

Community Hazardous Fuel Reduction (HFR) Program Overview

Landowners' Process for a Creating a Community Project

Thank you for your interest in collaborating with your neighbors to address the hazardous fuels that pose a risk to your home, community and environment.

The Plumas County Fire Safe Council and Plumas Corporation are pleased to provide assistance to communities that are interested in collaborating to reduce the risk of wildfire. The goal of the Council's Community Hazardous Fuel Reduction Program is to provide technical and cost-share assistance to communities seeking fuel reduction treatments.

Community fuel reduction can be a complicated process involving many entities including the US Forest Service, or other agencies that provide grant funds, and the California Department of Forestry & Fire Protection which has regulatory responsibility for forestry practices on private land. Hazardous fuel reduction work is not the same as a timber harvest although it can include the removal of commercially valuable trees and involve a Registered Professional Forester (RPF).

There are several important advantages to working collaboratively with the Council. These advantages include:

- The Council has professional expertise in the form of fire science specialists, foresters and grant writers.
- The Council will pursue grant funds to assist with the cost of hazardous fuel reduction.
- The Council includes representatives of all of the agencies that are involved in implementing the National Fire Plan.
- In California the agencies that provide grants for the purpose of community fuel reduction will only work with established Fire Safe Councils, or other government or non-government entities such as non-profits.
- By working with the Council there are cost savings associated with economies of scale. It is more cost-effective to treat large areas that are owned by several landowners than to have each landowner working independently.
- The Council works on your behalf with the RPFs and the treatment contractors.

There are a number of very important considerations that you should understand as you begin to work with the Plumas County Fire Safe Council (PCFSC) including: cost-sharing, grant sources, the process and timelines.

Cost-Share Assistance Policies:

The Plumas County Fire Safe Council (PCFSC) has three important policy considerations related to the community hazard fuel reduction assistance program.

1. The goal of a community hazardous fuel reduction project is to treat surface, ladder and crown fuel to create a fire resilient forest to protect life, property and natural resources. The treatment goal is not to perform a commercial timber harvest for forest management reasons to enhance forest growth and forest health, although that is usually a beneficial result, or to maximize landowner economic gain.

2. There is usually a grant requirement to “match” awarded funds, which averages about 25% of the project cost. PCFSC uses funds from other grants and contributions from landowners to fulfill this requirement. Where there is potential to do so, PCFSC prescriptions can remove some amount of commercial forest products* to contribute to match requirements. **Presently the in-kind cash contribution from landowners is projected not to exceed \$250 per acre. However, costs fluctuate greatly so the in-kind cash contribution may vary. The exact amount will be specified in the Landowner Agreement prior to treatment.** *Commercial forest products are selected from the smaller diameter classes, using a general prescription of thinning from below, where tree spacing and retention of the larger and healthier trees create the desired stand condition. This usually includes removal of sawlog size trees (12-22 inches in diameter). **Eligibility to receive government funded cost share assistance requires that all proceeds from commercial forest products be used to help cover the project cost and can not go to the landowner.**

Current Average Fuel Treatment Costs and projected in-kind for forest products:

Treatment	Average Cost of Treatment (per Acre)	Average Value of Forest Products (per Acre)	Landowner Contribution per Acre
Biomass Commercial Thinning	\$ 1,200 – 2,500	\$ 300 - 500	Up to \$250*
Mastication	\$ 800 - 1,000	\$ 0	
Hand Thinning with Piling & Burning or Chipping	\$ 800 – 3,000	\$ 0	
Prescribed Underburning	\$ 150 - 500	\$ 0	
* Costs fluctuate greatly so the in-kind cash contribution may vary. The exact amount will be specified in the Landowner Agreement.			

3. If it appears that the goals of the landowner or the Council will not be met, either party can withdraw from the process. Landowners have the final say regarding tree removal on their property. However, if the final treatment won’t provide a fire resilient stand, the Council will not be able to assist with the funding and the parcel will be removed from the project.

