



RESOURCE GUIDE #2

Marin Wildfire Prevention Authority

A Model To Change The Wildfire Prevention Paradigm

www.marinwildfire.org

In October 2017, the conditions that produced the North Bay Fires existed in Marin. Marin simply got lucky and avoided that one spark that leads to disaster. Luck is not a strategy, and the Marin community used this wake-up call to shift the wildfire prevention paradigm from siloed agency plans to a countywide fire prevention effort. This Resource Guide outlines the MWPA’s (i) history and funding, (ii) governance, and (iii) programs. Below are the key attributes for this new collaborative model to effectively advance wildfire prevention initiatives.



Collaborative Countywide Governance & Leadership

- ✓ JPA governance structure with County, cities, and all fire districts.
- ✓ Early coalition building with environmental stakeholders to implement fire prevention efforts in an ecologically responsible way.
- ✓ Elected officials serve as Board of Directors with subject matter expert input from staff on Operations Committee and Advisory/Technical Committees.

Dedicated Funding

- ✓ Passed property tax assessment for 10 years.
- ✓ Generates approximately \$19 million annually.

Public Education Partnership

- ✓ Active communication to residents and businesses about shared responsibility for wildfire prevention.
- ✓ Partner with FIREsafe MARIN, trusted Fire Safe Council non-profit, focusing on wildfire public education with active use of video, training, and resource materials.

Integrated & Holistic Program Focus

- ✓ Integrates wildfire prevention efforts into coordinated and holistic strategy, with programs for: defensible space, home hardening, vegetation management, evacuation, and public education.
- ✓ Formed to develop and implement a comprehensive wildfire prevention and emergency preparedness plan throughout almost all of Marin County. Everyone has a responsibility.



SECTION 1: HISTORY & FUNDING



2017 – Launch the Lessons Learned Committee



In the wake of the 2017 North Bay Fires, the Marin County Board of Supervisors created a “Lessons Learned Committee” with representatives from county government, city/town managers, fire, law enforcement, and land management agencies. The Committee interviewed Sonoma County officials and hosted a public forum to gather community input and preferences. It also inventoried Marin’s existing programs and identified gaps within and across agencies.

The Committee’s recommendations included the creation of a countywide joint powers authority (JPA) to work on cross-jurisdictional fire prevention projects out of reach of most individual agencies. The recommendation was repeated in a subsequent Grand Jury Report.

2019 – Draft JPA Agreement & Partnerships

In 2019, a committee of agency executives and staff was convened to draft a joint powers agreement and a tax measure for the 2020 primary ballot. The JPA was proposed to be funded by \$0.10 / square foot parcel tax to generate approximately \$19 million annually. By the end of year, seventeen agencies joined to form the Marin Wildfire Prevention Authority (MWPA) and Measure C was placed before the voters.

Early on there was a recognition of the importance of the environmental community and ecology with the creation of the “Ecologically Sound Practices” partnership. This group was formed before the election and helped with the Measure C campaign. This coalition of environmental stakeholders, fire agencies and the MWPA continues and drives implementation of fire prevention efforts in an ecologically responsible way.

2020 – Voters Approve Funding with Measure C

With extensive community outreach and education, Measure C passed with 70% of the vote. Measure C provides recurring funding of approximately \$19 million/year for ten years unless renewed by the voters. Measure C revenues are spent in three categories.

- 60% to cross-jurisdictional projects -- wildfire detection & evacuation program improvements, vegetation management/fire hazard reduction, grants management, public education.
- 20% to local agencies for defensible space evaluations and home hardening.
- 20% to community-level wildfire prevention mitigation -- enhanced fire patrols for problem areas, additional fire hazard reduction work, evacuation route parking issues.



