

Strategic Planning Framework Board Update



Northern Sonoma County Fire Protection District Board Meeting
April 30, 2023

Strategic Plan Vision – Updated (5-08-23)

The Northern Sonoma County Fire Protection District now encompasses 263,727 Acres (412 square miles), 26% of the County's land area. The territory is largely forest and wildland subject to high and extreme wildfire hazard, is the center of the County's thriving wine industry, attracts a million visitors each year to the 'wine country' and recreational, lodging, and dining businesses, and contains critical infrastructure including Lake Sonoma and The Geysers Geothermal Area power plants, major federal and state highways, and Santa Rosa's Geysers wastewater line.

Over the past six years the District has confronted four major wildfires (Tubbs, Pocket, Kincade, and Walbridge) that have burned over 40% of its territory into neighboring portions of the County and in response, the District has become a Statewide leader in establishing effective fuel reduction and vegetation management on a landscape scale and collaborating with local community-based fire safety organizations.

Scaling this effort up to the regional level, continuing to refine management and treatment practices, and implementing a range of other fire prevention services is the best way to reduce structure fires, wildland fires affecting the whole County, improve public safety, and reduce economic impacts on key industries.

Strategic Plan Vision – Updated (5-08-23)

This will be accomplished through a new level of cooperation and reorganization with other fire protection agencies serving northern Sonoma County, State and local regulating agencies, fire risk reduction community-based organizations, and private industry, all seeking to reduce wildfire risks and sustain the local and regional economy and environment.

Mission Statement, **Approved (12-15-22)**

- Sustain and improve fire protection, structural fire response, and emergency medical response in Region 6 through a redefinition, suitable for the fire and emergency risks of northern Sonoma County, of how fire protection services are organized and delivered
- Achieve optimum and efficient fire protection services through a mix of cooperation, contracts, and consolidation with other fire protection agencies serving northern Sonoma County
- Expand vegetation management and other wildfire hazard reduction efforts at a scale needed to meaningfully protect rural, WUI, and urban areas from devastating wildfires and related impacts, in Region 6 and beyond its borders in Sonoma County and in neighboring counties of Napa, Lake, and Mendocino
- Fully integrate and support community-based fire risk reduction and resilience efforts (COPE, Fire Safe Councils, CERT, etc.)
- Protect key industries and critical infrastructure from the devastating effects of wildfires reducing losses and economic impacts
- Coordinate fire prevention and vegetation management with resource management objectives including water quality and quantity, air quality and climate change adaptation, and habitat protection

Strategic Challenges, **Confirmed (12-15-22)**

Developing and implementing the Strategic Plan will require facing and resolving a range of existing challenges, both 'internal' and 'external', these challenges include:

1. The large size of the District and dispersed development pattern
2. The extreme wildfire hazard conditions that cover most of the District
3. Limited existing recurring financial resources (local taxes) as compared with fire protection service needs
4. Reducing current heavy reliance on non-recurring grant funding while sustaining grant-funded projects
5. Resolving circumstances or conditions that inhibit effective cooperation with other fire protection agencies in Region 6
6. Expanding current cooperation with South Lake County FPD and the City of Calistoga, along with their County governments and other agencies to pursue integrated wildfire hazard reduction in adjacent portions of Napa, Lake, and Mendocino Counties
7. Responding to Sonoma County's continued pursuit of Countywide consolidation of fire protection services by the County government and efforts to establish new fire protection and vegetation management taxes

