

Forest Stewardship Education Newsletter November 2025

Before You Buy Forestland, Part 2

Greetings from UC ANR

Whether you're considering moving to the forest, are a recent transplant to the forest, or have been a long-time resident, learning how to live with fire is a never-ending journey.

We're excited to share with you some lessons from new and lifelong forest landowners in our next webinar in the Before you Buy Forestland webinar series. In this session, we will discuss considerations for evacuation planning and how to prepare your home and property for wildfire, including one of my favorite topics: how to return fire to your land in a safe and ecological manner.

We recognize that landowners have many more questions about fire than what we could possibly answer in an hour and a half webinar! The remainder of this newsletter hopes to answer some more of the questions that we heard new forest landowners wished they had known before purchasing property. If you still have questions, please don't hesitate to reach out to your local UCCE office for additional resources! That's what we're here for!

If you missed the first webinar in our Before You Buy Forestland Webinar Series focusing on forest stewardship, you can view it at the link [here](#).

We hope to see you at our upcoming webinar,
Alison Deak, UC ANR Fire Advisor

Understand your fire risk: Mapping tools you can use

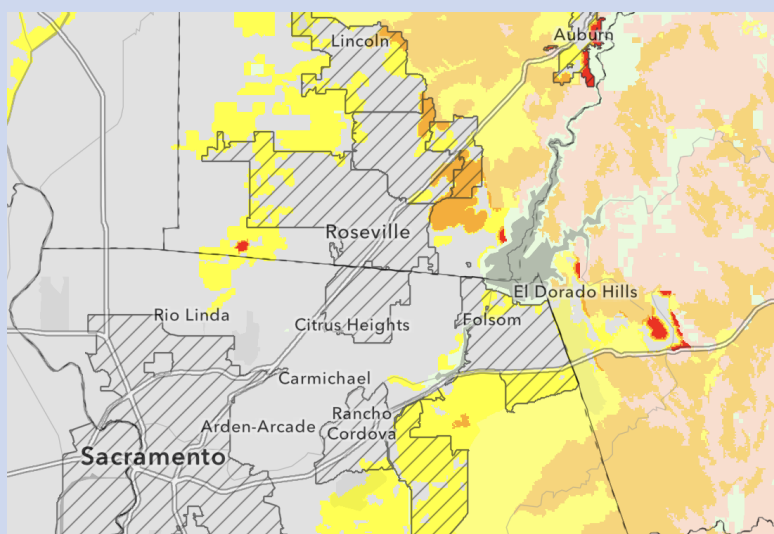
Many areas of California are considered to have high fire hazards. If you are a new homeowner or are considering buying property in a high fire hazard severity zone, this may have been or will be disclosed to you during your home's sale.

California's fire hazard severity zone (FHSZ) maps help communicate the expected intensity of fire behavior. Mapping these zones began in 1981 following the devastating Panorama Fire (1980) in the San Bernardino mountains, which prompted legislation requiring CAL FIRE (then CDF or

the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection) to create and maintain maps detailing where FHSZs exist. These maps are also helpful tools for homeowners to determine where and how to prepare and maintain their homes and vegetation to prevent damage from wildfires

The current FHSZ model used to determine three hazard zones (moderate, high, and very high) are determined by two main elements: the *probability of an area burning* and the expected *fire behavior* under extreme fuel and weather conditions. FHSZs factor in fire history, predicted flame lengths, blowing embers, terrain, local weather for the area that contributes to fire growth, and existing and potential natural vegetation that may fuel fire over a 50-year period. In urban areas, proximity to wildlands and fire hazard of nearby wildlands is also considered.

Click the map below to learn more about wildfire hazard severity zones and use the online map viewer tool to explore your neighborhood's fire hazard.



