



# Regional Priority Plan to Reduce Wildfire Risk and Improve Ecosystem Health in Santa Barbara County

## Overview

Given the growing impacts of climate change and extreme heat and drought conditions, Santa Barbara County is increasingly vulnerable to the risks of large-scale fire events. Across the county, community leaders and frontline communities are focusing on these challenges and finding opportunities to build resilience and reduce risks.

Over the past year, the Regional Priority Plan (RPP) team has conducted community outreach, wildfire risk mapping and predictive modeling to assess the highest priority challenges and opportunities to reduce wildfire risk in Santa Barbara County. The RPP identified 50 projects critical to community and ecosystem resilience in the face of increased wildfire threat, and mapped priority locations for wildfire risk reduction actions. All the priority projects, maps and models are available at [sbcwildfireresilience.org](https://sbcwildfireresilience.org).

## Background

With funding from the California Coastal Conservancy, the RPP team implemented a highly collaborative effort to understand wildfire risk and opportunities for risk reduction on public and private land in Santa Barbara County. Through an extensive community engagement process, the RPP team sourced priorities from a wide range of partners engaged in fire protection, education, environmental stewardship, restoration, land management, agriculture, neighborhood associations, and government leadership. The team also drew from 700 ideas generated through the Climate Resilience Roundtable Series convened by the Community Environmental Council between November 2019 through March 2021, which unfolded in parallel with this process.

## Outcomes

These conversations and gatherings surfaced 50 priority projects spanning 10 critical impact areas. They represent the distilled wisdom of dozens of community leaders about how to increase fire resilience, build community, enhance ecosystem function and better adapt to living with Santa Barbara's inherent fire regime. The RPP team also gathered data, maps and reports into a publicly accessible data library. With that data we undertook more comprehensive wildfire risk modeling than was previously done, generating maps, models and decision support tools to enable more effective planning, policy, and data-driven decision making.

The RPP team delivered critical tools and resources for building resilience:

- » A dynamic publicly available database of 50 priority wildfire resilience projects
- » A centralized library of Santa Barbara County wildfire data and models
- » A customizable countywide wildfire risk model and spatial decision support system to identify high priority areas for wildfire risk-reduction activities
- » A beta version of a dynamic partner and stakeholder directory
- » A guide to permitting considerations for project proponents and policy makers

## Critical Impact Areas

Equity

Neighborhood Organizing

Restoration

Capacity Building

Education Engagement

Vegetation Management

Planning and Policy

Insurance

Buffers and Land Protection

Research and Analysis

## Ongoing Efforts

The tools and resources developed as part of this project, including the RPP website, represent a starting point rather than an endpoint of our unfolding work to reduce wildfire risk and build resilience. Community needs and impact opportunities will continue to evolve as we face the intensifying effects of the climate crisis, and our capacity to innovate and implement these projects will grow over time. As such, the outputs on the website are critical tools and resources for finding and defining pathways forward together.

We believe the pathway to community and ecosystem resilience will be forged as a series of collaborative projects undertaken with various agencies, community-based organizations, funders, and neighborhoods. Each project must achieve important outcomes while simultaneously building trust through shared accomplishments, weaving social networks, increasing collaborative capacity, and setting the stage for subsequent projects. While the challenges are immense, each project advances our goals and each incremental step matters. We simply must respond to every funding opportunity to ensure each of the 50 RPP priority projects becomes a stepping stone on the pathway to community resilience.

The potential for this suite of projects to have a transformative impact on Santa Barbara County is immense. Rob Hazard, Division Chief and Fire Marshall for Santa Barbara County Fire Department and a close collaborator on the RPP says “If we implement the projects in the RPP over the next ten years we’ll be 90 percent of the way to building resilience to wildfire. Most of these projects are going to be done by non-government players, and the County needs to do everything we can to help. The end result will be a more resilient natural environment and a safer community.”

## Funding and Partnerships

The RPP was funded by the California Coastal Conservancy via the California Climate Investments initiative that puts Cap-and-Trade dollars towards reducing greenhouse gas emissions to strengthen the economy and improve public health and the environment. This visionary project was funded to help Santa Barbara County organize and prioritize projects, programs, and policies to address the ongoing threat of wildfires in the region.

The RPP was led by a core group of organizations committed to collaboratively building community resilience. Rachel Couch and Tom Gandesbery of the **Coastal Conservancy** helped design the project and direct its funding. Anna Olsen of the **Cachuma Resource Conservation District** shaped the project and managed its implementation and fiscal management. Carl Palmer and the team at **LegacyWorks Group** provided leadership, facilitation and community engagement and produced the website and deliverables. Christina McGinnis of **McGinnis Environmental** led the team’s extensive community engagement efforts and was a major contributor to the projects and deliverables. Sharyn Main of the **Community Environmental Council** helped shape the project, stewarded its launch through the Wildfire and Smoke Climate Resilience Roundtable, and guided its progress. John Gallo, Zachary Canter, and the team at **Conservation Biology Institute** led the mapping and modelling.

## Website Content

Below are screenshots from the [Featured Projects](#) and the [Maps](#) pages of the RPP website. One benefit of having this information in web format is that it can be collaboratively and continuously updated.