SECTION 2: JPA LAUNCH – BUILDING THE ORGANIZATION

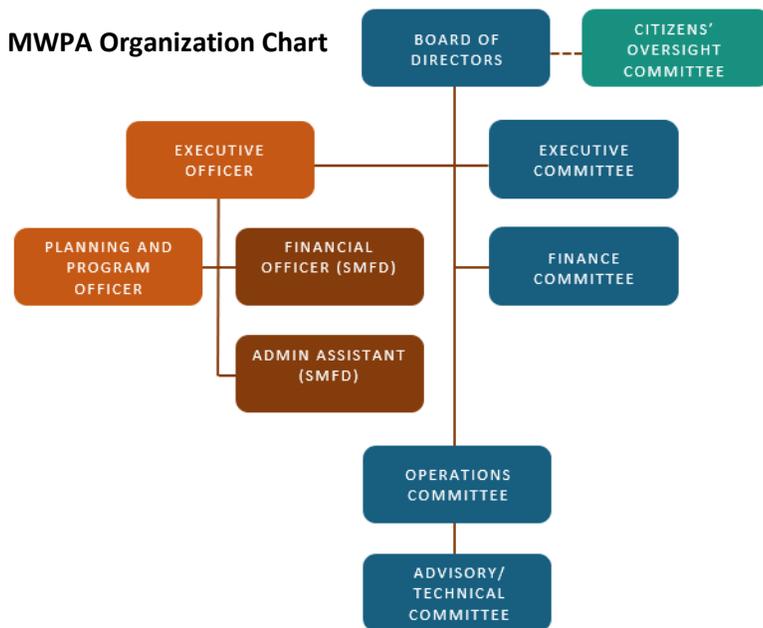
The creation of a new countywide organization was built on existing relationships. All fire agencies, cities and towns organizations were included. FIEReSafe Marin, a trusted non-profit already focused on public outreach, education and Firewise communities, was a key partner. A draft JPA was created before Measure C passed and then was formally approved after.

Seventeen of nineteen eligible agencies joined including seven municipalities and the County forming the backbone of the new JPA. The joint powers agreement was drafted with the following tenets: fair representation, informed decision making, thoughtful distribution of resources, and accountability. The agency’s Board of Directors is comprised of elected officials from the member agencies. Fair representation is promoted through a weighted voting system that promotes consensus building by preventing blocs of agencies from dominating decisions.

MPWA Governance

To inform Board votes, items are reviewed by two staff-level committees, an Operations Committee and an Advisory/Technical Committee; these committees consider the cost-benefit aspects of the activities funded by MWPA. Key stakeholders, such as regional land managers, participate on committees as non-voting members. The joint powers agreement also provides for a strong Citizens’ Oversight Committee that reviews agency decisions and helps communicate the programs and value of the Authority to the public.

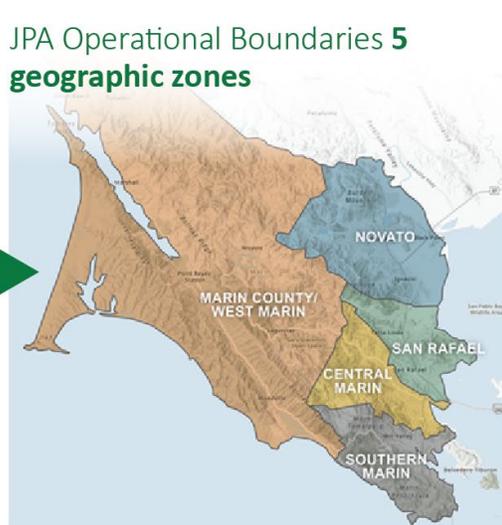
To thoughtfully distribute resources, MWPA is divided into five geographic zones into which MWPA resources are invested as equally as possible. Each zone contains agencies in proximity to one another that share common fire prevention challenges. An early challenge (and success) has been establishing the infrastructure to support member agencies with differing needs and capacities while developing a shared knowledge base of best practices.



