

## HUMBOLDT COUNTY COMMUNITY WILDFIRE PROTECTION PLAN, 2019

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## 5.3 WILDFIRE-PROTECTION CAPABILITIES

### 5.3.1 INTRODUCTION TO FIRE PROTECTION IN HUMBOLDT COUNTY

Wildfire protection and emergency response capabilities are evaluated in this CWPP by identifying, defining, and analyzing the delivery of services and level of coverage provided by current fire-protection organizations in Humboldt County. The following sections discuss the level and type of emergency response provided in Humboldt County, and the critical needs to sustain these services and ensure community safety.

Local and tribal fire protection organizations in Humboldt County provide all-risk fire protection. Firefighters are called upon to:

- Provide structural fire protection,
- Manage wildland fire,
- Respond to medical emergencies,
- Perform technical rescue,
- Respond to hazardous materials incidents, and
- Assist with general disaster management.

State and federal firefighters also respond to a broad array of emergencies beyond wildfire—depending on their availability—with their primary responsibility being protecting federal and state wildland areas.

The following pages contain details about local, tribal, state, and federal fire and rescue resources.

#### Fire Protection Responsibility Areas

Only a small portion of the county is classified as Local Responsibility Area, or LRA. Most local fire agencies contain State Responsibility Area, or SRA, lands within their jurisdictional boundaries (many are only SRA). Fire-related districts are responsible for structural fire protection and wildland fires in the LRA. The California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, or CAL FIRE, is responsible for wildfires in the SRA. CAL FIRE also assists local districts with the management of wildfires in the LRA based on mutual-aid agreements.

There are three specific land classifications to identify the agency with the financial responsibility for preventing and suppressing wildfire.

- **Local Responsibility Area (LRA)** is primarily the responsibility of the local jurisdiction, i.e. local fire departments.
- **State Responsibility Area (SRA)** is primarily the responsibility of the state, or CAL FIRE.
- **Federal Responsibility Area (FRA)** is primarily the responsibility of a federal government agency, such as the US Forest Service (USFS) and Bureau of Land Management (BLM).

*See Map 5.3.2 **State and Federal Fire Protection** later in this chapter for LRA vs. SRA vs. FRA designations in Humboldt County.*

### Mutual Aid and Other Cooperative Agreements

To provide quick and adequate response to fires, the Humboldt County Fire Chiefs' Association developed, approved, and maintains a Countywide Mutual Aid Agreement. It is a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) made and entered into by and between all local fire-service providers in the county and CAL FIRE. The MOU states that the equipment, facilities, and trained personnel of each fire department are available to the other participants in the agreement on an as-requested basis. The MOU facilitates quick, decisive dispatch of resources and defines expectations and responsibilities for the requesting and receiving parties. Additionally, several local fire-service providers have auto-aid agreements. Depending on the specific incident, fires may be managed under a unified command between multiple departments or one department may simply assist another, depending on who has the protection responsibility.

**Mutual aid** is a reciprocal aid agreement between two or more agencies that defines what resources each will provide to the other in response to certain predetermined types of emergencies. Mutual aid response is provided upon request.

**Automatic Mutual Aid, or auto aid agreements** dictate that within specified areas of a fire department's response area or for certain types of incidents, their automatic mutual aid partner will be automatically dispatched to an emergency and a special request for help will not be necessary.

Fire departments near either National Forest or National Recreation Area lands have mutual aid agreements with the USFS and BLM. *See Appendix G.2, for details regarding these agreements: Statewide and Regional-Level Cooperative Fire Agreements, Six Rivers National Forest (SRNF) Forest-Wide Fire Assistance Agreements and Local Operating Plans, and SRNF Agreements with Humboldt County Local Volunteer Fire Departments for Fire Suppression Assistance and Assistance-By-Hire for Wildfire Incidents.*

Under a cooperative agreement, federal and state agencies have exchanged protection responsibilities in specific areas. These areas are known as Direct Protection Areas, or DPAs. For example, fire protection on most FRA public land managed by the BLM, including the King Range National Conservation Area, is the responsibility of CAL FIRE. Additionally, the communities of Willow Creek and Orleans are within the protection responsibility of the SRNF for wildfires, even though these communities are in SRA. *See Map 5.3.2 State and Federal Fire Protection later in this chapter for an illustration of these DPA protection areas.*

### 5.3.2 FIRE-PROTECTION ORGANIZATIONS AND LEVEL OF SERVICE

Humboldt County receives fire protection and related emergency services from a variety of fire organizations. Given the diverse range of community characteristics and emergency service needs throughout the county, each fire-service organization provides an emergency response and deployment system that reflect its constituents' expectations, needs, and local risks, within its revenue and support constraints. The following sections describe the fire-protection agencies and organizations in Humboldt County and the *Level of Service* they provide.

**Level of Service** is defined here as the ability to provide, on a countywide basis, adequate and appropriate levels of emergency service to meet community needs. Level of Service should be commensurate with the community's risks and the public safety responsibilities of the local fire-protection organization.

#### Local Fire Protection Services

Local fire protection and rescue services are provided year round by local fire departments and companies. According to the *2017 Humboldt County Fire Chiefs' Association Annual Report*, local fire service is provided by forty fire departments and companies. The service areas of these local fire departments and companies are shown on *Map 5.3.1, Local Fire Protection*, later in this chapter.

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### Department vs. Company

In this CWPP, with a few exceptions, local fire and rescue service providers associated with a special district are called **Volunteer Fire Departments**, as they receive some tax or fee revenue. Those volunteer organizations not receiving tax revenue and being funded primarily through fundraisers and donations, are called **Volunteer Fire Companies**.

