

FOOTHILL FIRE FLASH

El Dorado County Fire Safe Council (EDCFSC)

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Message From the Chair - *Ken Pimlott*

As we begin the new year, I would like to take a moment and reflect on 2022. It was a challenging and emotional year as we helped with recovery from the Caldor and Mosquito fires and supported those who were impacted.

It was also a very rewarding and productive year as we worked on many projects across the county and welcomed new associate fire safe councils. I want to thank everyone, especially fire safe council volunteers and our agency partners, for your continued dedicated service to our communities.

New Fire Hazard Map - 21% increase in very high hazard zone

CAL FIRE has released its much anticipated, updated Fire Hazard Severity Zone (FHSZ) map for California. In general, much more of the county (and the Sierra foothills in general) is now considered to be in a very high severity hazard zone (the highest).

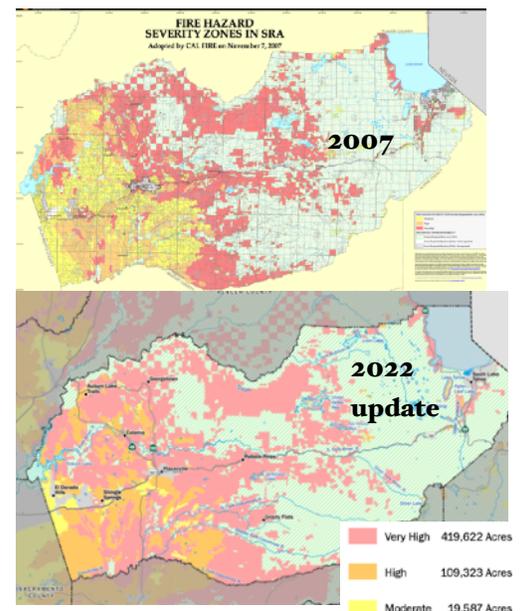
Let's look first at the zones and what the higher fire severity designation means to us all. We'll then delve in to the background as to how the map was created.

Three zones

CAL FIRE maps fire hazard for all property within California that is in the 'state responsibility area'- land where the state has primary fire prevention/suppression responsibility. That would be all land that is not federal (such as the Eldorado National Forest), and all land that is not already in a 'local responsibility area'. Local areas in our county are Placerville (city limits), South Lake County (city limits), and parts of Cameron Park and El Dorado Hills. Those areas, and other local areas across the state, will be mapped separately soon by CAL FIRE (gray areas) The federal land is separate still (green on maps)

For all the rest of us, the map is now out and available for [comment until February 3](#)

All property across the state is designated to be in one of three hazard severity zones- moderate, high, or very high. There is no "low", or "no hazard".



Senior/vet/low income defensible space help still open!

The popular defensible space program for seniors, (> 60 yrs) veterans, and low income residents is open and available, thanks to new funding obtained by the El Dorado County Fire Safe Council. The program is for the primary residence of people who have neither the financial nor physical resources to do the needed work.

A licensed and insured contractor will remove vegetation as needed to create defensible space, at no cost to the resident. Not included are leaf removal from gutters and roofs, nor removal of whole trees. Eligibility requirements and application can be found [here](#).

Thank you funders!



Def. Space Contractor List and Pointers

Need help finding a contractor yourself? The [EDCFSC website](#) gives hints for picking a contractor, as well as providing a [list of local contractors](#).

To view the map more closely, including hazard at your particular address, or to see the broader statewide version, visit

[Office of the State Fire Marshal website](#). Or, for more county specific information and questions, visit [El Dorado County FHSZ map webpage](#)

What do the designations mean to residents?

One of the main purposes of the designations is to drive local planning decisions, and to simply alert folks living in the state to how serious they need to be about wildfire mitigation. Defensible space, including the more thorough treatment of the first 5 feet however, is still needed for everyone in the county regardless of whether they are in a moderate, high, or very high hazard zone. Home hardening is also important for all fire hazard severity zones.

One thing that does change is when selling property. The fire hazard severity zone needs to be disclosed, and if high or very high, documentation of a compliant defensible space inspection must be provided.



Some residents are concerned that a very high hazard zone will make it harder to sell their property. That may be the case, but do note that a very large part of the county, and the whole Sierra foothill area, is now designated as very high.

What about insurance impacts?

Insurance companies have been using their own, alternate wildfire risk tools for many years, when determining where they will write policies and what the premiums will be- not the Fire Hazard Severity Zone map produced by CAL FIRE. According to California Insurance Commissioner Lara's office, it is not likely therefore that a change in designation will affect insurance rates of individual homeowners.

Winter: a great time for defensible space work.

Our winters tend to have nice cool dry periods interspersed between the wet, which are perfect for getting defensible space work done around your home and outbuildings. Get the work done by March and you'll greatly reduce the chance of disturbing nesting birds.

Start at the house and work outwards, paying special attention to removing vegetation within 5 feet of your home, deck, and outbuildings. Then move further out for 100 feet, removing all dead vegetation, and that live vegetation which is close horizontally or vertically to other plants. [More details can be found here.](#)

And remember, the [EDCFSC free chipping program](#) is still available!

Maps of fire hazard zones for fire safe councils

It can be very useful for residents to have access to a map that shows their fire safe council area in detail, with fire hazard severity zones layered over roads and property boundaries. Contact Steve Willis, who is coordinating these needs.

Note too that the new [insurance regulations](#) described in the Aug/Sept Foothill Flash have now been passed, helping us all. The new regulations mean that if certain wildfire risk reduction measures are taken by a homeowner and their community, insurance is required to drop to reflect those changes (though there is a 6 month window for insurance companies to put that into effect). Those risk reduction measures can be found at [Safer from Wildfire](#).

