

**Proposal to Add a Fire Safety Goal to Nevada City Strategic Plan
January 10, 2020**

We, the undersigned, believe that wildfire is Nevada City's greatest public safety risk and suggest that the City Council's commitment to fire safety be reflected in the Strategic Plan.

Three Firewise communities -- Deer Creek Southside, Greater Champion, and Greater Cement Hill -- are particularly at risk as they contain large City-owned tracts within their footprints. Accordingly, these Firewise groups propose adding a fire safety goal and objectives to the City's strategic plan. In order to strengthen the City's preparedness for wildfire.

Nevada City's open spaces are an important part of our town's character and greatly improve the quality of life. We appreciate City leaders, past and present, who have had the foresight to preserve and manage nearly 300 acres of open space that surround the town, including Sugarloaf, Hirschman's Pond, the Tribute and Environs Trails, the Old Airport, and Deer Creek Park. Most were acquired in a different era. Today, with catastrophic wildfire a very real threat, all landowners -- both private and public -- must tend our land accordingly.

We further appreciate the significant fuel reduction work Nevada City has done in the last year, including deploying Washington Ridge CalFire hand crews, working with Firewise Communities in and around Nevada City, hosting a Firewise Town Hall, managing free street-side chipping, rolling out and enforcing a hazardous vegetation ordinance, and fundraising for prescriptive grazing.

Yet extensive areas of City-owned land remain untreated. City staff have told us they cannot address vegetation on some city-owned lots in residential areas without Council approval of additional funding. Much of the City's forest land harbors dense brush, many small, overcrowded trees, and extensive deadwood -- ladder fuels that lead to crown fires. Most of these City-owned lands are within a mile of Nevada City's downtown and residential areas. A fire in these areas could easily drop an 'ember blizzard' on the downtown and residential areas. Conversely, if these open spaces are treated to include [shaded fuel breaks](#), they could serve as buffers between an approaching wildfire and Nevada City.

We recognize that City resources are limited. While some of these objectives are ambitious, we believe they are proportionate to the threat and attainable, especially if approached in an orderly, incremental manner. Residents of Nevada City possess a wealth of abilities and are motivated to improve fire safety; they can potentially be recruited to support the City's efforts. Firewise communities are organized and ready to work with the City. This will require a sustained leadership effort, which we believe must start with the City Council.

We appreciate the opportunity to propose these ideas and look forward to working with you to formulate a stronger Strategic Plan for Nevada City.

Sincerely yours,
Sam Gitchel, Greater Champion Firewise Committee
Teri Voorhes, Deer Creek Southside Firewise Community
Annette Seabury, Greater Cement Hill Firewise Community

Proposed Goal and Objectives

Goal: Protect Nevada City residents, visitors, and structures from wildfire.

Objectives

1. Create a comprehensive vegetation management plan for wildfire mitigation and healthy forests on City-owned properties.

Rationale and notes

- A comprehensive plan would address open spaces, parks and other property within the city limits, and roadsides. It would include:
 - An inventory of City-owned properties.
 - Fuel reduction standards such as tree/shrub density, species and size ratios, limbing height, etc.
 - Timeline/prioritization for initial fuel reduction treatment.
 - Follow up treatment schedule.
 - Removal of non-native invasive species such as broom and blackberry.
 - Replanting with natives when needed.

Doing so would:

- Ensure fuels treatments simultaneously reduce wildfire risk and create healthier, more resilient forests.
 - Establish priorities and direct resources to the areas of greatest need.
 - Strengthen the City's ability to secure grant funding for fuels reduction. Grant funding may be available to create a plan.
 - Help the public understand the City's plans.
- A Progressive Vegetation Management Program was slated for City Council action on March 13, 2019 but action is still pending.
 - A "Fire Hazard Reduction" plan was drafted for Sugarloaf as part of a grant proposal in which Nevada City was a partner. (We have seen a draft but not a final version. Nevada City may have a copy on file.)

2. Develop a long-term funding plan for vegetation management on all City-owned properties.

Rationale

- Funding will always be a challenge. Ongoing maintenance is required to keep lands in a safe and healthy condition.

3. Submit at least one proposal for grant funding of fuels reduction projects on City-owned land.

Rationale and note

- Such funding would jump-start an ongoing fuels management program on City-owned land.
- CalFire and Sierra Nevada Conservancy offer grant funding that Nevada City is eligible to receive.

4. Maintain City-owned properties within the City limits at the same standard as required of private property owners.

Rationale

- The City owns a significant amount of land that abuts residences and businesses.
- By setting an example, the City can inspire residents to act similarly.

5. Conduct a comprehensive review of 2018-19 fuel management activities on City-owned property.

Rationale and note

- A comprehensive evaluation can address the number of acres treated by various methods (grazing, hand crews, etc.), the relative effectiveness of each method, and their practical considerations.
- Understanding the efficacy, cost effectiveness, and practical aspects of fuels treatment methods is necessary for making the best decisions about resource allocation and future planning.
- Improves the City's communication with its public about its progress, plans, and needs.

6. Test the capacity of the City water system to deliver water to multiple hydrants in the event of a catastrophic fire.

Rationale

- Parts of Nevada City's water supply infrastructure are decrepit. Knowledge of the system's capacity for a catastrophic fire scenario would identify potential weaknesses and could help emergency responders plan.

7. Replace wooden street signs and signposts with reflective metal signs and metal signposts.

Rationale

- More visible and fire-resistant signage facilitates smooth evacuation and helps out-of-town firefighters to navigate.

8. Hold a Town Hall meeting on fire-related matters in the spring of 2020.

Note

- Greater Champion and Deer Creek Southside Firewise Communities have volunteered to work with Councilmember Minett to organize this event.

9. Continue and enhance City support for residents' fuel reduction activities.

- Increase Nevada City residents' access to green waste dropoff sites.
- Promote free chipping program.
- Review city imposed fees related to fire safety, such as the tree removal permit application fee, that may be barriers.
- Review discrepancies between Nevada City and Grass Valley Vegetation Ordinances regarding (a) responsibility for tree limbs that extend across a property line and (b) Fire Department's ability to place a lien on property owners who violate the ordinance.

10. In all the above processes, make information available to the public and establish mechanisms for resident input.