

ALMANOR BASIN FIRE SAFE COUNCIL

FIRE SAFE COUNCIL REPORT TO THE COMMUNITY

In June of 2002, the Almanor Basin Fire Safe Council published the first local wildland fire prevention plan. That document, which is available at the Chester Library, was generated by a team of volunteers from the US Forest Service, California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CDF), local fire districts, regional timber companies and the general public. After considering the conditions that existed within this particular area, the team identified a set of nine issues that needed attention for the long-term well-being of the community. Many of those issues have been addressed in the two years since the publication of the plan, and the local Fire Safe Council would now like to provide citizens a progress report.

The topics cited for special focus were not prioritized but the first four were identified for near-term attention. The original concern and the current status of each of those are summarized in the following.

1. **Warner Valley Access** -- There is only a single paved, dead end road into the Warner Valley / Drakesbad area, leading to concerns regarding the safety of residents and visitors in the event of a fire, particularly if the fire were at the narrow south end of Warner Valley. Collaboration between CDF, Lassen National Forest and Sierra Pacific Industries has now led to the identification of an unpaved route that will allow supplemental emergency vehicle access to the east of the existing paved

road. Development of this alternate route is part of the ongoing Warner Defensive Fuel Profile Zone (DFPZ) project that is being implemented by Lassen National Forest (LNF).

2. **Emergency Communications** -- The lack of a local AM or FM radio station raised concerns about the ability of public officials to broadcast timely emergency information to residents and visitors. The local Fire Safe Council therefore recommended that Plumas County Office of Emergency Services acquire a portable, low-power radio transmitter system that could be towed to the scene of an emergency, anywhere in the county, and used to provide vital public communications such as real-time status reports and evacuation advisories. A conceptual design of such a system, housed in a small utility trailer, was provided to the County, along with a preliminary set of specifications for their consideration. Not long after the recommendation was forwarded to the County, radio station KTOR was put into service in Westwood; this has helped reduce the immediate pressure for a separate transmitter.

3. **Fire District Funding** -- As most readers are aware, our local fire districts are largely dependent on citizen volunteers for staffing and on per-parcel special assessments for funding. At the time that the local fire plan was prepared, there was a very large disparity between assessments for the Chester FD and those for other local districts. The Fire Safe Council therefore lent its support to Chester FD in the recent ballot Measure A, which did pass and which now brings financial support for Chester more in line with other local districts.

4. **Fuel Break Continuation** -- The basin has benefited from many years of proactive fire prevention actions by CDF, Forest Service and nearby timber producers. Even before the Almanor Basin Fire Safe Council was formed, a major portion of the local fuel break network was already

established. These thinned and cleaned up forest tracts provide community defense against wildfire as well as forest defense against fires that begin within communities.

In the past two years, an area nearly two thousand acres in size has been added to that fuel break network. Some of this work was completed under grant funding through the Plumas County Fire Safe Council. Much more of it was accomplished as a supplement to commercial timber harvesting done by Collins Pine, Roseburg and Sierra Pacific. More than a thousand acres resulted from Lassen National Forest projects aimed at reducing hazardous fuel levels in the wildland-urban interface (WUI) zone around our communities.

5. **Additional Fuel Breaks** -- The 2002 plan recognized that community areas situated beyond the periphery of the lake needed fuel breaks as well, and therefore recommended that the practice be extended to those locations. Those who drive Highway 36 towards Susanville will have noticed the start of such work near Westwood, primarily on the north side of the highway. A major fuel break effort is now beginning in the southern Warner Valley area under Lassen National Forest leadership. At the south end of the lake, planning is underway for hazardous fuel removals on Plumas National Forest lands around Canyon Dam and the adjacent PG&E facilities; this work should begin next season under grant funding from the Plumas County RAC.

An overview of all of these community fuel breaks is found in the accompanying map. Not shown are many additional outlying areas of thinned forests and DFPZs that would help slow down an advancing fire and give firefighters a chance to contain a blaze.