Special districts are formed to provide services within a specific jurisdictional boundary with support from a combination of taxes, fees, grants, and fundraising. Many of these jurisdictional boundaries were created as far back as the 1930s. Since then, neighborhoods, scattered subdivisions, and rural residential development have expanded beyond district boundaries. This newer development requires year-round fire protection and emergency services, which it receives in a variety of ways. Special districts that deliver fire and rescue services are identified on *Map 5.3.1* as “District” and are shown in green.

There are many areas outside the boundaries of an established district that receive fire protection from district resources responding beyond their jurisdiction. This type of service, which is often referred to as “goodwill service,” is identified in *Map 5.3.1* as “Out of District” and shown in yellow. District fire departments provide service to these areas even though they are under no obligation to do so and receive no compensation for their service, other than donations. This practice can strain already limited resources. Furthermore, property owners within the district may question why their taxes are supporting out-of-district residents.

Finally, many areas outside the boundaries of an established district receive fire protection from a volunteer fire company. They receive no tax revenue, hence they are identified on *Map 2.3.1* as “Non-Tax,” and shown in orange. The survival of volunteer fire companies depends on revenue generated from community donations, fundraisers, and grants. Some communities are more supportive of their local fire companies than others; support can fluctuate dramatically depending upon local economic conditions.

The following table lists all of the local fire-protection organizations in Humboldt County and summarizes their current resources.

FIGURE 5.3.1 LOCAL FIRE SERVICE: STATION, APPARATUS, AND STAFFING CAPABILITY <sup>1</sup>				
LOCAL FIRE ORGANIZATION <sup>2</sup>	FIRE STATIONS <sup>3</sup>	FIRE APPARATUS <sup>4</sup>	FIREFIGHTERS	
			CAREER	VOLUNTEER
Alderpoint Fire Company	1	4	0	17
Arcata Fire Protection District	3	10	22	17
Briceland Fire Department	3	8	0	19
Blue Lake Fire Department	1	6	1	21
Bridgeville Fire Department	1	4	0	12
Carlotta Fire Department	2	6	0	13
County Service Area No. 4 <sup>5</sup>	1	1	10	0

<sup>1</sup> Humboldt County Fire Safe Council. (2018). Humboldt County Fire Chiefs’ Association Annual Report, 2017. Retrieved from <https://humboldt.gov/Archive.aspx?AMID=75>

<sup>2</sup> The label “Fire Department” identifies service associated with a special district and “Fire Company” identifies non-tax, non-district organizations. (There are some exceptions).

<sup>3</sup> Local fire stations, particularly in remote rural areas, may only be a basic fire apparatus shelter or even apparatus that is stored at a volunteer firefighter’s home.

<sup>4</sup> Fire apparatus includes: water tenders, engines, ladders, quick attack, and rescue vehicles.

<sup>5</sup> Services for CSA No. 4 are provided by CAL FIRE. The numbers here are year-round available resources. During fire season there are 2 fire engines and 14 firefighters available.

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<b>FIGURE 5.3.1 LOCAL FIRE SERVICE: STATION, APPARATUS, AND STAFFING CAPABILITY<sup>1</sup></b>				
LOCAL FIRE ORGANIZATION <sup>2</sup>	FIRE STATIONS <sup>3</sup>	FIRE APPARATUS <sup>4</sup>	FIREFIGHTERS	
			CAREER	VOLUNTEER
Fieldbrook Fire Department	1	4	0	23
Ferndale Fire Department	1	7	0	29
Fortuna Fire Department	3	15	3	77
Fruitland Ridge Fire Company	1	3	0	7
Garberville Fire Department	1	3	0	15
Honeydew Fire Company	4	5	0	16
Hoopla Fire and Rescue	1	6	0	15
Hoopla Fire Department	1	6	19	6
Humboldt Bay Fire Department <sup>6</sup>	5	16	53	5
Kneeland Fire Department	1	3	0	9
Loleta Fire Department	1	7	0	23
Miranda Fire Department	1	3	0	12
Myers Flat Fire Department	1	2	0	3
Orick Fire Department	1	4	0	13
Orleans Fire Company	1	4	0	13
Palo Verde Fire Company	1	2	0	30
Petrolia Fire Department	1	7	0	22
Phillipsville Fire Company	1	3	0	2
Redcrest Fire Company	2 <sup>7</sup>	2	0	8
Redway Fire Department	1	5	0	13
Rio Dell Fire Department	1	6	0	27
Salmon Creek Fire Company	1	2	0	12
Samoa Peninsula Fire Department	2	4	0	17
Scotia Fire Department	1	6	0	10
Shelter Cove Fire Department	1	9	0	16
Sprowel Creek Fire Company	2	2	0	20
Telegraph Ridge Fire Department	1	3	0	12
Trinidad Fire Department	1	3	0	10
Westhaven Fire Company	1	5	0	8
Whale Gulch Fire Company	1	3	0	20
Whitethorn Fire Department	1	4	0	11
Willow Creek Fire Department	1	5	0	14
Yurok Wildland Fire Department	1	<i>unknown</i>	<i>unknown</i>	<i>unknown</i>
Yurok Volunteer Fire Department	1	1	0	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>199</b>	<b>108</b>	<b>621</b>

<sup>6</sup> Humboldt #1 Fire Protection District and City of Eureka Fire combined their resources under the name of Humboldt Bay Fire but have not yet officially consolidated their jurisdictions.

<sup>7</sup> The Redcrest Fire Company is providing an organizational umbrella for a new fire station and associated group of volunteers in the community of Shively.

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Local fire service in Humboldt County, although primarily responsible for community fire protection, plays a pivotal role in wildfire management. Local firefighters train and are equipped for wildfire response, often being called to assist CAL FIRE during wildfires. Local firefighting resources respond from over fifty locations throughout the county, so they can be well situated to supplement CAL FIRE, which may have a longer *response time*. Local firefighters are frequently the first on the scene and able to assume command of the incident, provide initial assessment, and initiate suppression actions until CAL FIRE arrives. This helps keep the fires to a manageable size. Many local fire organizations provide station coverage for CAL FIRE when they are called away to wildfires outside of the county. During station coverage assignments, local firefighters fill CAL FIRE's wildfire management role.