What does your property's fire hazard severity zone (FHSZ) mean for you? Managing your fire hazards is required under California regulations and local law (e.g., PRC 4291). Routine property maintenance, home hardening, defensible space, fuels management, and additional evacuation planning and preparedness measures are all key to successfully navigating and mitigating wildfire risk to your family and property. Simple low or no-cost fixes include installing one-eighth inch metal mesh screening over vents and regularly clearing flammable vegetation, debris, and clutter from the roof and side of your home. Focusing on the structure first and then moving outward to the property can help simplify your plan of action.

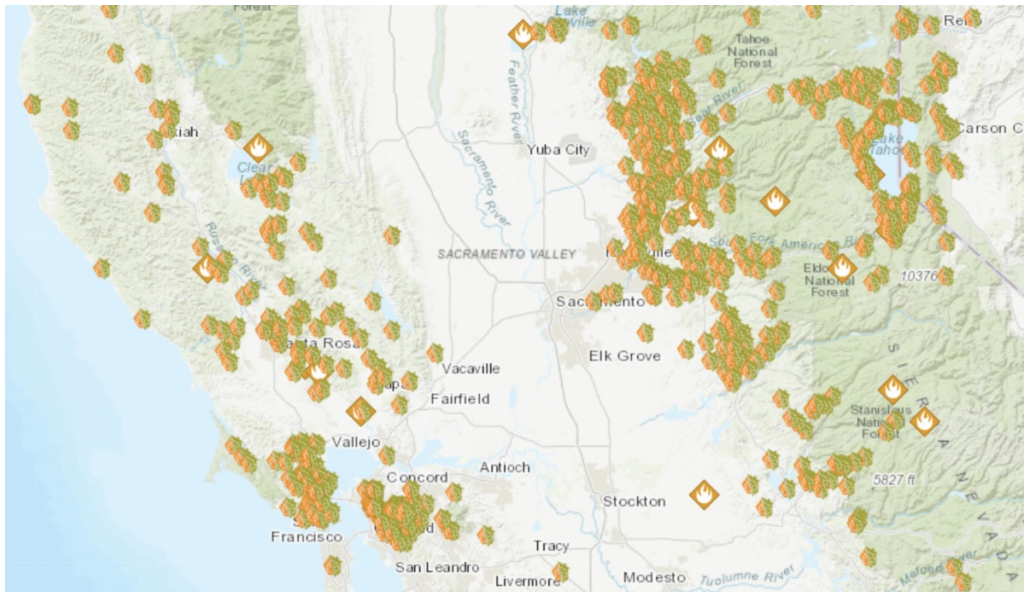
While the FHSZ maps help us understand the potential direct impacts to your safety and property, also consider how to prevent or prepare for other wildfire-related impacts such as public safety power shutoffs and communication failures (i.e., understanding how and where to evacuate if power to cell towers is lost). Consider what amount of emergency supplies, water, and food that you may need in case your refrigerator or well pumps lose power. For information on preparing for evacuations and stocking a go-bag, refer to [CAL FIRE's evacuation guide](#).

without considering mitigation measures, such as home hardening, recent wildfire, or fuel reduction efforts. Risk, on the other hand, is the potential damage a fire may do to the area under existing conditions, accounting for mitigation measures.

Reducing the Vulnerability of Buildings to Wildfire: Vegetation and Landscaping Guidance (Valachovic et al, 2021)

Firewise USA® community recognition

While California requires each individual to mitigate their fire hazards, wildfire doesn't stop at property boundaries. The Firewise USA® Communities model is an approach by the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) to link neighbors in the effort to bring education and teamwork to their neighborhood and reduce wildfire hazards together. Firewise USA® is nationally recognized and California requires insurers to provide fire insurance discounts for certified participating neighborhoods.



Click the above map to explore Firewise communities near you

There is no national wildfire mitigation requirement, and while states like California have led in developing wildfire mitigation policy at the state level, many communities in the country have yet to adopt protective regulations and residents miss out on good wildfire prevention guidance. NFPA provides this guidance through the Firewise USA® site certification process which requires neighborhood fire planning and a minimum investment of work hours and expenses towards improving local wildfire safety.