6. **Community Cleanup Programs** -- There is a continuing need for regular removal of natural and manmade debris that accumulates on residential and business properties. Dealing with this issue has been placed in the capable hands of local fire districts, where applicable, and CDF where there is no local fire district. Property owner associations have also been key players in this effort, making use of CC&Rs where needed to ensure that parcels are maintained in a fire safe manner. Overall, there has been excellent cooperation between property owners and fire officials when the need for improvements has been brought to property owners' attention.
7. **Fuel Break Maintenance** -- Fuel breaks rely on the absence of brush or undergrowth to slow down a fire and keep flame lengths low. Over time, new growth naturally reappears in a fuel break area. The local Fire Safe Council therefore explored some alternative ways of limiting the amount of brush in fuel break areas. However, there has been no coordinated action to actually implement any of those alternatives to this point.
8. **Community Fire Attack Plans** -- This item was basically an administrative reminder, to encourage local fire districts and associated agencies (a) to continue and expand their mutual coordination efforts, (b) to review their particular areas of coverage with an eye towards pre-fire planning, and (c) to update or prepare appropriate fire attack plans for the circumstances that are unique to their particular areas.
9. **Public Awareness & Education** -- Local fire records tell us that a large fraction of wildland fires begin as the result of human activity. Experience has also shown that informed property owners are more likely to take appropriate defensive measures before a fire occurs, thereby reducing their risk of loss or injury. The importance of individual residents taking action to reduce hazards cannot be overstated. As a result, the local Fire Safe Council has made public awareness and education a primary thrust,

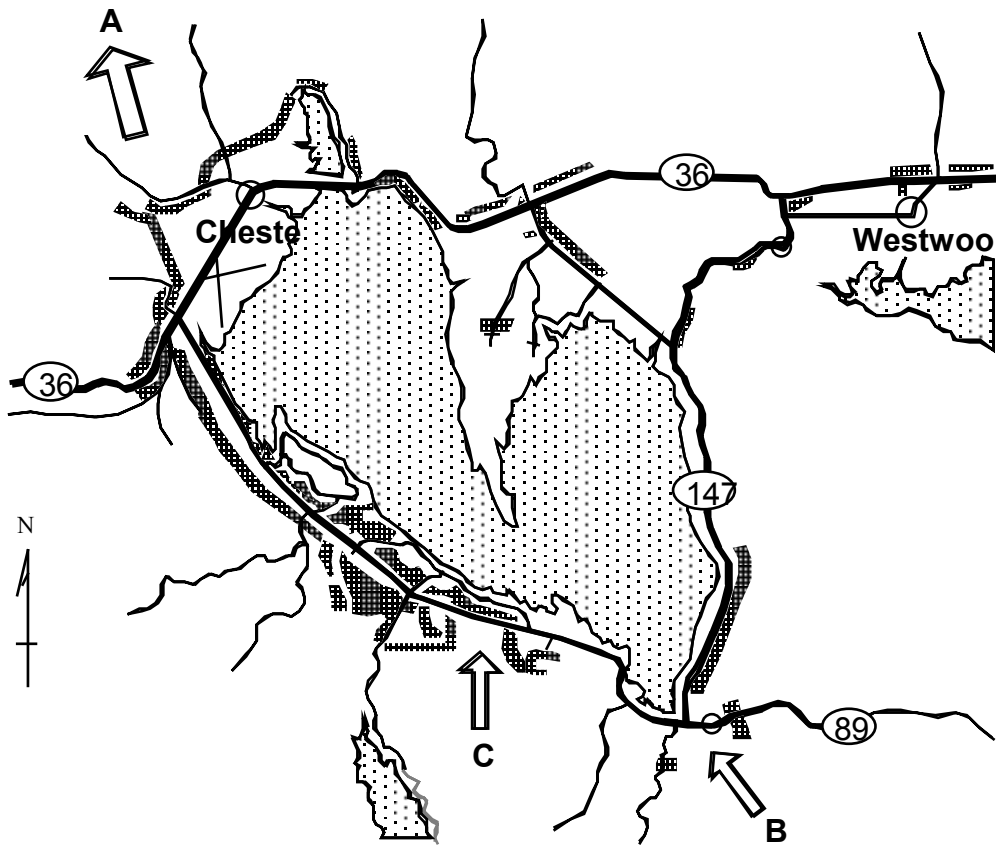
and has been proactive in generating and distributing fire prevention information that should be useful to residents and visitors alike. Helpful information is also available on the websites of the Plumas County Fire Safe Council and the West Almanor Fire Department at the following locations:


- a. www.plumasfiresafe.org
- b. www.citlink.net/~westalmanorfd.

In summary, there has been significant progress during the past two years, leading to improved fire safety conditions in much of our area. Additional work is obviously still required, such as implementation of the planned Canyon Dam DFPZ and continuation of fuel breaks into the Hamilton Branch area, the northern east shore area, Westwood and Clear Creek. And while the community deserves to give itself a round of applause for the important accomplishments to date, we also need to be mindful of the continuing need to keep our homes, yards and neighborhoods fire safe, year after year. Remember, it's not "if" a wildland fire will occur, it's a matter of "when."

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ALMANOR BASIN FUEL BREAK NETWORK



 - Fuel break (completed or underway, as October)

A - Ongoing Warner DFPZ
B - Planned Canyon Dam DFPZ
C - Proposed Fox Farm DFPZ