

Fire-Resilient Forests Initiative

The Need

The October 2017 Coast Range wildfires in Northern California caused great devastation to humans living in the area and their homes. But it was, on the whole, good for the health of the fire-adapted forest landscape. One challenge we face now is finding ways to manage the fuels in forests so that fires improve the health of the ecosystem without turning into uncontrollable conflagrations that destroy human communities.

More than 80% of the forest land in Sonoma County is privately held. Developing meaningful levels of fire resilience in forests requires engaging private landowners. The goal of the Fire-Resilient Forests Initiative is to build active connections between private landowners and specialists in sustainable forest management.

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The Fire-Resilient Forests Initiative (FRFI) is a project of the Sonoma County Forest Conservation Working Group (<http://sonomaforests.org/>). The Working Group has served as a hub for advancing education and outreach on sustainable forest management for over a decade. This group aims to get consistent, expert practices into the hands of both private and public land managers in Sonoma, Napa, Solano, and Mendocino Counties. Participants in the Working Group include the Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District, the Sonoma and Gold Ridge Resource Conservation Districts, the Sonoma Land Trust, foresters, land managers, landowners, and academics.

The purpose of the FRFI is to complement the publicly-funded response to the fires and get the best science, expert, and permitting guidance to landowners via a network of public agencies and nonprofit organizations.

FRFI will help to coordinate and implement forest resilience by supporting regional approaches to scientific analyses and technical assessments, dissemination of locally-appropriate land management expertise, and hands-on landowner outreach.

Outcomes

Technical Assessments: Support a coordinated assessment of the impacts of the fires to understand needs and prioritize actions based on feasibility, urgency, and efficiency. Assessments may include mapping and using already-available data resources, such as extensive data compiled by government agencies, UC Berkeley, and Pepperwood's Dwight Center for Conservation Science.

Land Management Recommendations Help prioritize urgent actions including hazards advisories, erosion control and other steps to protect water quality, and coordinate action with private and public landowners. FRFI will then use the technical assessments to recommend longer-term actions that support forest resilience and reduce the risks of future conflagrations. Recommendations will integrate projections of future global change to help ensure that on-the-ground adaptive management enhances the ecological, economic, and social sustainability of our region.

Landowner Outreach Develop information for forest landowners and residents and disseminate it through partner communications networks.

What's Needed

Resources needed to successfully complete this work include:

- Project management services
- Staff time from member organizations for assessment and recommendation development
- Support for outreach efforts including website, email, social media, and mailings

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