**Response Time** is the time that elapses between the moment a 9-1-1 call is placed to the emergency dispatch center and the time that a first-responder arrives on scene. Response time includes dispatch time, turnout time (the time it takes firefighters to travel to the fire station, put on their personal protective equipment (PPE), and prepare the apparatus), and travel time.

There is one local-government Type-3 Engine Strike Team composed of several local fire organizations in the county. CAL FIRE hires this Strike Team to supplement their resources during wildfire events both inside and outside the county. Local fire department equipment is also rented by the state and operated by CAL FIRE personnel when needed. Local fire service financially benefits from this arrangement, both to the participating fire department and individual firefighters, and by circulating the funds into the local economy. Indirect benefits to local firefighters, including volunteers, include gaining valuable wildfire management experience, which also benefits local communities by developing more confident, capable local firefighters. Firefighters learn about wildfire management strategies, emergency radio communications, working together, training needs, and the physical demands and expectations required by CAL FIRE and the USFS. This experience increases the ability of local firefighters to quickly and efficiently organize resources, should a large wildfire event happen here.



*Telegraph Ridge Volunteer Fire Department.*

The Humboldt County, Southern Humboldt, and Eel River Valley Fire Chiefs' Associations are vital local organizations working to address common challenges and improve Level of Service throughout the county. They do this via increased coordination, communication, standardization, and support. The work of these chiefs' associations has enabled the growth of productive and effective relationships that have proven to be beneficial to all parties.

Collaboration within and among these groups has led to many advancements, including:

- A stronger voice for the fire service to help secure support and resources,
- Auto-aid agreements,
- Communications plans,
- Pre-fire plans, and
- Administrative and operational improvements.

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These associations continue to work together to ensure all departments and companies benefit from recent advancements; they also tackle new projects such as the development of a website and other social media platforms.

The Public Safety and Essential Services half-cent sales tax, passed by Humboldt County voters in 2014 through Measure Z, provided critical fire and rescue support funding over the last three years, facilitating a spirit of cooperation between local fire organizations. Over \$5.5 million in Measure Z funding has been awarded to purchase firefighting equipment, pay dispatch fees, and continue a multiyear sustainable fire-services planning effort. Measure Z purchases and activities have benefitted volunteer, and especially rural fire organizations, to increase the safety and capability of firefighters within the county.



*Star Hotel fire, Fortuna.*

Equipment purchases are bringing local fire service up to nationally recognized minimum-level safety equipment and emergency-response apparatus standards. Updated equipment helps responders be better prepared, and decreases the risk of injury while increasing the ability to protect the public. Equipment purchases include fire engines, self-contained breathing apparatus (SCBA), wildland- and structural-fire personal protective equipment (PPE), and fire hose. Additionally, permitting and purchasing structures to protect fire equipment that was historically stored outdoors or in unsecured locations has been funded. These improvements will have a direct impact on fire departments' ability to improve their Insurance Services Office (ISO) Fire-Suppression Rating Schedules, which can in turn, lower homeowner fire insurance rates. The Public Safety and Essential Services sales tax was renewed by voters in 2018 through Measure O and will continue to be an important source of funding, depended upon by local fire and rescue service providers.



*Westhaven Volunteer Fire Department.*

There have been significant improvements in local fire-protection organizations' ability to efficiently, effectively, and safely deploy fire-protection resources since what was reported in the 2013 CWPP. However, these organizations continue to experience a high degree of variability in their training levels, amount and quality of their equipment, and number of firefighting personnel at their disposal. Such differences make it challenging to identify Level of Service standards that are realistically achievable for all local fire-service providers. This is slowly being addressed by updating standards to consider pragmatic expectations by area type (e.g. rural, suburban, or urban).

Many local fire departments continue to face these common challenges:

- Volunteer recruitment and retention;
- Access to appropriate levels and types of training and local facilities, including fire academy, driver-operator training, and other on-going skills;
- Ever increasing mandatory requirements and standards;
- Limited administrative capacity to address growing organizational requirements;
- Limited pre-fire planning resources such as response-area maps and pre-fire attack plans; and
- A lack of capital to cover growing expenses, including:
  - The replacement of aging safety equipment,
  - Dispatch fees and communication infrastructure improvements,
  - Insurance and worker's compensation,
  - Training, and
  - Maintaining and establishing fire stations.

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The top need identified by local fire service is a more robust and ongoing volunteer recruitment and retention strategy. All local fire departments in the county depend fully or partially on volunteers. Many have indicated that recruiting and retaining these volunteers is their biggest challenge. This challenge includes:

- Ever-increasing training and performance demands on volunteers;
- An increasing volume of calls that put volunteers in dangerous situations, threatening their physical safety and mental health;
- Uncertainty about a stable local economy; and
- Limited community awareness and support.

Local residents and businesses depend heavily on local fire and rescue services. More community resources and volunteers are needed to ensure their survival. When firefighter numbers fall, services suffer. In recent years, some fire companies have closed their doors, leaving neighboring departments impacted as they try to fill in for these areas. This issue is not unique to Humboldt County; the sustainable delivery of community fire and rescue services is a challenge in many other areas of the state and nation. It is complex and likely cannot be resolved quickly. Investing now to ensure future emergency services for the citizens of Humboldt County is a priority of this CWPP.

