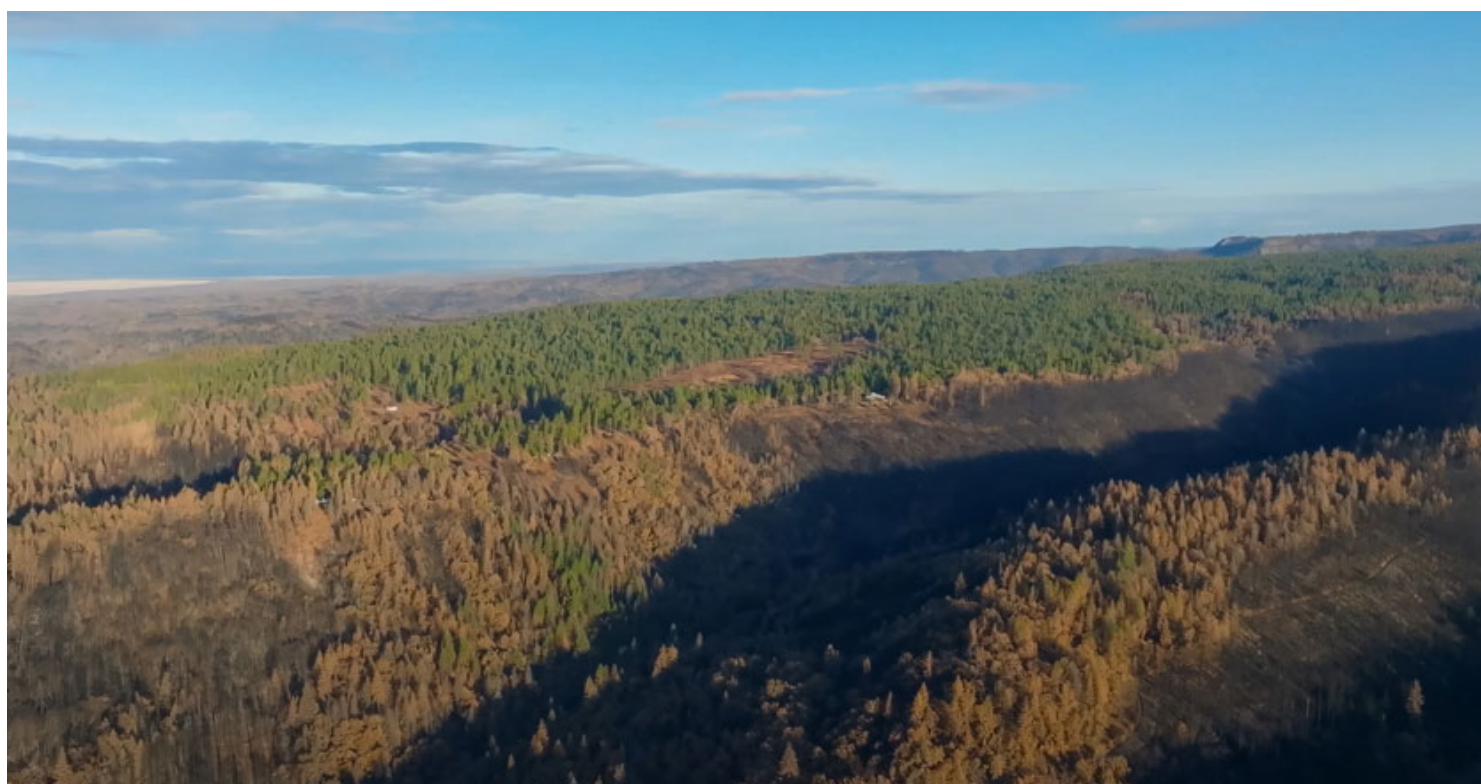


# SNC-funded fuel treatments protected Butte County communities from Park Fire

Jan 7, 2025 | PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS



Unburnt trees form a green island around the town of Cohasset within the Park Fire burn scar. Firefighters were able to protect the town thanks to a network of fuel breaks completed by the Butte County Fire Safe Council (BCFSC) with support from the SNC, CAL FIRE, and others. *Credit: BCFSC.*

The 2024 Park Fire burned over 450,000 acres and destroyed more than 700 structures. It was both the largest and most destructive wildfire in California in 2024. The Sierra Nevada Conservancy (SNC) has supported a network of fuel breaks constructed around Butte County communities that helped to prevent even more tragic results.

