

The West Valley OUTLOOK

a vision for our Age Friendly communities

July 2022

West Valley wildfire prevention and safety year-round

By Joe Simitian,
Santa Clara County
Supervisor

The CZU Lightning Complex fire that threatened Santa Clara County's West Valley struck during the height of summer. But it was a chilly Friday in January 2022 when embers blown by high winds ignited the coastal mountains near Big Sur, forcing evacuations and closing Highway 1 for several days.

In California, fire season is no longer a "season." Indeed, it seems almost constant.

As we continue to experience larger and more damaging wildfires each year, we have to keep looking for opportunities to improve fire prevention year-round, and to give local communities the help they need to keep their homes, businesses, and families safe.

This is particularly important in places like the West Valley, where many folks live in the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) zone that extends from the scenic and rugged—and fire-fuel rich—Santa Cruz Mountains to the cities and neighborhoods on our western flank.

I'm gratified that my Board colleagues agreed, unanimously supporting my proposal to expand the Santa Clara County Central Fire Protection District's Pre-Fire Management and Wildfire Resilience program.

First, the County will be adding a dedicated crew, called a Fuels Crew, to clear brush and vegetation along evacuation routes and roads in the fire district, which includes the cities of Los Gatos, Monte Sereno, Cupertino, and a

portion of Saratoga, along with unincorporated lands in western Santa Clara County. (As a "dependent" fire district, SCCCFPD is governed by the County Board of Supervisors, which acts as the district's Board of Directors.)

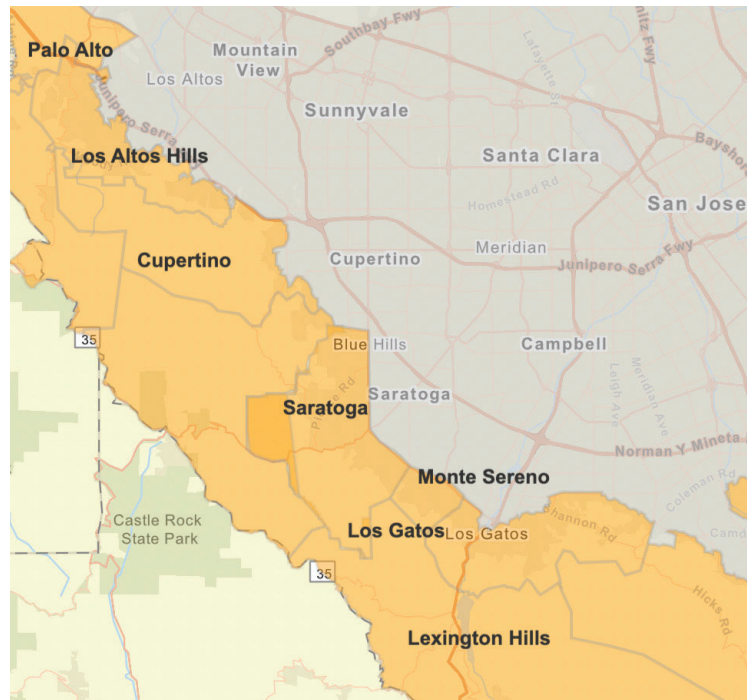
In addition to reducing wildfire ignitions and spread along evacuation routes, we've also expanded a free "chipping" program that helps individual residents and communities create and maintain defensible space, and further reduces hazardous WUI fuels.

Offered in partnership with the Santa Clara County Fire Safe Council, the community chipping program currently offers free processing and disposal of brush and tree branches once a year at a central location. It's a win all around, and I'm pleased we'll be able to do more of it.

Other new prevention strategies approved by the Board include:

- A pilot Community Wildfire Program, with the addition of a specialist who will conduct inspections for residents living in high-fire-hazard areas, and provide guidance on creating defensible spaces around properties;
- Community education webinars for wildfire preparedness; and,
- An online data tool to run training simulations and to alert the public of evacuations with real-time information.

Our County's existing Fire Protection and Wildfire Resilience Program was established with federal, state, and local partners in 2020, following two devastating megafires –



Santa Clara County's Wildland Urban Interface (WUI).

Photo from sccfiresafe.org

the CZU and Santa Clara Unit (SCU) lightning complexes—that affected the South Bay.