While Firewise USA® fills a piece of the wildfire safety and home insurance puzzle, there must still be some notable cautions in the sense of security Firewise USA® provides. Firewise USA® does not necessarily mean “fire safe;” the program exists to identify and reduce hazards in a collective way. Other hazards—particularly climate, weather, and terrain features—will still impact fire behavior. However, participating in Firewise USA® means that residents in your neighborhood are developing and practicing lifestyle

habits that support improved fire safety.

Click here to learn more about becoming recognized as a Firewise Community



*Smoke from a prescribed burn in the Sierra Nevada Foothills.
Photo by Alison Deak, UC ANR*

Prescribed burning for fuels reduction

If you are managing a property with multiple acres, you may want to consider if prescribed fire is right for meeting your fuels management objectives. Compared to manual thinning and brush removal, prescribed fire can easily scale to larger areas with little change in costs. Prescribed Burn Associations, or PBAs, often serve this community need by providing experienced support with burns and hands-on training for landowners. [Connect with your local PBA to learn more.](#)

At a prescribed burn, the ‘burn boss’ (aka burn manager) follows a burn plan within a ‘prescription,’ or the window of tolerance the burn can safely take place to meet an objective. Good burns follow checklists, which are similar to or match elements of those used in agency burns, and help foster trust with fire agencies that you will burn using the best methods available.

Connect with your local
Prescribed Burn
Association

Learn about the rules
and regulations
governing prescribed
fire in California

Should I burn? Consider
a Prescribed Fire
Go/No-Go Checklist
Before You Begin



Forest property outbuildings. Photo by Forest Stewardship Workshop Participant



Pile burning. Photo by Forest Stewardship Participant

Additional Resources

- [CDFA Livestock Agricultural Pass Program](#)
- [Livestock Health Post-fire](#)
- [CAL FIRE Animal Evacuation](#)
- [UC ANR Fire Network Wildfire Preparedness Page](#)

Evacuation planning for pets and livestock

When you're planning for evacuations, don't forget about our furry loved ones! Like humans, companion animals also suffer health impacts from wildfire smoke, so use the best practices available to limit pet exposure to unhealthy air just like you would your family. Keep animals inside and protect your indoor air by sealing windows and doors, and avoid using wood stoves, vacuuming, and frying foods.

Plan ahead

- Review existing emergency resources ahead of time from your county Office of Emergency Services (OES) website.
- Read through [disaster preparedness and evacuation guidelines for household pets](#). Build an alternate plan if your local evacuation shelter cannot accept non-service animals.
- Livestock and large animals have special needs during wildfires and evacuations. Learn more about preparing livestock for wildfires and keeping these animals healthy during and after wildfires. For more information about keeping livestock and large animals healthy during wildfires, read below for a Q&A with Dan Macon, Livestock and Natural Resources Advisor, on the [California Livestock Disaster Agricultural Pass Program](#).

Build an emergency kit

- Create a pet go-bag with food, water, medicine, sanitation, first aid, travel supplies, important documents, and comfort items for your animal.

Stay informed

- Keep informed on disaster alerts by signing up to [receive notifications](#) and know your evacuation zone for when the time comes.
- Know where to find your current air quality ([AirNow](#) or [PurpleAir](#)).

"Be sure you have an established veterinarian-client-patient relationship for all your animals prior to any emergency!" - Dan Macon, Livestock and Natural Resources Advisor

Q&A with [Dan Macon](#), Livestock and Natural Resources Advisor in the Central Sierra and the Disaster Livestock Access Pass

The [Livestock Agricultural Pass Program](#) allows commercial farmers and ranchers limited access to their properties located in restricted areas to conduct essential commercial agricultural activities such as tending to their crops or livestock during or following a natural disaster. We asked Dan how this program can be a resource for forest landowners.

Q: How did the Disaster Livestock Access Pass come about?