# Cohasset & Forest Ranch protected from fire

The Park Fire ignited the afternoon of July 24, and fueled by record-breaking heat, strong winds, and dry fuels, grew to nearly 45,000 acres in nine hours. The fire's rapid growth threatened Cohasset and Forest Ranch, foothill communities just northeast of Chico, and caused a series of evacuation orders, impacting thousands of residents.

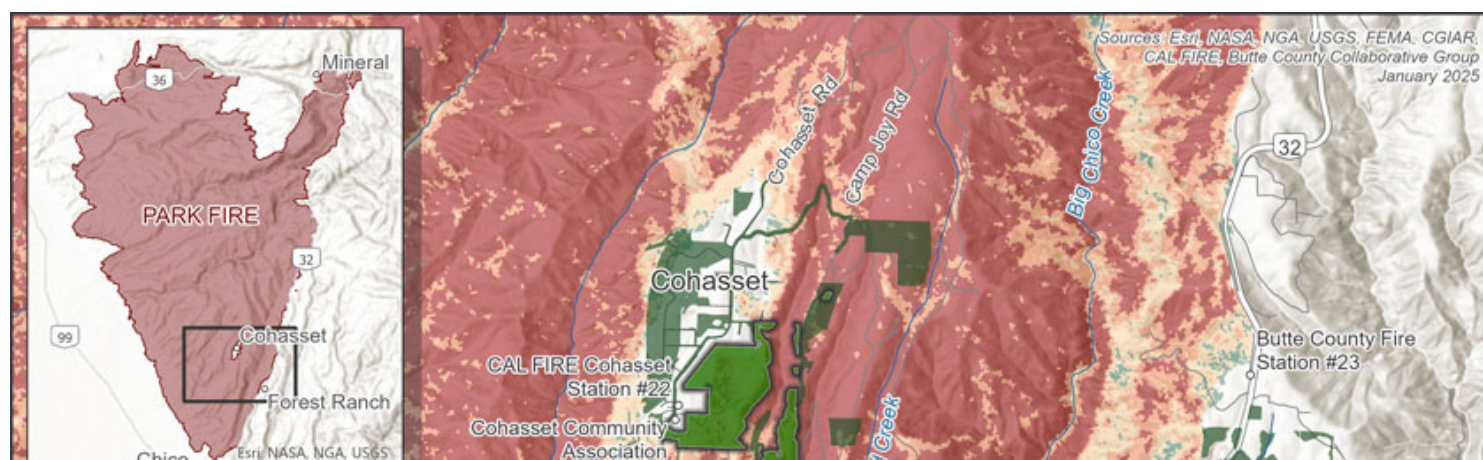
This area of the Sierra-Cascade, Butte County and the surrounding region, has endured multiple large, damaging, and deadly fires in recent years, beginning with the tragic 2018 Camp Fire. Thus, in the early hours of the Park Fire, many feared the worst — more towns and lives would once again be lost in a part of California that has already suffered so much.

