

THE MENDOCINO COUNTY FIRE SAFE COUNCIL

HISTORY

Mendocino County is located in northwestern California and boasts over 100 miles of spectacular coastline. Most of our 3,510 beautiful square miles are covered with forests and oak woodlands, and large inland areas are covered with chaparral. The ocean has a moderating influence on the coastal towns, but the great majority of the county is at very high risk of wildfire and is shown as such on the newly-revised Fire Hazard Severity Zone maps for California.

The Mendocino County Fire Safe Council was founded in 2003 by Colin Wilson, Chief of the Anderson Valley Fire Department and then President of the Mendocino County Fire Chiefs Association, and Julie Rogers, then Volunteer Coordinator of the Coalition to Save the Ukiah Air Attack Base. This occurred soon after the Coalition had successfully regained funding for the Cal Fire (then CDF) aerial firefighting base at the Ukiah Regional Airport. During this effort, Wilson and Rogers agreed that, regardless of the air tankers' presence, a pro-active, grassroots effort toward wildland fire safety was sorely lacking in Mendocino County, and they set about to meet that need.

The first meeting toward creation of a fire safe effort, held in September 2003, was attended by ten local and Cal Fire chiefs. They decided that a countywide Fire Safe Council was the best format for such an effort, due in part to Fire Safe Councils' growing role in California at that time as prime recipients of federal grant funding for wildfire reduction efforts.

In October 2003 Chief Wilson helped to fight the devastating Cedar Fire in San Diego County, part of the 2003 South California Fire Siege. He returned from this horrifying experience with a renewed sense of urgency regarding wildland fire prevention. (See his account on this web site.) In November 2003 Wilson and Rogers attended a regional Firewise Communities USA workshop and met members of neighboring counties' Fire Safe Councils already in existence. From this experience came the realization that small local Fire Safe groups working in partnership with the countywide organization was the best working model for such a large and diverse county.

In late 2003, the fledgling council prepared an application for free ArcView computer mapping software through a Firewise Communities competition. They were successful, and Mendocino County's Fire Safe Council became one of only five groups in California – and 27 nationwide – to be named Firewise “ArcView Communities.” This success entitled the Council to not only the software and free technical support, but also national recognition as an emerging wildfire safety organization.

In January 2004 the Council held its first official meeting and appointed an initial board of directors, with Colin Wilson as President and Julie Rogers as Coordinator. Late that month the Council's first public educational meeting in Ukiah drew a crowd of 90 persons, who donated \$1,200 toward establishing the Council. The Council operated with these funds and other small donations for its first year.

The Council was incorporated on March 3, 2004, and Bylaws were approved on April 27 of that year. The majority of the initial Directors were fire professionals, but measures were taken to ensure that within a year the majority would instead be interested citizens from various interest groups and locations, and this is now the case. The Council has voting members, who select the Directors at the annual meeting; membership dues are \$30 per calendar year. See this web site for the membership application. Donations and membership dues are tax-deductible, as organization is recognized as a

nonprofit charitable corporation by both the Internal Revenue Service and the California Franchise Tax Board. Further financial and corporate information is available on this web site.

The MCFSC's Executive Director, Julie Rogers, was hired as the Council's sole staff person in early 2005, courtesy of a Startup Grant from the U.S. Department of the Interior's Bureau of Land Management. She was the primary author and editor of the county's Community Wildfire Protection Plan and utilizes her experience and training as a volunteer firefighter with the Ukiah Valley Fire District during educational efforts. The Council's first office was a cubicle inside the Fire District's station, for which the Council is extremely grateful. The current office, furnished with donated furniture and equipment, is located in the Willow Water District building next door to the fire station.

COMMUNITY WILDFIRE PROTECTION PLAN

In 2005, in conjunction with CAL FIRE's (formerly CDF) Mendocino Unit and local fire districts, the Fire Safe Council created a 150-page county-wide Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) in accordance with the requirements of the Healthy Forests Restoration Act of 2003. This CWPP fully incorporates Cal Fire's Mendocino Unit Wildfire Management Plan, and contains information and concerns identified by local residents and fire chiefs at 12 meetings held around the county in Spring 2005.

CAL FIRE leadership in Sacramento acknowledged our work on this Plan by inviting us to speak about it at an interagency Wildfire Mitigation Conference in Sacramento in March 2006. Our County Fire Chiefs' Association approved the plan in November 2005 and our County Supervisors did so in January 2006. The Plan may be found on this web site. We welcome corrections and additions to the Plan, which we intend to be a living, usable document. Please contact us at firesafe@pacific.net or (707) 462-3662.