**San Benito Wildfire Resilience Program**

**Community Meeting on Regional Prioritization Plan (RPP)**

**When**: Wednesday, March 26th, 2025, 5:30-8:00 PM

**Where**: Bolado Park 9000 Airline Hwy, Tres Pinos, CA 95075

**Overview and Introductions**

Barb Satink Wolfson, head of the San Benito Wildfire Resilience Program (SBWRP) introduced herself and the SBWRP and thanked Mattia Pizza Food Truck for catering the event. She gave a basic overview on the funding and wildfire planning in San Benito County, introduced the members of the Core Collaborators group associated with the program, and went over the basic plan for the night. Barb went over the goals of the SBWRP and shared that the Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) is now available on RCDSanBenito.org as it was finalized in December 2024. It is important to note how having a county-wide CWPP opens doors for federal funding. She then transitioned to defining a Regional Priority Plan (RPP), and introduced possible potential projects and the opportunities they can open.

**Regional Priority Plan (RPP) Overview/Overview of Priority Project List**

Isabel Jamerson, Climate and Conservation Planner at Environmental Science Associates, introduced herself and walked through some of the specifics of the RPP. She explained what the RPP deliverable will consist of and went over Priority Project List examples. Each project was either prioritized as a near-term project (able to be accomplished in the next five years) or as a long-term project (project will take over five years to complete). The proposed criteria for further prioritization of projects are connectivity, ecosystem health, equity of project, community impacts, near vs. long term, funding status/source, project size, reduction of fire risk, and permitting needs/status.

**General Q&A**

A community member recommended projects that related to defensible space. Barb said that this is in the hard plan and shared with the public and that there are zones and regulations that will potentially be put into place by Jan 2026. Also, in some locations, they do require non-flammable roofs amongst other requirements. All of this is in the CWPP.

A community member says that some of these projects he'd expect to be done on an annual basis and asks what the SBWRP is doing to be aware of that.

**Small Break Out Groups**

Isabel provided an overview of the small break out group exercise and noted that facilitators at each table will help guide the participants through the three exercises and corresponding questions. Participants spent time in groups before sharing back to the larger plenary group. The following notes reflect ideas captured in each breakout group and during the plenary discussion.

Exercise 1:

1. Walk through the example criteria – any questions about these?
2. Are there any additional prioritization characteristics that we should consider incorporating into this framework?

Notes:

* Collaboration: working across entities, through restrictions / Collaborative partnership projects (i.e. Firewise community and local school collaboration) (+3)
  + Opportunities to collaborate with multiple entities/interagency connections, or training opportunities, benefits the land and the people to enhance our resilience
  + Public and private partnerships
* Rank in terms of simplicity/feasibility: (minimal / complex) (+2)
  + Different prioritizations for different projects – nuance for how we navigate this
  + Not simple to rank quantitatively due to juggling factors for project feasibility, effectiveness, community support
    - Suggestion separate an initial ranking system e.g. 1-5 then a secondary qualitative assessment
  + Rank as high value / least cost, for example:
    - Row mowing
    - Clearing around the school
* Maintenance / frequency / lifespan of a project (+1)
* Condition constraints (timing / surveys)
* Bureaucracy
* Accessibility: Serving people in need (financially, physically, capacity/time)
* Communication: include in Indigenous languages and for Spanish speaking population
  + Include the Spanish speaking and indigenous speaking community in this work – prescribed burns, make sure that everyone’s included and communicated with – accessibility of range
  + Also relates to evacuation and disasters (make sure we have this outreach)
* Community Involvement / contracting
  + Custom grazing
  + Other local services
  + Local economic benefits
* Climate resiliency
* Do it yourself projects that we don’t think about funding/permitting, few people who want it to happen on private land
  + A question of education, do people know what to do and if they are allowed to do it
    - Wildfire coordinator position with the wildfire safe council can help this education
* Accountability / transparency
* Capacity to implement (personnel)
* Capacity to match external grant funds with local funding

Suggestions on current criteria:

* Implementation readiness covers
  + Funding
  + Permitting
  + Public Support
* Explain the difference between community risk reduction and reduction of fire risk
  + If these are different, more distinguishing between criteria, or if not combine
* Include transportation/evacuation in Public Safety

Exercise 2:

1. Review the current project list and discuss which have community support.
2. Ask community members to recommend the top 5 projects to be completed in the near-term.