*More detailed information about each local fire organization, including their recent accomplishments, can be found in each relevant **Planning Unit Action Plan** in Part 4 of this CWPP, and in the current version of the Humboldt County Fire Chiefs' Association Annual Report, available at <https://humboldt.gov/Archive.aspx?AMID=75>.*



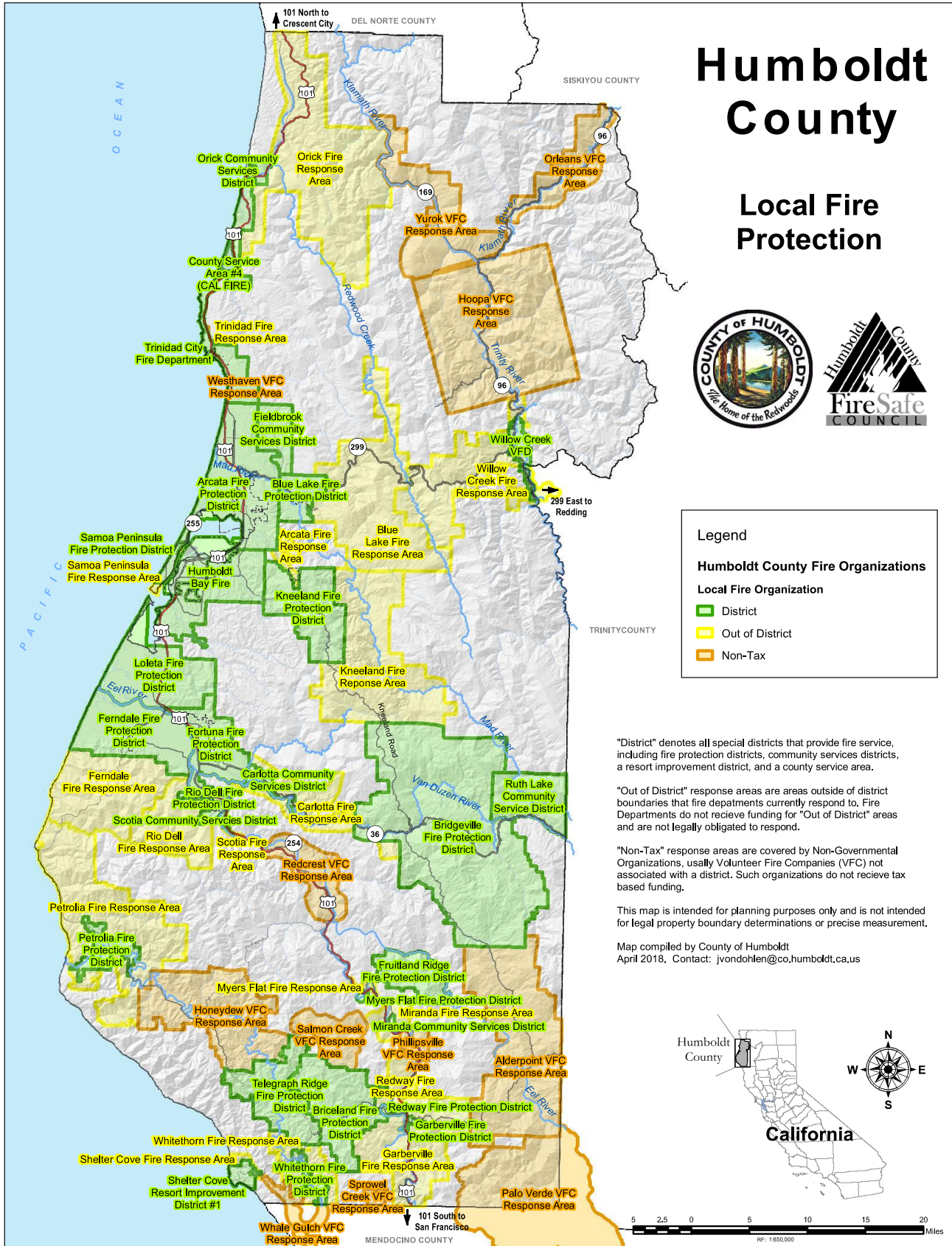
*Scotia Volunteer Fire Department.*



*Humboldt Bay Fire Department.*

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## Map 5.3.1 Local Fire Protection



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### Tribal Fire-Protection Services

Tribes located in Humboldt County provide fire and rescue services to their communities through a variety of means. Some maintain their own community fire protection and wildfire management services, while others coordinate with local fire protection districts, CAL FIRE, and/or federal agencies to provide these services. The following describes several local tribal fire-service situations.

#### **Hoopa Fire-Protection Services**

The Hoopa Fire Department strives to develop programs and processes for the protection of the Hoopa Indian Reservation and the community of Hoopa, through an aggressive fire suppression and prevention program. The Department responds to fires and provides additional all-risk response assistance when requested. The Hoopa Fire Department also participates in national suppression efforts through cooperative agreements and mutual aid, with firefighters traveling around the country providing suppression assistance.



The Department is building a larger workforce to staff its three Type-3 fire engines, two Type-4 quick attack engines, and its Type-1 water tender. Each engine is staffed seven days a week with five firefighters during fire season. The staffed positions are a combination of permanent and temporary employees with all levels of qualifications, from entry-level firefighter to engine captain. Finally, the Fire Department hosts the Tribal Office of Emergency Services, tasked with year-round operational responsibilities. Both programs are under the leadership of the Department Chief.

The Hoopa Reservation also receives fire protection services from Hoopa Volunteer Fire and Rescue, a community-based volunteer fire company established in the late 1970s by the Hoopa Valley Tribal Council and the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA). It is an all-risk organization, with its primary mission being structural fire protection. Services are provided by 13 volunteer firefighters using one Type-2 fire engine and two Type-1 engines. Hoopa Fire and Rescue needs more volunteers to help meet their service demands.

