

MENDOCINO COUNTY FIRE SAFE COUNCIL, INC.

151 Laws Avenue #B, Ukiah, California 95482 (707) 462-3662

2007 ANNUAL PROGRESS REPORT

for the Annual Members' Meeting on May 28, 2008

The year 2007 saw tremendous growth for the Mendocino County Fire Safe Council. Our first county-wide educational outreach, a publication entitled "Living with Wildfire in Mendocino County," received extremely positive responses and spread knowledge of our organization to thousands previously unaware of our existence. That project also ate up all of our savings, such that we feared for our continued existence. Thanks to the generosity of numerous friends who responded to our fundraising letter in early 2008 with gifts totaling \$15,000, we are back in the black and continuing our efforts fulltime. Most exciting to us is the birth of local Fire Safe Councils in Caspar, Deerwood east of Ukiah, Oak Knoll southwest of Ukiah, and Greenfield Ranch northwest of Ukiah – because local fire safe councils are where the rubber meets the road!

PROJECTS COMPLETED

Brooktrails Township Fire Program. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) awarded us \$73,054 in 2006 to assist this community, which is recognized by fire professionals throughout the county as being at extreme risk of loss of life in a wildfire. The project, completed in April 2007, cleared brush and tree branches back from a dozen miles of roads, identified and cleared several evacuation routes through private land, created a Brooktrails Township Community Wildfire Protection Plan, printed a second edition of the "Brooktrails Wildland Fire and Emergency Evacuation Plan," and funded the mailing, in conjunction with the Brooktrails Community Emergency Response Team (CERT), of a checklist for evacuating with pets.

Pine Mountain Defensible Space and Addressing Campaign. Another grant from BLM provided \$59,168 to improve wildfire safety in the Pine Mountain area east/southeast of Willits. The Pine Mountain Fire Safe Council, an energetic group who had already worked on fire safe projects for three years, managed and performed the campaign. They educated their neighbors, performed home inspections for fire safety, cleared brush and tree branches from several miles of roads, worked with a professional mapping (GIS) expert to create the first accurate map of their area for use by emergency responders, and installed road signs at every unmarked intersection. Free roadside chipping provided by a local tree service motivated residents to clear their excess vegetation. The Pine Mountain project manager reported that some residents worked long into the night and created massive piles before their assigned chipping date! This project, completed in April 2008, has made a dramatic difference in the fire safety of the Pine Mountain area and its residents.

Fire Safe Homes, Mendocino! The Community Foundation of Mendocino County granted us \$3,000 to assist lower-income or disabled persons with needed clearing around their homes. This project, completed in summer of 2007, provided tree trimming and removal for four households, in Hopland, Albion, Brooktrails, and Pine Mountain east of Willits.

Living with Wildfire in Mendocino County. This was by far our largest outreach project yet, and has produced the most positive results. The 16-page, full-color 10" x 13" publication, stapled and printed on high-quality paper, features articles and photos by local persons on subjects of local interest, with background on our local fire districts and contact information for all fire stations in the county. Instructions about preparing to survive wildfires, and insights on what it's like to be both residents and firefighters in a major wildfire, fill its pages. We printed 40,000 copies, and mailed 34,000 of those to every rural address in the county. The rest were distributed by fire departments, community groups, stores, insurance agents, local fire safe councils, and others. Sponsors and advertisers paid approximately half of the project's cost.

We took special care throughout the publication to use only common words, and to explain all the “hows and whys.” We were rewarded for this effort by hundreds of people who told us, “I read every word of it, and I understood it! And now I’ve trimmed my trees, cut back my manzanitas, put up a reflective address sign, cleaned out my gutters – and next spring we’re installing a new fire-resistant roof to replace our wood shakes!” We plan to create and distribute a second edition of “Living with Wildfire in Mendocino County” in early summer 2008, funded in part by the U.S. Forest Service.

CURRENT PROJECT

Brooktrails Fuels Reduction Project. Our ever-generous funder, BLM, awarded us an additional \$166,852 for additional vegetation (“fuels” for a wildfire) removal throughout Brooktrails during 2008. A large portion of the work is being performed by CAL FIRE (CDF) hand crews of 15 men each, clearing vegetation along roads and on “Greenbelt” parcels owned by the Brooktrails Community Services District. Private contractors will be hired for additional work as needed. This work, building on what we did last year, is making a huge difference in the safety of the area’s residents and homes should a wildfire strike. We greatly appreciate CAL FIRE’s contribution.

UPCOMING FIRE SAFE PROJECTS

From early 2009 through early 2010 we will perform two huge projects, again funded by BLM: removal of the highly-flammable, invasive plant called gorse, which has taken over the Caspar area on the coast (\$108,850), and a county-wide chipping program, which will provide free chipping services throughout the county for persons who clear around their homes, roads, and driveways (\$98,565). We are thrilled to continue to receive such generous funding from our federal partners.

OUR FINANCIAL SITUATION

Our situation is currently stable, thanks to the generosity of our friends! We have expanded our search for funds in recent months, and at this time it appears that we will be able to fully fund our annual operating budget of \$59,000 -- one employee, plus office rent, travel, supplies, etc. -- for all of 2008 and 2009. A significant boost is the promise of the 2009 BLM funding totaling \$207,000, \$35,000 of which we will “earn” from the grants by our management of them. We always operate frugally, taking great care to be good stewards of the funds entrusted to us.

Special thanks for significant donations (\$1,000 and above) during the past year go to **Robert Mailer Anderson and Nicola Miner, Brooktrails Township Community Services District, Anderson Valley Community Services District, and Hopland Fire Protection District.** In early 2008, **Mendocino Redwood Company** gave us a beautiful 4-wheel-drive 2000 GMC Sierra pickup truck, which will enable us to travel safely to project areas and educational events on unpaved or steep roads – a huge boost! We continue to be extremely indebted to the **Allen-Heath Memorial Foundation** and its local representatives, **Chuck and Liz Philips Heath**, who have granted us \$20,000 a year for the past three years and have been the primary sustainers of our budget and our work since our inception! Last but not most important, our **members** contribute both good energy and good funds, including in the form of membership dues of \$30 per year. Members, we love you!

The past year has been good. We look forward to new opportunities throughout 2008 and beyond, as we strive to help our county’s residents prepare for wildland fires. The fires are sure to come: nearly all scientists who study the history and behavior of wildfires report that fires are increasing in size and severity, that “fire season” is lasting longer and longer, and that areas once spared will be spared no more. Our county has been fortunate, but our time will come. Thank you for working with us to ensure that we are as “fire safe” as we can possibly be!

-- Julie Rogers, Executive Director