Hazard vs. Risk

Be aware that this new FHSZ map is of wildfire **hazard** (the underlying potential for wildfire damage over the next 30-50 years). This is different from wildfire **risk** which is something you can reduce by preparative actions such as defensible space and home hardening. Your wildfire **risk** is what insurance companies pay most attention to, and can be greatly improved by your own actions.

How the maps were created

The fire hazard severity zone maps are periodically reviewed and revised. with the last update being in 2007. Since then, much has been learned about how wildfires act in current, more extreme climatic conditions, and just how far embers can travel.

Modeling of fire behavior has also improved along with other science, and this is now reflected in the newest maps. The models are designed to describe relative fire hazard potential over the long term of 30-50 years, for both wildland and urban-interface areas.

5 steps were taken in designating fire hazard:

1. Simplified vegetation and slope classifications were made, with very large zones broken up by watershed boundaries.
2. Two factors- Flame length expected under worst conditions, and burn probability- were used to assign a preliminary fire hazard zone. Flame length was based on info such as more detailed vegetation type, crown fire estimation, climate data. Burn probability was calculated using such info as fire history of the last 30 years, vegetation life form, and urbanization.
3. Dispersal of embers from woodland into residential areas (a major hazard) was modeled, under worst local fire weather conditions, taking into account expected wind directions.
4. Non-wildland areas, including urban, agriculture, barren areas, and water bodies/wetlands, were assigned a fire hazard class as well, based on possible ember load, slope, tree cover, etc.
5. Jurisdictional overlays, and clean up such as removing small fragments (<20 acres), were used to finalize the maps.

For more on the process used to develop the maps, visit [Office of the State Fire Marshal](#)

Prescribed Burns- new county program

At the November EDCFSC board meeting, Kestrel Grevatt gave a presentation on the new Prescribed Burn Association (PBA) for El Dorado and Amador Counties. Several prescribed burns were conducted last year, burns which also served as workshops on prescribed burn use, planning, and integration with targeted grazing for fuels reduction. So far, these burns have been on a small scale, with 1/4 to 2 acres mentioned as a target size. The association works to empower landowners to conduct safe, legal, intentional burns through sharing of knowledge, time and resources.

Common goals of prescribed burns are to reduce fuels and resprouting shrubs in areas previously thinned and/or masticated, including reduction of invasive plants (which are often highly flammable). Other goals include introducing more heterogeneity and age diversity into forest stands to increase resiliency, reducing conifer encroachment in oak stands, and increasing native species diversity and habitat value.

Short flame lengths, low rate of spread, and good consumption of live and dead fuels can be achieved when these planned burns are implemented in appropriate weather and fuel conditions and are carefully managed.

Check out the [PBA website](#), or [join the PBA mailing list](#) to receive email updates, including upcoming workshops. Reach out to [Kestrel Grevatt](#) with any questions.

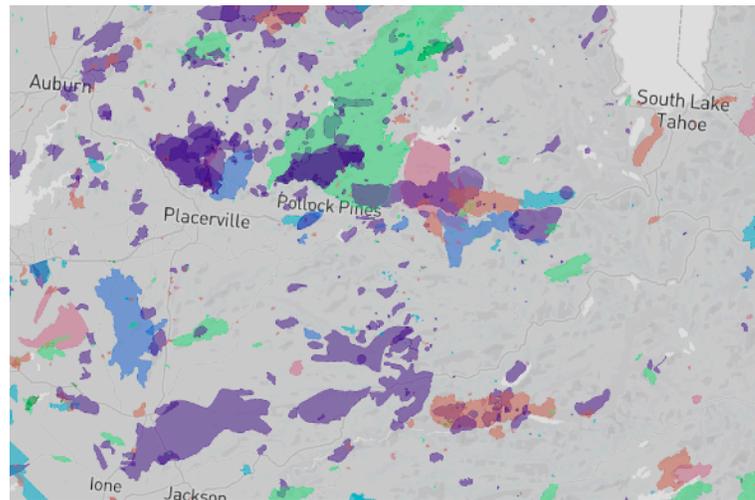
What this all means to you

You now have the opportunity to see just how hazardous your particular property might be. Wildfire hazard is very real in our county, in most areas. Good defensible space, including the first 5 feet, and home hardening, can all greatly reduce the risk of future wildfire damage to your home and property. Note: Public comments on the maps and their methodology are being accepted until February 3, 2023 [here](#).

County Fire History

In some cases, fires occur over and over in the same place, being affected by topography, wind direction, and fuel type. Such a place is Paradise of Camp Fire infamy, and east of Coloma in our own county. On the other hand, in places where no fire has occurred in decades, fuel can build up and increase the chances of a large fire also, such as happened in the Caldor footprint. The former is more the view taken by the creators of the fire hazard severity maps, with frequent fires considered to indicate areas of higher hazard.

It can be interesting to see a map of the county showing the footprints of fires over the last 100+ years (source: [Cap Radio, showing CAL FIRE data](#)) Zoom in, to see main roads outlined.



Decades

- 1878-1969
- 1970s
- 1980s
- 1990s
- 2000s
- 2010s

El Dorado Disposal Customers:

Don't forget to use your vouchers for free disposal of additional yard waste. They expire in March! Look closely to see details on your voucher. Some must be used at the transfer station, while others are good for curbside pickup.

Helpful Links- reduce risk!

[El Dorado County Fire Safe Council](#) **[Free chipping program](#)**

[Senior/vet/low income program](#) **[Burning information](#)**

[Defensible Space](#) **[Home hardening](#)** **[Insurance discounts](#)**