#### **Upper-Yurok Reservation Fire-Protection Services**

The Yurok Wildland Fire Department operates out of the Tully Creek Fire and Fitness Center in Weitchpec. In addition to providing fire-protection services to the Upper Yurok Reservation, the Department has some staff and resources for contract wildland firefighting throughout the region. The Tribe also maintains an agreement with CAL FIRE to provide wildfire protection for trust lands in this area.



The Yurok Volunteer Fire Department was formed in 2004 with supporting grant funding to build two fire stations in the Upper Yurok reservation. The Yurok Tribe has also provided funding, equipment, and facilities for the Department as it is able. Volunteers have worked with Reservation citizens to establish fire programs and awareness efforts to mitigate Reservation fire danger. The Tribe has attempted to maintain fire-protection services reservation wide, but funding and challenges recruiting and retaining volunteers make it difficult to provide this service at the desired level. The Volunteer Fire Department is working to recruit more volunteers, secure much-needed additional equipment, and improve response communications.

#### **Karuk Fire-Protection Services**

The Karuk Tribe supports a fire and fuels program in their Department of Natural Resources with offices in both Humboldt (Orleans) and Siskiyou (Happy Camp and Yreka) counties.<sup>8</sup> They manage forty to fifty National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG) qualified personnel, including their partners such as the Mid-Klamath Watershed Council, Salmon River Restoration Council, and the Cultural Fire Management Council. The Tribe has sponsored one twenty-person NWCG-qualified



<sup>8</sup> The aboriginal territory of the Karuk people spans both Humboldt and Siskiyou counties.

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Type-2 Initial Attack Wildland Fire Crew for over twenty years. This crew is operated under the BIA for reimbursement purposes for federal wildland fire and emergency dispatches, and follows all federal guidelines.

The fire and fuels program recently added a ten-person fuels crew, which is working towards becoming qualified as a Wildland Fire Use Module<sup>9</sup>. Most fire and fuels projects are grant funded, involving hazardous fuel reduction by hand treatment or prescribed fire, to reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire and increase cultural and natural-resources resilience, emphasizing Eco-Cultural Revitalization. The Wildland Fire Crew is dispatched by the Klamath National Forest for federal emergencies. Karuk tribal members living in the Orleans area also receive fire and rescue services from the Orleans Volunteer Fire Department, and firefighting resources from Six Rivers National Forest as available.

### Blue Lake Rancheria Fire Protection Services

The Blue Lake Rancheria Tribe maintains a memorandum of understanding with the Blue Lake Fire Protection District, which provides fire, medical, and rescue response to the Rancheria. Over the years, the Tribe has provided support to the Blue Lake Volunteer Fire Department for the purchase of equipment, production of educational materials and community events, and operational needs.



### Federal and State Agencies

#### California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE)

CAL FIRE maintains a significant presence in Humboldt County in fire protection, fire prevention, and resource management. The CAL FIRE Humboldt–Del Norte Unit (HUU) Administrative Headquarters is located in Fortuna and is home to the Fortuna Interagency Command Center (FICC) dispatch center, (*more details are provided about FICC in section 5.3.3 below*). CAL FIRE HUU staffs an engine in Trinidad year-round under an Amador Agreement<sup>10</sup> with the County of Humboldt, as well as two state-mission engines year round. In 2018, these engines were housed in Weott and Trinidad but their location could change at any time or on any given year based on state need. The remaining Humboldt County-based CAL FIRE stations are staffed only during fire season and include Elk Camp (Orick area), Fortuna, Bridgeville, Alderpoint, Mattole, Thorn (Whitethorn), and Garberville.



CAL FIRE operates two local Conservation Camps jointly with the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, Eel River Camp in Redway and High Rock Camp in Weott. Inmates serve out their sentences performing firefighting and conservation-related tasks. The crews are an all-risk department resource used both locally and statewide. During non-emergency response times, these crews work on fuel-reduction and other projects as requested by public agencies. They are trained in emergency response for fires and floods and utilized for various emergencies as needed.



*CAL Fire extinguishing a beach fire near Trinidad.*

CAL FIRE also operates the Rohnerville Air Attack Base, the Kneeland Helitack Base, and a fire lookout at Grasshopper Peak during times of high fire danger. During past fire seasons, CAL FIRE has also operated the Schoolhouse Peak Fire Lookout in Redwood National Park.

<sup>9</sup> For information on the definition and history of fire use modules, see:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fire\\_use\\_module](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fire_use_module)

<sup>10</sup> Amador Agreement: A contract that continues CAL FIRE staffing and station coverage through the winter off season.

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CAL FIRE HUU (including areas outside of Humboldt County), maintains fourteen frontline engines, three engines in reserve, two dozers, fifteen inmate crews, one helicopter, one air attack, and one air tanker for fire suppression efforts. There are approximately one-hundred permanent fire-suppression personnel, twelve resource-management personnel, and six clerical personnel to support these efforts. Additionally, HUU hires approximately ninety limited-term and seasonal personnel to supplement permanent staff during fire season.

All HUU aircraft provide rapid initial attack and are especially valuable in the county's remote areas where steep terrain and narrow, winding roads greatly increase ground-response times. In such situations, aircraft are often at the scene and applying water or retardant before engines or bulldozers arrive, cooling the fire and giving ground resources the ability to achieve initial-attack success. Aircraft also provide "eyes in the sky" for ground crews, noting spot fires and giving helpful directions.

CAL FIRE's objective is to successfully contain 95% of all wildfires within the SRA and DPA at 10 acres or less. During declared fire season, CAL FIRE engines are staffed 24 hours/day. In addition to fire engines, CAL FIRE's initial dispatch response includes fire crews, bulldozers, air tankers, helicopters, air-tactical supervisors, and Chief Officers. Dispatch levels for any given incident are based on the current fire-behavior indices as developed through the *Fire Danger Operating Plan*.