Grant Sources:

The PCFSC has sought and received grant support from several different sources. Presently the key sources include:

1. National Fire Plan grants, from the US Forest Service and Department of Interior agencies. The 1999 and 2002 wildfire season along with continuing fires have resulted in the National Fire Plan and increased federal funding for wildfire hazard mitigation and community protection the past several of years. The National Fire Plan grants are applied for through the California Fire Safe Council Grants Clearinghouse. All of the grant funds are subject to annual federal appropriations. The PCFSC has been successful in obtaining grants from both the US Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management.
2. The Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act of 2000. There are two sources of funds associated with this legislation, Title II and Title III. Title II funds can be used when it can be demonstrated that the work benefits national forest land resources. The closer the land is to the national forest the better chance it will have of qualifying. Title II funds are recommended for distribution by a Resource Advisory Committee that is a local assemblage of citizens representing diverse interests. The Resource Advisory Committee recommends projects to the Forest Supervisor for approval. The Council has used the Title II funds for the actual fuel reduction treatment. Title III funds come from the same legislation, but the Plumas County Board of Supervisors distributes them. These funds have been used to plan the projects.
3. California's Sierra Nevada Conservancy. There has been funding available for a number of purposes including the planning of projects, including development of environmental assessment to meet California's Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). After appropriate documentation is prepared applicants can seek implementation funding. Sources of funds have been Proposition 84: Safe Drinking Water, Water Quality and Supply, Flood Control, River and Coast Protection Bond Act of 2006 and Proposition 1: Water Quality, Supply, and Infrastructure Improvement Act of 2014. The purpose of these funds is to demonstrate benefits to the protection and restoration of rivers, lakes and streams, their watersheds and associated land, water, and other natural resources. Certainly reducing fire hazard in and around communities meets this requirement.
4. CAL FIRE provides grant funding from State Responsibility Area (SRA) fees. The State Responsibility Area Fire Prevention Fund (SRAFPF) and Tree Mortality (TM) Grant Program funds projects that focus on supporting local efforts to remove dead and dying trees that pose a threat to public health and safety and for projects that reduce the wildfire threat to habitable structures within State Responsibility Areas (SRA).

The Process:

The PCFSC will work with communities where a resident has performed the outreach to generate community interest and recruited several homeowners. The following describes the steps involved in a community fuel reduction project.

- Step 1. Begin by talking to your neighbors. You want to generate interest among your neighbors to participate in a community fuel reduction project. Have them complete the **Community Hazardous Fuel Reduction Landowner Application** (<http://www.plumasfiresafe.org/application-for-services.html>) request form to demonstrate their interest.
- Step 2. When we have received applications from landowners that represent 75 or more acres - the more contiguous, the better - the Council will begin working on your behalf to develop grant proposals to help fund the project.
- Step 3. A community meeting can be held to further educate your community and answer questions.
- Step 4. The PCFSC develops the project. Information will be collected from preliminary field data to help develop grant proposals for treatment funds. Planning funds are required for this project step. Grant funds will be requested for both the planning and the on-the-ground fuel reduction work. These funds may come from a number of sources.
- Step 5. When the Council has obtained funding then a Registered Professional Forester will be retained to begin the project planning and environmental assessment process. This process includes development of the required environmental documentation for both the state (California Environmental Quality Act- CEQA) and federal processes (National Environmental Policy Act-NEPA). The RPF, working with the landowners, will assess the parcels to determine the treatments and identify the boundaries with plastic flagging. The RPF will also assess the area for archaeologically significant sites, threatened and endangered wildlife and sensitive plants, and other critical information.
- Step 6. When landowners are confident they want to participate, they complete the Landowner Agreement that is the legal document that addresses issues related to expectations, responsibilities and liabilities. The landowner agreement is held with Plumas Corporation, which implements the Fire Safe Council's projects under a Memorandum of Agreement.
- Step 7. When the environmental documentation has been completed and landowner agreements are signed, the Council will solicit for a contractor to do the fuel reduction work.
- Step 8. Fuel reduction treatment work begins. Photo monitoring plots are taken and the RPF supervises the project.
- Step 9. Maintenance considerations are discussed with the landowners by the RPF. Fuels will continue to accumulate unless you perform annual maintenance.

Timeframe:

How long the process takes depends on many factors. Key steps include:

- Community organization for collection of landowner applications may take from a couple months to a year.
- It can take up to a year to secure the necessary funding.
- The environmental assessment process and application for permits can take a few weeks to several months.
- Treatment, depending on project acres and treatment types, weather conditions, equipment and operator availability, can take from a few months up to two seasons.

Primary contacts for more information are:

Hannah Hepner, Plumas County Fire Safe Council Coordinator, 283-0829

Diann Jewett, Administrative Assistant for Plumas Corporation (a non-profit organization working to enhance Plumas County's economic development and natural resources), 283-3739.

You, or a member of your community, are encouraged to attend the Plumas County Fire Safe Council meetings (2nd Thursday of each month). The meeting agenda and minutes are available at the council website: www.plumasfiresafe.org

The Plumas County Fire Safe Council is a non-profit tax-exempt organization. Tax-deductible donations are welcomed. They can be mailed to P.O. Box 1225, Quincy, CA 95971. They will be used for community Firewise education or fuel reduction.