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Little Chico Creek neighbors create Fire Safe Council due to high fire danger

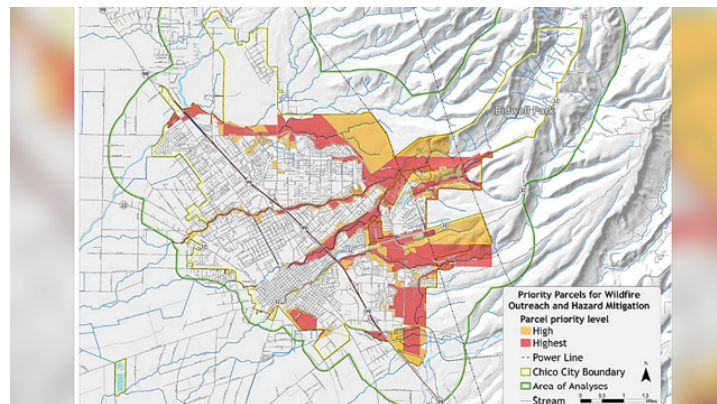
By: Tori Apodaca
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CHICO, Calif. - A report from the City of Chico has identified neighborhoods most at risk for wildfires. The document is called the Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP). It identifies the parcels at highest priority for wildfire outreach and hazard mitigation.

The report noted possible scenarios of special concern including a fire starting in Little Chico Creek Canyon around Stilson Canyon and spreading to the southwest, west of Marsh Junior High School and into the El Monte neighborhood.

According to the report, another scenario fire could also spread from Stilson Canyon toward the Picholine neighborhood.

This does not come as a shock to neighbors in this area as they have been on high-alert since the 2018 Camp Fire. Due to the fire danger, the community there created its own “Little Chico Creek Fire Safe Council” in 2020.



Chairman of the Little Chico Creek Fire Safe Council, Tom McClain, told Action News Now how important this group is to the neighborhood.

“Several of us neighbors got together kind of impromptu, and realized we needed to be more proactive about keeping our neighborhood from catching fire and mitigating the risk of fires,” McClain said.

The neighborhood was evacuated in 2018 during the Camp Fire. McClain said it was a big scare since the fire nearly reached E. 20th Street.

“Surely there will be more fires,” McClain said. “There is no reason there wouldn’t be.”

The Little Chico Creek Fire Safe Council draws its boundary lines from Humboldt Road to East 20th Street. It includes about 900 homes on the east side of Bruce Road, to the Diversion Dam near Stilson Canyon.

This exact area is highlighted as an area of high priority in the CWPP. A lot of Stilson is county land, so mitigation there will require the city and county to work together to reduce fire danger.

"I'm sure the other neighborhoods on this side of Chico are delighted to be identified as high-fire risk, but that does not automatically lessen your risk," McClain said. "It merely identifies the area that needs some kind of treatment whether that be vegetation management or home hardening."

McClain told Action News Now the group has been going door to door around his neighborhood educating people about how to fire-proof homes.

The Little Chico Creek Fire Safe Council is currently trying to apply for grants to start projects.

They really want to bring goats into the area to graze on all the fire fuels.

"Basically Bruce Road to the Diversion Dam has grass and brush in the creek channel and along the creek," McClain said. "If we could manage the vegetation and bring a goat herd in there that would be a big start and a big help."

Chico Fire Chief Steve Standridge told Action News Now his department has been doing controlled burns in areas identified in the 2021 Vegetation Fuels Management Plan.

This plan does not list any projects for the area of the Little Chico Creek that the Fire Safe Council was established in.

The 100-page CWPP does reaffirm the Vegetation Fuels Management Plan plus draws attention to over 3,000 areas where brush cutting and mowing is critical.

One of the big strategies the plan also highlights is education. This means Chico Fire is going into high-risk neighborhoods to teach people how to harden homes and maintain a defensible space.

It would also mean the city could continue to seek funding for things like weed abatement.

The report also lays out several potential policy shifts and preparedness upgrades to prevent catastrophic wildfires.

To see the full CWPP Draft click [here](#). Chief Standridge said they are taking community feedback on the plan until August 1. They then will create a final draft to present to the city council at a future meeting.

Tori Apodaca

Tori Apodaca joined the Action News Now team in February 2021 as a reporter. Reach out to Tori with story ideas at 4news@actionnewsnow.com.