The program's strong initial results are encouraging. Expanding this initiative will protect not only the communities we call home here in the County, but also the diverse wild-life and forests with which we coexist.

Residents of communities near or within WUIs understand all too well the devastating potential of wildfires: the CZU lightning complex destroyed nearly 1,500 homes and businesses in San Mateo and Santa Cruz counties, engulfed the ancient red-wood trees of California's oldest state park, and caused one fatality. Collateral damage from smoke can even affect communities hundreds of miles away, severely

reducing air quality, causing health risks, and keeping people indoors for weeks at a time.

As Assistant Fire Chief Brian Glass put it, "The region continues to experience increased risk due to an accumulation of drought-stressed fuels and overgrowth. Wildland megafires are becoming more frequent and deadly and this is why it is so important that we take action, now, to explore additional ways to keep the communities we serve safe."

I commend the Fire District's efforts to date to focus on prevention and wildfire mitigation. It's time for us to step up and take these efforts to the next level. We can and will do more. Frankly put, we have to.

Joe Simitian was elected to the Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors in

2012 and re-elected in 2016 and 2020. He represents the Fifth District, which now includes Cupertino, Los Altos, Los Altos Hills, Los Gatos, Monte Sereno, Mountain View, Palo Alto, Saratoga, Stanford, and portions of San Jose. Joe's public service over the years includes stints as a member of the California State Senate, the California State Assembly, Mayor of Palo Alto, President of the Palo Alto School Board, as well as an earlier term on the Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors. He served as an election observer/supervisor in El Salvador and Bosnia and participated in refugee relief and resettlement efforts in Albania and Kosovo.

LOS GATOS WEEKLY TIMES



July 15, 2022

FIRE SAFETY

Los Gatos park to house county fire program crew

Supervisors approved a pair of agreements to bolster wildfire management project

By Hannah Kanik

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The Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors approved a set of agreements to protect county parks from wildfires and set up a pilot fire lookout station in Los Gatos.

The board approved a five-year lease agreement with the Santa Clara County Central Fire Protection District late last month to base its pilot Pre-Fire Management and Wildfire Resilience Program Crew in Vasona Lake County Park.

“This is a win-win for Parks and Central Fire, and also for the surrounding communities around our county parks,” Su-

pervisor Joe Simitian said in a press release. “It will give Central Fire a presence at Vasona, and we get some use out of a building that had been sitting empty but will now be used for a program that makes our communities safer.”

The 2,400-square-foot modular building in Vasona used to be occupied by Parks and Recreation staff. Central Fire can provide training to parks staff along with fuel reduction efforts in lieu of rent.

The agreement came with two five-year extension options.

The other agreement is with the Santa Clara County Firesafe Council to fund forest management services through March 31, 2025.

“These efforts protect our

parks, but also all of us. Our area is fortunate to be so well-served by a network of county parks, but that means we’ve got to manage them safely and responsibly,” Simitian said.

The Firesafe Council will thin overly dense trees and brush on 290 acres of parkland in Sanborn and Upper Stevens Creek parks. The council, a nonprofit grassroots organization, supports homeowners and landowners in Santa Clara County that are vulnerable to wildfire.

The agreement also allows the county to participate in the Los Gatos Watershed Forest Health Program, which mitigates the risk of wildfire in the region and funds fuel reduction and forest health improvements in the Santa Cruz Mountains. The program was also awarded a \$7.5 million Cal Fire Forest Health Grant in 2021.



LOS GATAN

June 7, 2023

SUPERVISORS ACT TO PROTECT RESIDENTS FROM WILDFIRES

At County Supervisor Joe Simitian's urging, the Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors unanimously directed staff to enter into a contract for enhanced and expanded defensive space brush chipping and debris removal

services along public access areas to address the wildland fire risk in the county's fire-prone areas on its western side.

The Board's action, which was made in response to a request from Simitian in April, will allow the Central Fire Protection District Fire Chief to negotiate a new \$1.25 million, five-year contract with the Santa Clara County FireSafe Council for defensive space brush chipping and debris removal services for owners and residents of properties located along public access areas in Central Fire's Wildland Urban Interface area (WUI). The contract also allows the FireSafe Council to perform roadside vegetation treatments to maintain shaded fuel breaks and evacuation routes.