Notes:

* Wildfire position (+8)
* more outreach and education (+6)
  + Training grazing techniques to control fuel loads and tools to use to control livestock safely to do local fuel mitigation
  + More advice to homeowners and residents on how to be firesafe
* Cienaga School (+2)
  + Prescribed burn near Cienega school
* AMLT Cultural burn program (+2)
* Roadside mowing (ongoing with CalTrans and County) (+1)
* San Juan Canyon: high priority area
  + Deer Flat (+1)
  + Gabilan Ranch/VTP
  + Hollister Hills
* La Gloria Fuel Break
* DeAnza trail as fuel break (waiting for county, have parks and CalFire support)
* Cienega VMP/Ranch Mt Harlan
* Fire pond initiative: local water development and resources
* Prescribed Grazing on private and public lands/roads
* Long term: Fire Sat
  + Alerting system
  + Web for ease of use
* Prescribed burns and livestock
* One table’s Ranking
  + Wildfire Coordinator Position (7/8 votes)
  + Cienaga School (7/8 votes)
  + Enhance community outreach and education (5/8 votes)
  + Pinnacles Fire Risk Reduction (5/8 votes)
  + AMLT Cultural Burn (4/8 votes)
  + Deer Flat (3/8 votes)
  + Roadside mowing (3/8 votes)

Suggestions for Current List:

* Need to clarify in AirTable whether funding for projects is confirmed or if just proposals
* Project sites previously treated or in progress but not complete – are they high priority?
* Rick Mazzarella created a ranking/scoring systems based on impact and effort – have his notes should we want to reconsider ranking projects

Exercise 3:

1. Are there any projects, currently not on the list, that you feel should be considered for the RPP?
2. If so, identify who could lead the project, possible funding sources, and other key project details (so that we could fill out the information in the database).

Notes:

* Expand roadside mowing project to South County roads and do annually before it dries out (+1)
  + Hwy 25 roadside mowing (ID funding through shared management between county and Caltrans)
* Community burn pile: orchestrated by CalFire (+1)
  + In San Juan Canyon where people could bring their fuel to a common place if they don’t know how to burn on their property
  + Create a more effective work yard station (Travel to and from Hollister to south county is tough)
* Fuel reduction in Diablo range East of Hollister
  + Comstock and Lone Oak Rd
* Develop evacuation plans for high-risk communities/share those that have been done (CalFire to lead)
  + Rural school evacuations
* Rea Rd Evacuation Route: prepare identified locations to allow for vehicle passage during evacuation (Lead: Ranch Aromasitas Firewise Community; funding: CalFire grant)
* Granite rock eucalyptus removal/reduction (Lead: Granite Rock; Funding: CalFire and Granite Rock)
* Fund position who leads a vulnerability assessment, that can go out and get grants
  + Consider how permitting / burning requirements prevent this
* Vibrant plant tool
* Public hub – “capacity of interactivity”
* Trex Trainings – more of them
* Wildfire mitigation technical advice for homeowners around defensible space, through a community service officer (CalFire, grant funded)
* Paying for more road workers (SB county only has 3 currently)
* Notes from CAL FIRE: Battalion Chief from Aromas
  + Tremendously understaff and under-funded compared to Monterey (don’t have the tax base)
  + Focus on the ones that we can right now with our funds
    - Websites/education
  + Why reinvent the wheel – sending folks to resources that are already exist (created a link tree that includes the priorities at a state level to see what gets funded down to cal fire, includes EMS and county priorities) – goes into wildfire resilience and preparedness
  + CAL FIRE – have vulnerability assessment tool
    - Life, property, watershed – this is their prioritization tools

Other Considerations

* Funding important factor in deciding what else to do
  + Grant writing capacity
  + CalFire strong record of accessing funds
* Funding management over multiple year projects
* Putting project list in GIS format to see how they relate to population centers and other features on landscape

Other actions:

* Send Cal Fire QR/LINK to group here
* Add QR code to San Benito Website
* Email CA State Parks to add projects to list