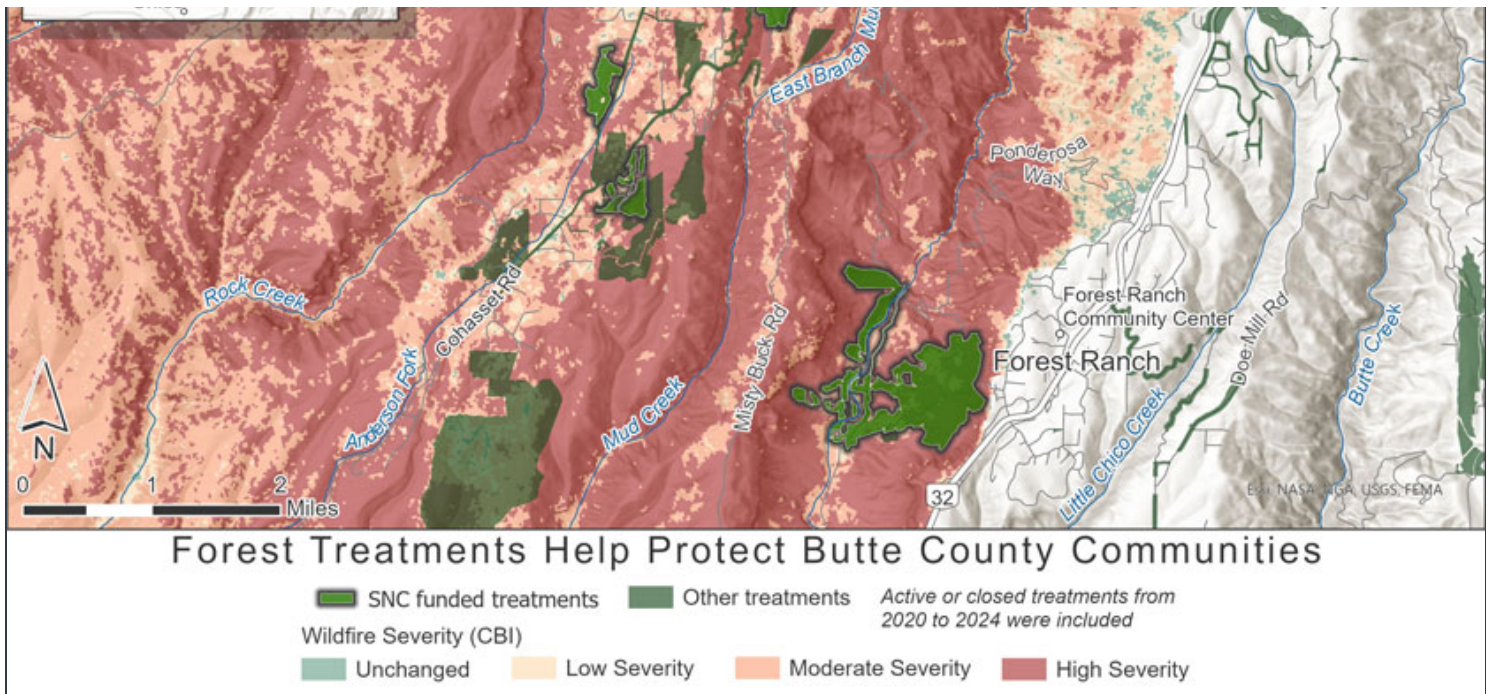
But the worst-case scenario was avoided, and did not materialize.

While many homes and structures were still lost, the damage didn't include entire towns. Firefighters kept the blaze out of the heart of both Cohasset and Forest Ranch and held a vital containment line on State Highway 32.

Green islands around Cohasset and a green wall of live trees at Forest Ranch mark pockets of resilience and reasons for optimism in this part of the Sierra-Cascade that has endured deadly wildfires in recent years.

These forest-restoration and wildfire-protection successes were built on years of collaboration between the Butte County Fire Safe Council (BCFSC), private landowners, and state funders like the SNC and CAL FIRE.





Strategic forest treatments and fuel breaks by the SNC and other agencies helped protect the communities of Cohasset and Forest Ranch.

## Funded by SNC, the BCFSC spearheads key work

The BCFSC and the SNC have been working together for over a decade to make local communities and landscapes more resilient to fire.

Early efforts resulted in [pockets of resilience during the catastrophic 2018 Camp Fire](#), saving a school and neighborhood. Recent increases in state wildfire resilience funding have allowed the BCFSC, with help from SNC and others, to put in place more comprehensive protections around Cohasset.

The SNC's involvement around Cohasset began in 2020 with an SNC planning grant called the Cohasset Watershed Forest Resilience Project. That project created a [3,750-acre forest management plan for Cohasset](#) and completed environmental permitting for fuel-reduction treatments on nearly 7,000 acres of privately owned lands, including much of the defined management area. Two years later, thanks to the historic wildfire funding included in the California Budget Act of 2021, the SNC was able to provide funding for completion of 630 acres of fuels treatments called for by the plan, much of which was completed prior to the start of Park Fire in July 2024.

