptical. I was worried about time, as many I called said "we will leave when we see the flames". NOT GOOD. I called a buddy at CalFire and he told me "get out now". That was all I needed to hear. I called my neighbors and said this is the real deal, do not dally. We have had fires all around us, so I had packed up precious things a few weeks ago. I had meds, some pictures, jewelry already packed. I also pack up my Indian pots at the beginning of the fire season every year. We have a safety deposit box for our important papers just so we don't have to think about them. Still people thought they could fight the fire as they may have

done in the past. They had never encountered this kind of beast - thousands of degrees, roaring through the treetops at breakneck speed. Not just burning but disintegrating every object in its path. My house might have been saved, as I had cleared more than my 100-foot defensible space radius and hardened the house. The 10 acres of jungle right across the street was a different story. As it was, the house was gone but I had more viable trees on my 5 acres, surrounded by Hiroshima on all sides. These trees have a good chance of making it. That means a lot to a tree lover like me. I moved to Berry Creek to live surrounded by Madrones and Sugar Pines hundreds of years old. I hope my old friends are alive. Three of our human neighbors are dead, not sure about the fourth. Their son took their only vehicle into town, leaving them with no escape. When he tried to return, he could not get to them. They were found on the way to a nearby pond. Someone called the Sheriff to do a welfare check on them but told them if the truck was gone, they had gotten out. No so. The Sheriff did a drive by but didn't knock. Another neighbor stayed to fight the fire and was burned severely. Not sure of his prognosis. Every fire has a story to tell. Stories of tragedy and stories of triumph. We get to score some points for our side.

Much of the fuel reduction work that the Butte Fire Safe Council was able to accomplish in conjunction with CalFire did save lives and property as well as key parts of the forest. The clearing below Kelly Ridge kept the fire from them. A great deal of clearing and prescribed burns saved parts of Forbestown and Loafer Creek. It also contributed to swift evacuation. We were just about to start clearing 100 feet on each side Bald Rock Road and 300 feet on each side of



Figure 2: Map of Berry Creek, CA

Rockerfeller, impeded by months getting CEQA approval (environmental), when the fire took its toll. Still early evacuees found the roads passable. Road clearing by Caltrans helped. This same vegetation management grant saved several homes in the Lake Madrone Area. Even 2-year-old dozer lines above Berry Creek, on Bloomer Mountain and above Brush Creek slowed it a bit. A comprehensive statewide vegetation and forest management plan is also in the works. A coalition of Fire Safe Councils, CalFire and other state agencies, colleges, private lumber companies, and other stakeholders are meeting to come up with the best ideas from all disciplines. This will not only focus on WUI (Wildland Urban Interface) areas but all areas of forest health. The trees are the lungs of the planet. We must turn the tide of our destructive ways and give our grandchildren a vibrant, healthy earth to live on. If the planet dies, we all die, there is no alternative.

So, amongst all the disaster are images of strength, compassion, and community. The slate is clean now. What we do with it is ours to write. Keep the brush down, save the viable trees, replant native trees and plants, be thankful to be alive to create a future, share your story so others can benefit from your experience. Keep the faith and start now to rebuild zip code 95916.