



## Technical Advisory Council

### Item 9: CAL FIRE Grantee Case Study

March 7, 2025

#### Historical Context and 27 Years of Project Implementation - Protecting Vulnerable Forests and Communities in Butte County

The Butte County Fire Safe Council (BCFSC) has been instrumental in both wildfire recovery and prevention efforts since its inception in 1998 – steadily scaling the organization to meet the growing demands of increasing environmental and economic threat due to wildfire.

Since 2021, the BCFSC has leveraged partnerships, grass roots community engagement, and increased the pace and scale of project implementation to enhance the resilience of Butte County's forested landscapes and rural communities. An important contribution to this increase has been through CAL FIRE's Forest Health program, in which the BCFSC has received support from CAL FIRE through four projects:

1. 8GG20627 – Forest Health and Upper Watershed Resilience (09/9/21 – 03/31/25)
2. 8GG21612 – Forest Health and Feather River Watershed Resilience (07/28/22 – 03/31/26)
3. 8GG22609 – WUI Wide Forest and Watershed Restoration Project (08/15/23 – 03/31/29)
4. 8GG23607 – Butte County Forest Resilience and Restoration Project (12/11/24 – 03/31/30)

The BCFSC recognizes that the escalating threats of wildfires and climate change demand an urgent, coordinated response. In Butte County, where wildfire risks and climate impacts are increasingly pronounced, the pace and scale of cross-boundary collaborative projects must be accelerated to safeguard our communities, forests, and critical infrastructure. This memo outlines the pressing need to enhance collaboration among local, state, tribal, and federal partners, identifies key challenges to achieving swift and effective project implementation, and offers strategic recommendations to advance wildfire resilience and climate adaptation initiatives throughout Butte County.

The wildfire crisis has profoundly impacted Butte County, with nearly 40% of the county burning in the past decade. Catastrophic events like the 2018 Camp Fire, 2020 Bear Fire, 2021 Dixie Fire, and 2024 Park Fire have destroyed homes, disrupted local economies, and decimated forests that once provided critical habitat and carbon storage.

Recognizing that Butte County's unnaturally dense forests are increasingly vulnerable to wildfire and climate change, the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE)'s Forest Health grant program has supported a range of interventions—mechanical thinning, grazing, biomass removal

for electricity generation, reintroduction of low-intensity prescribed fire, constituting nearly 10,000 acres of general hazardous fuels prevention efforts for wildfire prevention. CAL FIRE estimates that our four CCI Forest Health grants will sequester over 30,000 metric tons of carbon dioxide-equivalent over their lifetimes.

Developed through robust collaboration with local fire safe councils, Firewise communities, and the Butte County Collaborative Group—and reinforced by the annual Wildfire Safety Summit—these initiatives strategically align with existing and planned efforts. This integrated approach maximizes benefits to both communities and forested landscapes throughout Butte County.

### **Fuels Treatment Effectiveness (FTE) – The Park Fire and the BCFSC’s Preventative Treatments**

When the Park Fire erupted on July 24, 2024 – eventually becoming the fourth-largest wildfire in California history – grant-funded fuels reduction work around Cohasset was in the direct path of the wildfire. Although these preventative treatments did not fully stop the blaze under extreme conditions, firefighters observed that the areas of Cohasset atop the West Branch Mud Creek drainage (projects made possible by the 8GG20627 – Forest Health and Upper Watershed Resilience grant) significantly reduced the wildfire’s intense behavior, slowing the fire’s progression – resulting in 717 acres of central Cohasset being saved from destruction. This reduction enabled CAL FIRE personnel to steer the fire away from central Cohasset, thereby reducing structural losses and property damage. Moreover, the lower fire severity allowed mature trees in the treated area to survive, ensuring continued carbon sequestration and long-term forest resilience.

CAL FIRE’s Fuels Treatment Effectiveness Reports (FTE) reports that our Forest Health and Upper Watershed Resilience grant “had a positive impact” on the outcome of the Park Fire to the community of Cohasset (Source: CAL FIRE - [Fuels Treatment Effectiveness Reports \(FTE\): 08/10/24](#))

*“The funding we have received through the California Climate Investments program has allowed us to make a long-lasting positive impact on the forests, canyons and ridges that we love and call home. The residents of Butte County who breathe life into these rural WUI communities are safer, thanks to the projects we’ve been able to administer the CCI Forest Health program and the strong partnership(s) we have with CAL FIRE.”*

- Taylor Nilsson

*Executive Director, BCFSC*