The BCFSC worked closely with other funding agencies, including CAL FIRE, to complete other components of the forest-management plan, and layered these defensible space protections with home hardening and chipping programs. Together these efforts gave Cohasset residents and emergency responders the tools they needed to protect lives and property.

## Fuel treatments slow fire in multiple locations

One place where SNC-funded treatments were instrumental was in the canyon below Maple Creek Ranch. There, treatments slowed the Park Fire as it climbed out of the canyon, buying residents crucial hours to evacuate and providing firefighters time to deploy suppression resources.

“And, so, when the fire came up, it did exactly what we had expected it to do. It still burned pretty high severity because of the rate of the fire, but the fact is the fuel treatments worked to slow down the fire.”

Jim Houtman — Director of Forest Health, BCFSC

A STORY OF RESILIENCE: The Park Fire, the Community of Cohasset, and Collabor...



Butte County Fire Safe Council video explains how fuel treatments near Maple Creek Ranch helped firefighters prevent the Park Fire from entering Cohasset from the south.

On the north edge of Cohasset Ridge, another SNC-funded Butte County Fire Safe Council project provided an anchor point for suppression activities that prevented the fire from encroaching into Cohasset from the north.

“That’s where they came back and made a stand with this dozer line and then they were able to put retardant on there and keep it out of these homes, and that’s what started basically the left flank that goes around the town of Cohasset and protects that.”

Jordan Hale — Battalion Chief, Battalion 4, CAL FIRE



Structures remain undamaged along a ridge near Cohasset. Firefighters were able to effectively battle the Park Fire from this location, creating a left flank on the fire by utilizing fuel-treatment areas,

ultimately protecting the community.

## Forest Ranch and watersheds also protected

The BCFSC and the SNC used a similar playbook to create a more defensible landscape near Forest Ranch. In 2019, the SNC funded the fire safe council to complete the Big Chico Creek Forest Management plan. Completed in 2022, the plan covers nearly 8,000 acres and identifies approximately 1,500 acres for thinning and prescribed fire activities.

The BCFSC was busy executing its plan, with funding from two additional SNC grants and other sources, when the Park Fire ignited. Although not all treatments were completed, firefighters credited the fuels work by the BCFSC, CAL FIRE, Sierra Pacific Industries, and others with their ability to hold fire lines at Highway 32.

As a result, they were able to save much of the town of Forest Ranch and prevent the Park Fire from spreading into the Little Chico Creek and Butte Creek drainages.

“That fuel break along Highway 32 was instrumental...there’s no way we would have held (the fire) without it, so that was a really good demonstration of what a little bit of work can do and how much it can buy us.”

Jordan Hale — Battalion Chief, Battalion 4, CAL FIRE

#ParkFire - Success Story - Fuel Break Highway 32 near Forest Ranch



CAL FIRE video explains how the fuel break along Highway 32 that was created through the efforts of the Butte County Fire Safe Council, CAL FIRE, SNC, Sierra Pacific Industries, and others allowed them to stop the forward progress of the fire.

## State investments in Butte County pay off

The 2024 Park Fire burned over 450,000 acres and destroyed more than 700 structures. It was yet another megafire that destroyed California homes and degraded treasured landscapes.

Even so, if not for a network of fuel breaks and other forest treatments in Butte County created by local leaders, like the BCFSC, in partnership with state entities like SNC and CAL FIRE, it would have almost certainly been far worse.

Much of the network of fuel treatments around Cohasset and Forest Ranch are being planned and implemented with funds from state budgets that allocated historic amounts of funding to community wildfire resilience between 2021 – 2023. That no lives, or entire towns, were lost to the Park Fire shows that strategic investments in community wildfire defense projects can work.

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### More Project Highlights

[← Landscape grant pilot update: HELP at work in Crystal Basin; other areas ready for funding](#)

