

Concept Proposal: A network of UC Fire Advisors

California needs coordinated fire extension

...to save lives and protect forests, agriculture, food, and other vital resources

UC Cooperative Extension (UCCE) is uniquely positioned to:

- Provide a **point of connection** for landowners, agencies, local governments, and community members to work together toward fire resilience;
- **Lead research** to inform strategic fuels management and policy efforts throughout California;
- Provide critical resources to enhance community wildfire planning, daylight best practices on community and state levels, and **build community fire adaptation and resiliency throughout California.**



Why invest in UC?

1. UC has 100+ year **track record of innovation** that breaks down barriers and builds relationships. UC Division of Agriculture and Natural Resources (ANR) is uniquely situated to connect the latest science and policy to public and private land managers, local governments, landowners, fire safe councils, resource conservation districts, and others. In the 1930s, UC organized the volunteer fire departments throughout the state and taught Californians how to fight fire.
2. UCCE advisors are **trusted experts** embedded in county government who have close working relationships with county and planning and building staff, planning commissioners, and boards of supervisors who have direct influence over local planning decisions.
3. **A bridge between communities:** UC ANR is in every county in California. It can connect communities, share ideas and innovation, and use its network to deliver high-quality information throughout the state.
4. UC ANR has **a network of delivery** and thousands of volunteers who can be empowered with the latest information about fire preparedness, fire safe landscaping, and home hardening. No other organization has an equivalent network of Master Gardeners, 4-H, or Master Naturalist volunteers.
5. UCCE is currently leading the charge in **building capacity for prescribed fire** and empowering communities to reduce fuels, restore ecosystem functions, manage invasive species, and improve habitat and forage.

University of California Agriculture and Natural Resources



“UC Cooperative Extension advisors have been critical partners in the development and expansion of practical solutions to challenging problems. For example, they have facilitated partnerships and trainings that enable us to use prescribed fire to reduce fuels, manage invasive species, and make our landscape more resilient.”

—Dina Moore, Humboldt County Livestock Producer



Fire Advisor Pilot Program- Phase 1 2019-2024

Staffing: The pilot program would start with the 2019 legislatively appropriated \$1 million-dollar investment. This would support 1.5 advisors for 4 years of program delivery. The program would support ½ of the existing grant funded fire advisor serving 4 northern counties. An additional advisor would be hired and located in central or southern California (e.g., ANR in Davis, South Coast REC). An option is for ANR to fund a Specialist to oversee the program and have the person located at an ANR Research Extension Center (e.g., Hopland REC). The specialist would connect UC campus resources to the county-based advisors, similarly to what has been done successfully in the field of agriculture for the last 50 years and through specially funded programs such as the Integrated Pest Management (IPM) and the Integrated Hardwood Range Management Program (IHRMP). As additional funding becomes available, the program would expand and bring a network of advisors to county offices and specialists to campus. As the program expands a committee with expertise in fire and outreach methods could be created to advise the program.

Phasing: This would initially be a pilot program. The expectation is that the coordinating specialist would help develop and bring in extramural funds to expand the program over time.

Locations: The budget includes resources for these people to work in county extension offices and Research Extension Centers (RECs). Advisors will be county-based with multi-county assignments, which is typical for UCCE advisors. We expect the fire advisor programs to vary based on the needs, issues, and interests of the regions where they are based; in southern California, community planning and wildland-urban interface issues will be most important, while in northern California, fuels management and prescribed fire will be more of a priority

Impacts: The program would directly engage county and city governments, land planners, environmental groups, non-profit organizations, federal and state agencies, foresters, fire safe councils, CAL FIRE, and the public in ways that reduce California's social and ecological vulnerabilities to wildfire. There are many agencies and organizations working on fire-related issues, and there is significant funding available for fuels treatments and fire mitigation, but **there is currently no coordinated research and outreach program around fire in California**. This UCCE Fire Advisor program will fill an important niche, providing critical capacity, coordination, and science-based momentum for an accelerated approach to California's fire problem.

Costs: \$1,000,000 supports 1.5 advisor positions that include salary + benefits, travel, and a supply budget

Northern CA Advisor 0.5 FTE \$66,000 annually (+\$16,500 in overhead) for 4 years

Southern CA Advisor 1.0 FTE \$115,000 annually (+\$29,500 in overhead) for 4 years

Who works with California landowners and residents?

Californians have the benefit of working with a diversity of support organizations. Many organizations are doubling down and prioritizing their efforts to help address the fire challenges and fuels management issues. However, not every organization is present in every community or has equivalent skills. In order to help California become fire adapted and resilient to wildfire, all of the organizations that work with landowners should be elevated and recognized for their unique contributions. **California will more effectively solve fire challenges when all support efforts are strong, collaborative, and sufficiently funded.**

The following summary provides a brief snapshot of the roles, skills, and limitations of key agencies and organizations:

CAL FIRE has Forestry Assistance Specialists that help landowners with technical, financial, and educational assistance. These foresters administer 1) the California Forest Improvement Program (CFIP), which is a cost share program to help landowners with forest management planning, reforestation, site preparation, thinning, and wildlife habitat improvement projects; and 2) the Vegetation Management Program (VMP) to help manage fuels and improve rangelands through a variety of treatment approaches. With CAL FIRE's regulatory and fire suppression role, they can have difficulty accessing some communities and rely on partners to fulfill the research and monitoring aspects of their work.

Resource Conservation Districts (RCDs) are special districts of the State of California, set up to be locally governed agencies with their own locally appointed or elected independent boards of directors. California RCDs implement projects on public and private lands. The focus of each RCD is unique to the conditions and interests of their boards. The RCD network includes 98 special districts serving rural, urban, and suburban communities across the state. Many have a focus on soil and water conservation, and some have developed skills in forestry and fuels reduction. They are well positioned to help landowners implement projects and contracts within their jurisdictional areas; however, the priorities and strengths of the RCDs vary by location. RCDs are common users of UC technical resources and often partner with UC to help evaluate the effectiveness of their efforts.

Fire Safe Councils (FSCs) are common throughout California. Each community fire safe council seeks to plan and manage fire prevention projects and be able to acquire grant funding to accomplish their objectives. FSCs are local in scale and can be as small as a neighborhood or homeowners' association or as large as a county. There is a California Fire Safe Council that seeks to provide overall coordination and guidance. FSCs can also help provide a framework for fire coordination and share fire safety information, assess fire risk, set fire protection priorities, etc. Staffing is a challenge as FSCs are largely volunteer run organizations. There are also gaps in FSC coverage throughout California. FSCs are common users of UC information.

UC Cooperative Extension Advisors are present throughout California and help build stronger and resilient communities through their leadership and technical skills in natural resources, agriculture, and community health. The UCCE network is embedded in county government and connects the research programs of the University of California to local communities. As trusted long-term partners, UC ANR provides educational delivery that empowers landowners and residents at every level. UC ANR evaluates and develops practices, disseminates new research and innovations through trainings and guidance documents, provides coordination and capacity for local and state-level collaborative efforts, and helps landowners and agencies overcome policy barriers. UC ANR has an existing network of Registered Professional Forester and Certified Rangeland Managers able to help navigate environmental compliance and permitting needs, and it is well positioned to provide similar levels of guidance, expertise, and coordination on fire topics throughout the state.



UC Advisor talks with CAL FIRE and landowner about invasive grasses that can be managed with Rx fire.