A: These programs began to develop locally following the Camp Fire and other mega-fires that impacted agricultural operations. Governor Newsom signed Assembly Bill 1103 in 2021, making the program statewide and standardizing the training curriculum.

Pass programs are typically administered by the county agriculture department or the county sheriff's office (often in collaboration with local cooperative extension offices) and require annual training updates and recertification. The pass allows livestock producers (and in some cases, farmers) to enter an evacuation zone (with law enforcement permission) to care for livestock and crops. It typically DOES NOT allow passholders to enter an active fire to evacuate livestock.

Q: Who does this program apply to? I noticed the information on the CDFA website says 'commercial producers'...

A: Each county defines a "commercial producer" – typically a minimum number of animals are required to qualify for a pass. Counties that also provide passes for farmers require some proof of commercial production (a farmers market grower's certificate, a written lease, organic registration,

etc.). The pass programs do not apply to hobby or backyard livestock or home gardens.

Q: Can this program apply to small forest landowners who may have animals for non-commercial reasons? If not, what are their options in a wildfire event?

A: Generally this would not apply to non-commercial livestock owners. Animal control is generally responsible for assisting non-commercial animal owners. Small-scale commercial forest owners could discuss options with local law enforcement or the county agriculture department before fire season.

Q: What would be your top 3-5 tips or BMPs for forest landowners who have livestock (or are considering them) to help them prepare for action in case of wildfire and evacuation.

1. Create a “Go Bag” for your animals – this includes halters, medications, supplemental feed/forage and drinking water for livestock, ropes and/or other catching and restraint tools, euthanasia tools, paperwork (livestock inventory records and transportation slips for cattle), and herding tools (e.g., flags, paddles, boards).
2. If possible, create a “safe zone” for livestock in the event you cannot evacuate (horse paddocks that are devoid of vegetation can potentially serve as safe zones).
3. Be sure you have an established veterinarian-client-patient relationship prior to any emergency!

For more information check out the factsheet [Keeping Livestock Safe and Healthy During Wildfires](#) and Dan's [Wildfire & Disaster Information for Ranchers webpage](#)



After the fire. Photo courtesy of Katie Reidy, UC ANR

After wildfire considerations

Purchasing land after a wildfire can offer benefits such as lower land costs and naturally reduced forest density, but it also requires careful

management planning. Post-fire priorities differ from pre-fire conditions and may include removing dead or hazardous trees, assessing tree mortality, addressing erosion risks, and evaluating road integrity. Landowners should also clarify management goals—such as whether reforestation is a priority or if natural regeneration is preferred.

Wildfires can leave lasting emotional and physical impacts on a community, but they also often bring people together in support and recovery. Neighbors, organizations, and agencies frequently collaborate to plan for post-fire management and future resilience. If you're considering buying land in a post-fire area, it's a good idea to reach out to local groups like Resource Conservation Districts (RCDs), Fire Safe Councils, conservancies, or the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). Learning about available programs and resources can help you find both financial and educational support for managing and restoring the land.

For more information about post-fire management, reach out to UCANR Post-fire Forest Stewardship coordinator, Katie Reidy kkreidy@ucanr.edu

Or [check out the website for post-fire factsheets and resources](#)



*Forest Stewardship Yuba-Nevada Co-hort participants and their CA Tree Sticks
Photo by Ricky Satomi, UC ANR*

For more information on the workshops, and to share with a friend, please visit:

Stewardship:
<https://ucanr.edu/site/forest-research-and-outreach/forest-stewardship-workshops>

Post-fire:
<https://ucanr.edu/site/forest-research-and-outreach/post-fire->

Upcoming Forest Stewardship Workshops and Field Days:

- [Forest Stewardship San Diego 2 Co-hort](#), coming soon in 2026!

[forest-resilience](#)



*Speakers at the Caldor Fire Post-fire
Forest Resilience Workshop field day.
Photo by Kim Ingram, UC ANR*



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