Strategic Plan Objectives, **Approved (12-15-22)**

1. Sustain and improve fire protection and emergency medical response in Region 6 as an independent fire protection district in cooperation with neighboring fire protection agencies
2. Achieve comprehensive fuel reduction and vegetation management at sufficient a scale to protect urban, rural residential, and wildland-urban interface areas from devastating wildfires throughout Sonoma County Region 6 and beyond its borders to include adjacent portions of the County or adjacent counties
3. Resolve the most beneficial, efficient, and cost-effective organizational structures and service delivery options available to northern Sonoma County fire protection agencies
4. Determine the most efficient and cost-effective array of fixed asset fire stations and related priorities
5. Support, strengthen, and sustain community-based fire risk reduction and resilience efforts (COPE, Fire Safe Councils, CERT, etc.) as integral part of fire protection services
6. Develop a sustainable and resilient Financial Plan, building on existing funding resources (primarily property taxes, grants) and including expanded fees for services, additional Service Area or District-wide special parcel taxes, financial support from key industries, development impact fees, and formalized grant seeking and administration

Priority Actions, (updated 5-08-23)

During the time that the Strategic Plan is under preparation will be necessary to pursue high priority 'action items' – those actions already underway or needing attention presently:

1. Continued discussions with Cloverdale Fire Protection District and other regional partners regarding improving service delivery options and formal consolidation of the two Districts
2. Managing Service Area funding measures including the two special tax districts, area-specific donations and services, and refinements to CWPPs and related planning efforts and pursuing other funding measures (e.g., new schedule of service charges)
3. Pursuing renovations to the Alexander Valley Fire Station
4. Taking actions to sustain existing ambulance services in North County area
5. Monitoring and interacting with any Countywide efforts related to vegetation management services or related funding efforts in a manner consistent with the Strategic Plan Vision

Priority Actions, (updated 5-08-23)

6. Creation of a formal Districtwide 'Service Zone' establishing vegetation management services
7. Preparing 'cost allocation study' as necessary to prepare a new Fire District Service Charge Schedule
8. Aligning FY 23-24 Budget with recent and proposed staffing changes and service and facility costs and Budget Forecasting Model

Interim Staffing Changes, Updated (5-08-23)

During the time that the Strategic Plan is under preparation it may be beneficial to make staffing changes that align with Strategic Plan Objectives and proposed Steps:

1. Add a Community Risk Reduction Officer to complement the recently hired Fire Prevention Officer position
2. Seek and retain a new administrative position that focuses on grant administration, grant writing, and community outreach (Service Area constituents, general public, and community-based organizations)
3. Reassign existing Firefighter position to an Engineer position to increase fire response coverage by creating two teams, one Geyserville Fire Station based and the other stationed 'forward' or on patrol to prevent fires or respond to emergencies
4. Expand administrative staff time to manage increasing workload by making current position full time or adding new accounting/finance person
5. Add additional permanent vegetation management staff member

Strategic Plan Preparation Approach, **Approved (12-15-22)**

- Strategic Plan will be developed in an interactive effort extending through June 2023, led by the Board of Directors, supported by staff and consultants, engaging the local community, and neighboring fire fighting agencies
- Seven planning steps have been identified that will be completed in sequence during the next six months
- The organizing approach of the Strategy Plan preparation will be a set of Board of Directors Study Sessions during scheduled month Board meetings or conducted as single agenda special meetings
- Five Study Sessions are envisioned, prefaced by the ‘kick-off’ Session that during December 2022 to review the proposed approach and make changes as may be directed, meanwhile a variety of staffing improvements and other interim actions will be completed
- Following the Study Sessions, a Draft Strategic Plan will be presented in a sequence of Service Area-focused public meetings
- Following these public review meetings, the Strategic Plan will be subjected to additional local area review, a public hearing and consideration for adoption

Strategic Plan Technical Components, Updated (05-08-23)

Completion of the Strategic Plan will require or benefit from a series of technical components that will provide data and information for strategic consideration, developing service priorities, and evaluation of funding options; these components include:

- Documenting 'Baseline Conditions' including financial conditions, Station facilities and equipment inventory, existing agreements with other fire fighting agencies, personnel resources, active and pending grant programs, status of the Property Tax Exchange with County, and vegetation management efforts underway
- Operationalizing the Fire District Budget Forecasting Model that can evaluate service scenarios and support revenue options
- Further development of a District-wide Wildfire Risk Reduction Treatment Strategy Mapping System that provides risk assessment, project identification and monitoring and other related information
- Governance Options 'Decision Tree' that illustrates the various options available, the choices involved, and the implications of these choices
- Development of an interactive browser-based Service Area Property Data Base that allows ongoing updating in cooperation with the COPEs and other community-based organizations

