

AN ASSESSMENT OF WILDFIRE ISSUES IN SOUTHEASTERN SAN DIEGO COUNTY

Workshop Facilitation and Report by

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Workshop Sponsored by

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San Diego Gas and Electric Company
San Diego Department of Agriculture, Weights and Measures
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PREFACE

Each year, wildfires destroy property, threaten human lives and cause mental anguish and suffering to people living in California. During the past two years 600,000 acres have burned statewide, 10 people lost their lives and 1,270 structures were destroyed. Attempts to exclude fire from brushland watersheds and forests have failed because fires are a natural part of these plant communities. Efforts to suppress wildfires during the last century have succeeded in allowing fuels to accumulate and forests and brushlands to grow thicker. Thus today's fires are larger and more dangerous than historical fires.

In 1995, the Watershed Fire Council of Southern California contracted to use The Impact Process to help develop a strategy to manage wildfires in southeastern San Diego County. The Impact Process is a computer-aided group decision-making procedure that uses a workshop setting to build a consensus on ways to resolve an issue.

This report documents the results of the workshop conducted using The Impact Process. Participants in the workshop included a variety of public and private organizations. The participants reached a consensus on a ranked list of effective and acceptable wildfire management strategies. They used key parts of the top ranked strategies to create a strategic plan for resolving wildfire management issues in southeastern San Diego County.

Workshop participants filled out a questionnaire to evaluate the process for San Diego County. The results showed that 94 percent of the participants felt that they had enough time to express their viewpoint and 88 percent felt that they could express their opinions without interference. In addition, participants rated how well the workshop was organized using a scale of 1 to 4, where the highest score represented completely organized. The workshop achieved 90 percent of the maximum possible score for organization. Finally, participants rated their satisfaction with The Impact Process using a scale of 1 to 7, where seven represents the highest satisfaction. The process achieved 85 percent of the maximum possible score for participant satisfaction.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A workshop was held at the Sycuan Indian Reservation in El Cajon, California, on November 13 and 14, 1995, to develop a strategic plan for managing wildfires in southeastern San Diego County. The workshop was sponsored by the Watershed Fire Council of Southern California, the Cleveland National Forest, San Diego Gas and Electric Company, San Diego Department of Agriculture, Weights and Measures, and the Sycuan Indian Reservation.

The workshop was designed to produce a consensus among representatives of a diverse group of interests on how to achieve the following goal:

Develop a strategy to address wildfire issues in brush lands and forests at or near the wildland urban interface in southeastern San Diego County. The strategy must protect human lives and property and enhance biodiversity. The strategy also must be technically and economically feasible, sustainable and socially acceptable.

A total of fifty-nine people from different public and private organizations participated in the workshop. The participants were assigned to thirteen stakeholder coalitions. Each coalition represented a particular category of interests, such as local fire protection or citizens. The participants in each stakeholder coalition worked together as a team. The Impact Process, a computer-aided group decision-making procedure, structured discussions in the workshop.

The first day of the workshop began by clarifying alternatives or strategies submitted by stakeholders prior to the workshop. The participants then ranked the alternatives based on a set of seven weighted screening criteria that evaluated the feasibility and effectiveness of the alternatives in addressing the issue. Next the participants ranked the alternatives using an additional set of ten criteria that represented the specific interests of stakeholders.

On the second day of the workshop the stakeholders used the insights gained on the first day to modify and improve their alternatives. Then the stakeholders ranked their alternatives based on acceptability. The participants reconciled differences between the criteria ranking and the acceptability ranking to identify the top five alternatives. Finally, they constructed a strategy for resolving the issue from key elements within the top five alternatives. Thus the final strategy consists of a list of eighteen integrated actions (Table 1). All decisions were reached by consensus.

The final strategy is a strategic plan, not a tactical plan (Table 1). In other words, the details of the plan must be worked out by organizations that are responsible for helping to resolve wildfire management issues in southeastern San Diego County. Nevertheless, any organization that strives to work within the guidelines set by the strategic plan should receive strong support for their actions from the stakeholders who attended the workshop. The Watershed Fire Council of Southern California volunteered to aid in coordinating efforts to implement the strategic plan.

Table 1

**A STRATEGIC PLAN FOR RESOLVING WILDFIRE ISSUES IN
SOUTHEASTERN SAN DIEGO COUNTY**

No.	Action	Organization
1.	Design a prescribed burn pattern or mosaic based on vegetation and wildlife surveys, fire history and public outreach programs.	Responsible fire or land management agency in coordination with the California Department of Fish and Game and the USDI Fish and Wildlife Service.
2.	Return low intensity fire to its natural role where possible.	Responsible fire or land management agency.
3.	Identify areas or sites for prescribed burning.	Responsible fire or land management agency.
4.	Design fire prescriptions for particular sites. Include agency coordination, size of fire, fuel loading, fire safety, smoke dispersal, biological information, monitoring and fire control in the prescription.	Responsible fire or land management agency in coordination with the California Department of Fish and Game, the USDI Fish and Wildlife Service, the National Weather Service, the Air Pollution Control Board and other agencies and organizations.
5.	Identify tribal representatives and historians who can point out cultural and other sensitive areas.	Responsible fire or land management agency.
6.	Avoid unnecessary damage to cultural sites, grazing lands and other sensitive areas.	Responsible fire or land management agency.
7.	Utilize local firefighting resources whenever possible.	Responsible fire or land management agency.
8.	Utilize volunteers and prison labor whenever possible.	Responsible fire or land management agency.
9.	Obtain property owner's agreement before carrying out a prescribed burn.	Responsible fire or land management agency.
10.	Rehabilitate damaged sites when necessary.	Responsible fire or land management agency.
11.	Maintain a strong initial attack and suppression organization.	Responsible fire or land management agency.
12.	Encourage the construction of community fuelbreaks.	Responsible fire or land management agency.
13.	Conduct public meetings with private and public landowners. Solicit information on their needs and opinions regarding wildfire control and prescribed burning.	Responsible fire or land management agency.
14.	Conduct education programs to reduce the public's risk from wildfires.	Responsible fire or land management agency.
15.	Encourage the public to assume greater responsibility for self-protection from wildfires.	Responsible fire or land management agency.
16.	Initiate a public relations program with local media and meet on site with political representatives.	Responsible fire or land management agency.
17.	Participate in land use planning process.	Responsible fire or land management agency.
18.	Consolidate land ownerships under mutual agreement to reduce future wildland-urban interface.	Responsible land management agency.

