

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.

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

Wendy DeOcampo, 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.