Strategic Plan Work Program – Updated (05-08-23)

The Strategic Plan Work Program has been approved and is underway involving the following efforts:

1.0 – Pursue Priority Actions

2.0 – Complete Proposed Staffing Changes

3.0 – Complete Technical Components

4.0 -- Develop Policy Framework and (Area-specific) Proposed Plan for Service

5.0 – Strategic Plan public review, adoption, and implementation

There is the continuing need for Board members, staff, and volunteers to participate in completion of priority and technical components of the Strategic Plan; a review of these assignments would be helpful

Strategic Plan Work Program Status Update (5-10-23)

1.0 – Pursue Priority Actions

- At the January Board Study Session direction was provided regarding Admin, Management, and Finance, and Firefighting and EMS functions.
- The priority actions regarding governance has focused on expanded conversations with CFPD regarding ongoing cooperative efforts and priorities for moving forward.
- This effort include a presentation to the CFPD Board and discussions with the Cloverdale Health District regarding an approach to sustaining locally controlled ambulance services in Region 6.
- A plan for initiating this effort, involving supporting Bells Ambulance Service and considering deployment of a three-tiered EMS response through cooperation with the CHD.
- Vegetation Management Service Zone formation (Resolution) mobilized at this (5-10-23) meeting.
- Others?

Strategic Plan Work Program Status Update (5-10-23)

2.0 – Complete Proposed Staffing Changes

Chief will report current status of staffing changes

Strategic Plan Work Program Status (5-08-23)

3.0 – Complete Technical Components

- Ongoing effort to refine Service Area Boundaries, particularly the Areas surrounding Healdsburg needed to distinguish Fitch Mountain Area from other side of River, is underway
- Documenting ‘Baseline Conditions’ -- including financial conditions, Station facilities and equipment inventory, existing agreements with other fire fighting agencies, personnel resources, active and pending grant programs, status of the Property Tax Exchange with County, and vegetation management efforts underway. This effort is underway, information is being assembled by Staff, as needed
- Fire District Budget and Service Scenario Financial Forecasting Model. Model constructed for Reorganization has been reformatted and restructured to serve Strategic Plan needs including testing staffing and service scenario assumptions and providing a basis for the revised District Service Charge Schedule, etc.

Strategic Plan Work Program Status (5-08-23)

Technical Components, continued

- Further development of the Wildfire Risk Reduction Treatment Strategy Mapping System that provides risk assessment, 'planning unit' project identification and monitoring and other related information. Staff team has assembled and evaluated County and Water Agency mapping systems that will be used as basis for risk evaluation, wildfire risk reduction treatment geography planning, and service planning. System will evolve and address questions regarding design and detail needed.

4.0 – Develop Proposed Plan for Service

- Concurrently with completion of the ongoing Goal and Policy preparation and input, using the mapping system under preparation, staff will describe Plan for Service for each Service Areas and identify the roles and relationships with partner agencies as needed to provide services to each Service Area.
- Chief is developing a proposed Plan for Service for District overall and for the Service Areas.
- A study session will be held to review and revise, as may be appropriate, the draft Plan for Service and review the partner agency recommendations.

Strategic Plan Work Program Status

4.0 – Develop Proposed Plan for Service, continued

- This Plan for Service scoping will allow preparation of a service cost forecast and related evaluation of funding needs and limitations. A study session will be held to review the cost forecast and funding capacity leading to setting priorities for service delivery and improvements.
- In addition to inviting members of the public to the Study Sessions and Board meetings a series of outreach meetings for each Service Area will be conducted to obtain input regarding the draft Plan for Service and other aspects of the Strategic Plan.

Questions, Discussion & Direction