17 agencies with different levels of work backlog, available resources, and community support



JPA Operational Boundaries 5 geographic zones



SECTION 3: PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Vegetation Management -- Through multiple strategies (work crews, goats, contractors and machinery), MWPA funds efforts to reduce fuels and help to ensure implementation of the most cost-effective practices for fuel reduction on an ongoing basis. MWPA is creating shaded fuel breaks along the wildland urban interface boundary. These fuel breaks are designed to slow, or even stop, the spread of an average intensity wildfire. They will decrease the intensity of extreme wildfires so residents can evacuate safely, and firefighters can suppress the fire. MWPA is also working with the land management agencies to perform and coordinate vegetation management projects in open spaces. The vegetation management practices are conducted in an ecologically sound manner, which not only lessens the risk of wildfire, but increases the health of forests and environment.

Much focus of the early core work of MWPA is on environmental compliance for vegetation management. The ability of member agencies to navigate the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) varies greatly. By centralizing this work and placing it in the hands of a team of experts, MWPA is preparing compliance documents, best practices guidelines, and training opportunities that will level the playing field and help every member tackle the shared goal of fuel reduction.

Wildfire Detection & Evacuation Program Improvements -- The MWPA implements safety measures that will improve early wildfire detection, warning and alerts as well as improve disaster evacuation routes for organized evacuations.

Grants -- The MWPA provides a local grant program ensuring targeted residents (access and functional needs, seniors, and financially disadvantaged) reduce fire risk of their properties and the greater surrounding community. MWPA is also seeking grants to leverage local investments for wildfire prevention and disaster preparedness programs.

Public Education -- The MWPA provides expert information and assistance to help the public reduce risk, prevent wildfires and be prepared for potential wildfires disasters. MWPA provides funding and partners with FIREsafe MARIN to deliver community wildfire outreach programs.

Defensible Space & Home Hardening Evaluations -- Funding is allocated to expand and enhance defensible space home evaluations to ensure homes meet fire and building codes, as well as education to reduce the vulnerability of a home. This work could be done by the JPA with a shared service model or by the responsible member fire agency. In 2021, the Central Marin MWPA Zone created a "beta test" of an online reporting tool to better inform residents of requirements, hazards, and suggested mitigation measures identified by inspectors. This evaluation may also determine if the property meets state and local requirements for defensible space. In some cases, failure to correct these issues may result in abatement and/or liens. Enforcement actions, if necessary, are the responsibility of the local fire department's Fire Prevention Bureau, not the MWPA.



Defensible Space Chipper Program -- MWPA and FIREsafe MARIN's launched a curbside pick-up chipping program for residents of Marin County that provides at least one curbside pick-up service for each of the approximately 70 Marin Firewise Sites and two additional days of service to each of the 17 MWPA agencies. The program was managed with software that scheduled reservations, mapped efficient routes, estimated pile size, collected photos of all piles chipped, and generated satisfaction surveys which measured program success and popularity. During the first five months of the program, FIREsafe MARIN made 2,478 curbside pick ups, removed 14,766 cubic yards of biomass, and delivered over 2,500 cubic yards of chipped material for conversion to energy (see [2020 Chipper Report](#)).



Local Wildfire Prevention Mitigation -- The MWPA provides local funding to JPA members for specific local wildfire mitigation needs specific to their service area.

Fire Science, Technology & Planning -- Marin has adopted an updated science based [Community Wildfire Prevention Plan \(CWPP\)](#) that is the road map for identifying areas of concerns down to parcel level hazard assessments and contains general project scoping (see [CWPP Story Map](#) for overview). MWPA is using GIS modeling to first identify parcel level hazard assessments. This parcel-by-parcel approach allows MWPA to identify properties with the greatest risk and spend funding wisely. By building the vegetation management programs from the ground up, MWPA makes use of the latest in fire science and ecology.



Association of Bay Area Governments: September 2021
Version 1; Draft 9/29/21 --This Resource Guide was built from the 2021 League of Cities Conference/Western Cities article titled "Changing the Wildfire Prevention Paradigm". It also includes information from MWPA and FIRESafe MARIN web sites.