### Six Rivers National Forest (SRNF)

Six Rivers National Forest is a "service first" organization.<sup>11</sup> It works in agreement with Redwood National Park (RNP) to protect both federal and state lands as Direct Protection Areas. They operate as one fire-management organization, supporting each other's fire and land-management objectives.



SRNF protects the wildland and manages fire on the landscape, while considering multiple-use land-management objectives, Federal Fire Policy, and the agency mission. It seeks to create resilient landscapes and fire-adapted communities through effective risk-based decision-making for wildfire response. SRNF works closely with CAL FIRE Humboldt-Del Norte Unit, Hoopa Wildland Fire Department, other federal agencies, neighboring National Forests, tribal governments, and multiple volunteer and local fire departments throughout Humboldt and nearby counties.

Staffing levels are based on level of fire danger, with the greatest staffing May through October and reduced staffing the rest of the year. During periods of increased fire danger, SRNF staffs twelve



SRNF fire crew.

engines, thirteen patrol and prevention units, two Type-1 hand crews, one Wildland Fire Module, four water tenders, one bulldozer, and four lookouts. These firefighting resources are spread over SRNF's four-county jurisdiction, employing approximately three hundred emergency responders in a variety of operational and non-operational roles. These include primary firefighters as well as support personnel in logistics, planning, resource advising, and public information. SRNF also has an agreement with Fortuna-based California Conservation Corps to mobilize a Type-2 hand crew with members from both agencies.

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<sup>11</sup> USDA Forest Service. (2016). Service first, working together [Webpage]. Retrieved from <https://www.fs.fed.us/servicefirst>

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### Redwood National Park (RNP)

The RNP is also a “service first” organization and works directly with SRNF as one fire-management organization, supporting each unit’s fire and land-management objectives.

During declared fire season, RNP staffs two engines, five days a week from 9:30 AM to 6:00 PM. Firefighting equipment is maintained at the Wolf Creek Fire Cache in Orick. If RNP is experiencing extreme fire indices, (based on readings from two Remote Automated Weather Stations, or RAWS), the acting Duty Officer will determine if longer staffing hours are needed.



RNP’s daily staffing level is based on the Park’s Preparedness Plan. This Plan determines thresholds for Low, Medium, High, Very High, and Extreme fire danger based on daily Energy Release Component (ERC) predictions. The Park currently uses RAWS stations located near the far north and south ends of the Park to determine its daily ERC’s.

National Park Service policy is to meet or exceed a 95% initial-attack success target. Standard dispatch for any given incident in RNP is determined by its Preparedness Plan. It generally includes one engine module; the Duty Officer will request additional resources through FICC, if conditions warrant.

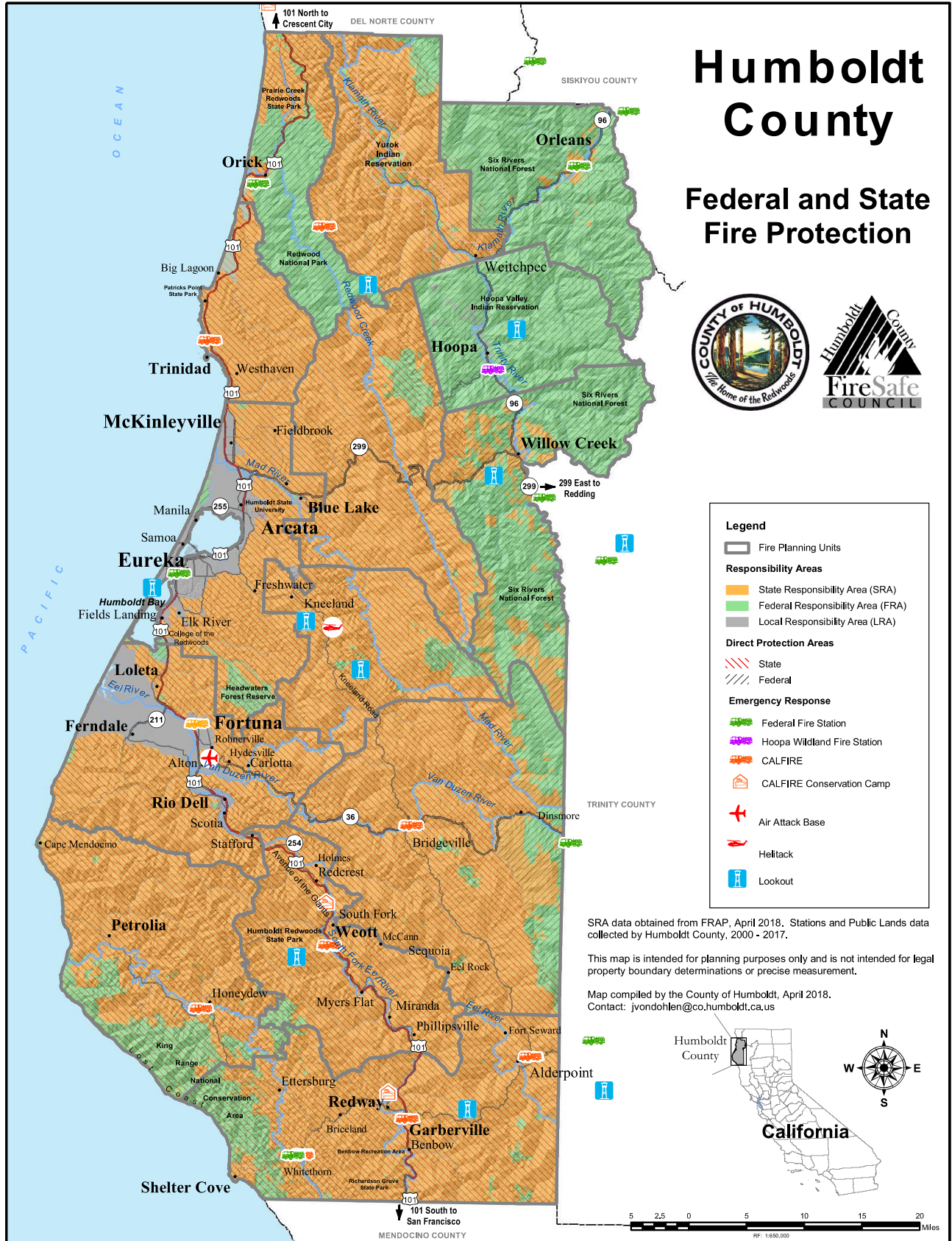
### Bureau of Land Management (BLM)