"The contract with the FireSafe Council will reduce hazardous fuels and increase public safety by creating more fire-resilient properties along public access areas in the WUI," said

Simitian, whose District Five includes the entirety of Central Fire's territories. "And it will ultimately decrease the potential for the catastrophic loss of life and property in a wildfire."

Simitian is supporting the FireSafe Council's request for \$60,000 in PG&E grant funding for its community chipping program operated in the WUI areas of the county, which includes the Santa Cruz Mountains. This funding source would allow work to be done beyond the public access area targeted by County funds, and will further help local residents in their efforts to create and maintain safe defensible space by processing or disposing of brush and tree branches.

Simitian noted, "While this is good news in terms of keeping our area safe from fires, we need even more in terms of resources, which is why I've asked PG&E to approve the FireSafe Council's request for grant funding for its community chipping program."

With the devastating storms that hit our mountain communities so hard this past winter, our mountain residents especially need and deserve PG&E's support."

Established in 1947, Central Fire's boundary includes the cities of Cupertino, Monte Sereno, a portion of Saratoga, the town of Los Gatos, as well as rural unincorporated lands in western Santa Clara County, including the Santa Cruz Mountains. The District provides service outside its boundaries by contract to the cities of Campbell and Los Altos, the Los Altos Hills County Fire District, and the Saratoga Fire Protection District. In total, Central Fire provides emergency response to over 225,000 residents in these communities.

Through Central Fire's Pre-Fire Management and Wildfire Resilience Program the District partners with local, state and federal agencies to develop pre-fire management solutions

San Jose Mercury News

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LOMA PRIETA AREA

County streamlines emergency plan

By Hannah Kanik

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The Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors recently approved a plan to improve emergency response planning and communication with the Loma Prieta community in the Santa Cruz Mountains.

Changes include more collaboration between Santa Clara and Santa Cruz counties, a joint community safety event this spring and the creation of a joint sheriff's office substation on the Loma Prieta Joint Union School District campus.

Loma Prieta is a small mountain community that straddles the Santa Clara and Santa Cruz counties and faces a high threat of wildfires and other disasters. Santa Clara County residents in the area have Los Gatos addresses.

Several residents expressed concern over emergency response protocol, and Supervisor Joe Simitian, who represents the Santa Clara County portion of the area, co-authored the emergency response plan with then-Supervisor Mike Wasserman.

"When disaster strikes, no one cares who's on one side of the line and who's on another, but you need to

make sure that public institutions are ready to respond and those artificial boundaries don't get in the way of rapid response," Simitian said.

Simitian said the recent string of storms in the Bay Area are "proof positive" that streamlining emergency response mechanisms in the area is important.

"I know the community is concerned about emergency response. I know having two different counties with responsibility for one community complicates matters. Finally, I know it's never too early to start getting ready for the next emergency, whether earthquake-, rain- or fire-related," Simitian said.

The county's Housing, Land Use, Environment and Transportation Committee will hear a progress report on this plan in May.

Under the new plan, Santa Clara and Santa Cruz counties will develop a memorandum of understanding on shared responsibilities, and organize a joint community outreach event this spring to explain the services available during an emergency.

The two counties' emergency operations centers will also conduct a joint tabletop exercise to simulate

what to do in the event of an emergency.

Firefighters and police officers will meet to discuss unified command and response, evacuation routes and mutual aid policies before the start of fire season.

"They say the best preparation for tomorrow is doing your best today. That makes a lot of sense to me. The safety of mountain residents depends on us being ready long before disaster strikes," Simitian said. "So now is the time to get the county's plans in order. ASAP."

The Santa Clara County and Santa Cruz County sheriff's offices will move into a new joint substation in the community center on the Loma Prieta Joint Union School District campus later this year. Simitian pushed for including a powerful generator to provide extended power to the station.

"The advent of electric cars and Zoom meetings has heightened the need for emergency power in times of disaster, outages and extreme climate swings," said Robin Porter, president of the Loma Prieta Community Foundation. "The community emergency response plan depends on emergency power generation to be equipped to handle these needs."