The BLM-Arcata Field Office administers 126 square miles of public lands in Humboldt County including the Headwaters Reserve, the King Range National Conservation Area, Samoa Dunes Recreation Area, and the Lost Coast Headlands. The CAL FIRE HUU, through the *California Cooperative Fire Protection Agreement*, provides wildfire protection for BLM lands in Humboldt County. The BLM augments CAL FIRE’s initial attack resources during fire season by providing one Type-3 engine and crew at the BLM King Range Project Office at Whitethorn Junction.



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## Map 5.3.2 State and Federal Fire Protection



### 5.3.3 EMERGENCY SERVICES DELIVERED

Fire protection organizations in Humboldt County provide a range of emergency-response services requiring extensive coordination within and among emergency service providers. The following highlights a selection of key services provided.

#### Initial Response and Dispatching Services

In order to initiate an emergency response, a call must go out, notifying first responders of an incident. This call can be initiated based on a variety of detection sources. For example, the detection mechanisms utilized by the SRNF include fire lookouts, fixed-wing reconnaissance aircraft, vehicle patrols during high fire danger, and automated lightning detection. Structure fires and medical emergencies are most often called in by citizens who are involved in or witness an incident.

When 9-1-1 is dialed, the call goes to one of two locations, depending on where the call initiated. 9-1-1 calls that originate from cell phones are initially routed to the California Highway Patrol (CHP); calls that originate from a landline will be answered by a Public Safety Answering Point (PSAP). Some cities have their own PSAP (e.g. Eureka, Arcata, and Fortuna as well as Humboldt State University), while unincorporated areas are answered by the Sheriff's Department. The Sheriff's Department, the applicable PSAP, or the CHP will then determine the nature of the emergency call. If the incident requires fire and/or ambulance response, the call will be transferred to the appropriate dispatching facility. The choice of dispatch center depends on the location of the incident and the dispatching service utilized by the nearest fire protection organization and/or ambulance service.

The Fortuna Interagency Command Center (FICC) is the Command and Control point for many emergency agencies in Humboldt and Del Norte Counties. CAL FIRE and the USFS personnel jointly staff the FICC, with CAL FIRE staff available 24 hours/day, 7 days/week. The FICC is the dispatch center for wildland-fire emergencies in the SRA in Humboldt and Del Norte Counties as well as for all SRNF lands. Finally, the FICC is the centralized logistical ordering point for all federal agencies with wildfire potential on their lands, including Hoopa Valley tribal lands, Redwood National Park, and Humboldt Bay National Wildlife Refuge.

Due to limitations in the current incident reporting methods as well as insufficient data, it is not possible to provide an exact number for the percent increase in emergency calls for the entire county. However, there is consensus among firefighting personnel that demand for fire service is increasing here.

Fire protection organizations have, thus far, managed to respond to the service demand with excellent service. However, if the annual rate of calls for service continues to increase, options for expanding service capabilities will need to be explored. Dispatch providers indicate that if demand for services continues to increase, they will need additional funding, staffing, and expanded facilities, as well as an increased financial contribution from some.

#### Wildland Fire Response

Wildland fire response is typically the primary responsibility of the state and federal agencies within the SRA and FRA. It is described in terms of "Preparedness Levels," fire-hazard considerations (such as weather), available resources, and fire-management response objectives. Federal, tribal, and state fire agencies have fire-suppression responsibilities within the SRA and FRA. In many cases, local fire departments are the first on scene or are asked to assist in wildland fire suppression by the responsible agency. However, local fire departments do not typically have the resources to manage a large wildfire incident, nor is wildfire protection a primary responsibility of most local departments.

On National Forest lands, wildland fires can be managed for one or more objectives based on the *Land and Resource Management Plan* and/or *Fire Management Plan* direction. These objectives range from protection of life and property by aggressively suppressing fires to managing fires to meet resource-management objectives. All wildfires receive an initial dispatch response based on fire danger,

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resource availability, and response-area characteristics. The response may change with changes in the fire's management objectives. Most fires escaping initial attack will initiate the *Wildland Fire Decision Support System*<sup>12</sup> and the agency administrator will clarify its intent, as well as incident objectives and management requirements for managing the fire.

While wildfires constitute a small percentage of the overall demand for emergency services, demand placed on local, state, and federal firefighting resources by wildfires can be substantially greater than most of the other types of calls combined. Wildfires can last for several days or even months, and can cost tens of millions of dollars. Wildfires frequently require aircraft of various types as well as fire engines, hand crews, and other specialized equipment. Acquiring these precious resources in an organized and timely manner involves coordination with multiple agencies around the state and country.

### Wildfire Disaster Response

Wildfires in Humboldt County may be proclaimed a "Local Emergency" by the local Director of Emergency Services (County Sheriff), and/or the Board of Supervisors, and are guided by the *Humboldt County Emergency Operations Plan*<sup>13</sup> (EOP). The maintenance and implementation of the EOP is supported by the Humboldt County Office of Emergency Services (OES) in the Sheriff's Office. OES functions are administered by the Emergency Services Manager.

When wildfires have the potential to become disasters by threatening life and safety, procedures are initiated to support the safe evacuation of people, domestic animals, and livestock from potentially hazardous areas. Evacuation procedures are outlined in the *Wildland Fire Checklist* in the *Operations Plan*. Law enforcement or the fire Incident Commander calls for an evacuation order, which is communicated to emergency responders and affected residents. Field responders and/or Emergency Operations Center (EOC) personnel generate the event's evacuation plan. Evacuation decision points, routes, locations, and support resources are then identified and communicated to the public and media.

A *Voluntary Evacuation Advisory* is called when a fire reaches an area determined to be the "outermost decision point" and may continue towards inhabited areas. A *Mandatory Evacuation* is announced during an immediate or imminent fire situation, when residents are in imminent danger of life-threatening events. The Sheriff's Office is responsible for implementing evacuation procedures in unincorporated areas, and the County EOC is responsible for coordinating sheltering and mass care for evacuees. There is no statute that can be used to force residents from their homes. However, once residents evacuate they can be refused re-entry. In rare cases, unaccompanied minors within a *Mandatory Evacuation* area may be taken into protective custody by law enforcement until a parent or guardian can be located.

**Voluntary Evacuation Advisory:** A threat has been identified by fire service and/or law enforcement personnel which may affect the population under Voluntary Evacuation. Mandatory evacuation may be ordered at any time. Individuals with access and functional needs, households with pets or livestock, and residents on roads without alternative evacuation routes should consider evacuating upon a Voluntary Evacuation Advisory.

**Mandatory Evacuation Order:** An imminent threat to life and safety requires the immediate evacuation of identified areas. Residents outside of evacuation zones will not be permitted inside the perimeter.

When an Evacuation Advisory or Order is issued, the public and media are notified via direct mass-notification alerts, social-media posts, and news releases. Escalating evacuation scenarios, including changing a Voluntary Advisory to a Mandatory Order, also require direct notification of residents in evacuation zones by fire and law enforcement personnel, and in some cases, community volunteers. Upon the identification of actual or anticipated resource needs of evacuated populations, an evacuation center or mass-care shelter may be established.

<sup>12</sup> Wildland Fire Decision Support System (WFDSS) Homepage: [https://wfdss.usqs.gov/wfdss/WFDSS\\_Home.shtml](https://wfdss.usqs.gov/wfdss/WFDSS_Home.shtml)

<sup>13</sup> County of Humboldt, OES. (2015, March). Wildland Fire Checklist. Humboldt County Emergency Operations Plan, Part 2: Initial Response Operations. Retrieved from <https://humboldtqov.org/DocumentCenter/View/51861>

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When large wildfires necessitate regional resources, the Governor's Office of Emergency Services (Cal OES) Fire and Rescue branch may provide support. Fire Mutual Aid is coordinated by the primary responding jurisdiction. Depending on the location of the fire(s), CAL FIRE or the USFS may assume command, or establish Unified Command for incidents with multiple responsible agencies.

The following agency actions would facilitate improved evacuation in Humboldt County:

- Multi-jurisdictional evacuation mapping.
- Evacuation support incorporated into local fire-service training programs.
- Continued improvement in coordination and pre-incident planning between law enforcement/OES and CAL FIRE field personnel (Incident Commander) to facilitate seamless communication and quick response during an evacuation.

Finally, these issues are common challenges facing successful evacuations in Humboldt County:

- Limited rural ingress and/or egress throughout the wildland-urban interface, or WUI.
- Communication deficiencies in rural areas preventing timely dissemination of information.
- Narrow and damaged roads with heavy traffic.
- Roads with excessive amounts of flammable vegetation growing up to the roadside.
- Diminished visibility and air quality due to heavy smoke.
- Evacuees with access and functional needs.
- Public misunderstanding of local threats, resulting in evacuations by populations outside of actual evacuation zones.

*Specific information related to potential evacuation routes is identified in each of the **Planning Unit Action Plans** in Part 4 of this CWPP. See Appendix H, **Living with Wildfire** for more information on preparing for safe evacuation, as well as evacuation planning for pets and livestock.*

### **Community (Structural) Fire Response**

Community fire protection is the suppression of structure fires and the protection of structures and other community resources from wildfire. Community fire-protection response—typically the responsibility of local fire departments and companies—is often described in terms of *response time*.<sup>14</sup>

When a fire involves a structure or is determined to be a threat to a community, the local fire-protection organization and its automatic-aid partners are dispatched based on the fire's location. Additional resource orders occur at the discretion of the Incident Commander (often the local fire chief).

CAL FIRE often aids in community fire protection when needed or requested. Their ability to assist varies depending on the time of year and the availability of their resources. CAL FIRE often responds to local incidents when either requested by the local fire department or company, or the California Master Mutual Aid Agreement, or when there could be a significant threat to SRA wildlands.

### **Medical Response**

**The primary focus of this plan is on wildfire and fires that threaten the wildland, however fire-service organizations and agencies play an important role in medical emergencies.** The medical emergency services provided by fire-protection organizations are provided under the authority of the North Coast Emergency Medical Services Authority (North Coast EMS). North Coast EMS is a Joint Powers Authority created to develop a regional Emergency Medical Services (EMS) system to reduce death and disability on the North Coast.

Generally, when an emergency medical dispatch is requested, the closest local fire departments are called in, along with local ambulance services. CAL FIRE also responds to medical aid calls in rural areas when available, under the "closest resource" concept. CAL FIRE has both mutual-aid and automatic-aid agreements with local agencies to respond to fires and medical aids jointly. North Coast EMS tasks CAL FIRE with coordinating helicopter responses for medical aids in Humboldt County.

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<sup>14</sup> See page 5 for a definition of Response Time.