History

- July 11, 2006 – City Council approved formation of Assessment District to fund specific services to reduce the impacts associated with wildfire

- Duration: One year
  - Allowing for an annual renewal
Assessment Area

City of Santa Barbara

- Foothill Zone
- Extreme Foothill Zone
- Mission Ridge Road
- Sycamore Canyon Road
- Highway 192
- Highway 101
- Foothill Road
- Stanwood Drive
WFSAD Services

- Vegetation Road Clearance (Sept. – Jan.)
- Defensible Space Assistance
  - Voluntary Evaluations
  - Chipping Services (March-June)
- Vegetation Management
  - Community Fuels Treatment Network and Vegetation Management Units
    - Identified and prioritized in City Wildland Fire Plan
Vegetation Road Clearance

14 Miles Treated in FY2018
Chipping Services

- Encourages property owners to create defensible space
- Provides a cost effective way to dispose of material
- Over 300 tons of flammable vegetation removed in FY2018
- 3500 tons removed since 2008
- 100% of the chips recycled in FY2018

Chipping available to all Assessment District residents
Chipping Services

Chipping Areas

San Roque Ontare

Las Canoas

Sheffield/Parma

Las Tunas

Lower Riviera

Sycamore Cyn Las Alturas

West Mountain/ Coyote

Westmont Circle

Eucalyptus Hill

Defensible Space Chipping

Westmont/Circle

Starts:

MAY 17
Vegetation Management

- Remove Flammable Vegetation
- Remove Ladder Fuels
- Reduce Fuel Load 30-60%
- Remove Dead Vegetation
- Remove Exotic and Invasive Plant Species
- Protect natural resources, special status species (i.e. plants and animals)

Challenges

- Biological Requirements
- Limited Access
Project Areas
FY 2018 - 2019

- North Ontare
  FY 2019
  7 Acres

- St. Mary’s
  FY 2019
  8 Acres

- Las Canoas &
  St. Mary’s
  FY 2018
  9 acres

- Las Tunas/Mountain Dr
  FY 2012
  15 Acres

- Mountain Drive
  FY 2009
  3 Acres

- Hillcrest Road
  FY 2012
  16 Acres

- Coyote/Circle/Westmont
  FY 2013 ~ 10 Acres

- Jimeno/Garcia Canyon
  FY 2015-17
  8 Acres

- Alston Place
  FY 2014
  11 Acres

- Garcia/Ferrelo
  Canyon
  FY 2016
  2 Acres

- Eucalyptus Hill
  FY 2013
  25 Acres
2018 Firesafe Grant

• City of Santa Barbara FY2018 Community Fuels Hazard Reduction Project
  • $17,500 with 100% match
  • Added funding for vegetation management
  • Focus on the Community Fuels Treatment Network
  • Project work will be completed in FY2019
Wildland Program Funding
FY 2019

General Fund Appropriation $200,000

Wildland Fire Suppression Assessment Fund $272,404

Total Funding = $472,404
Renewal Process

- An Engineer’s Report is required in the adopting resolution
- CPI Increase of 3.6%

Rate for 2018-2019:
- $82.20 per single family parcel-Foothill Zone
- $101.93 per single family parcel-Extreme Foothill
Projects
FY 2019

- Vegetation Road Clearance
- Chipping Services
- Voluntary Defensible Space Evaluations
- Complete Community Fuels Treatment Network

vegetation management project
Assessing the Effectiveness of Fire Management Strategies in the Wildland Urban Interface: A City of Santa Barbara Case Study

A Group Project submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of Master of Environmental Science and Management for the Bren School of Environmental Science & Management

Prepared By: Nico Alegria, Juliana Matos and Sarah McCutcheon
Project Advisor: Dr. Sarah Anderson

April 2016
Implementing a Wildland Fire Suppression Assessment District

Dear California Association of Council of Governments,

As we enter our fifth year of the historic California drought, and with the fire season quickly approaching, it is necessary to take all precautions to protect the safety and wellbeing of your constituents. In an effort to protect your citizens, it may be in your city’s best interest to implement a special assessment district that levies annual fees for enhanced and increased fire protection. The City of Santa Barbara is the first city in the country to implement such a district, and for the past nine years since voter approval it has shown great success. The fire department implements the district, and the funds raised from the district augment the yearly expenses, allowing for better fire protection of homes in the wildland urban interface. A multi-criteria analysis shows that your city would also benefit from a similar district due to its weather, topography, and demographics. For more general and Santa Barbara-specific information, please review the attached fact sheet.

Sincerely,

Nico Alegria, Juliana Matos, Sarah McCutcheon
Bren School of Environmental Science & Management
Assessing the effectiveness of fire mitigation strategies in the wildland urban interface

Group Members: Nico Alegria | Juliana Matos | Sarah McCutcheon | Faculty Advisor: Dr. Sarah Anderson

Fire in California

While fires are a natural and necessary part of many healthy ecosystems, they can also be a destructive force when they impact human communities. Due to fire suppression, urban disturbance, invasive species, and climate change, fires in many areas now burn hotter and larger than they would have historically. Even fire-adapted ecosystems are threatened by increasing fire intensity, and recent studies show that fire frequency and severity may increase with warming climates.

Between 2004 and 2013, California experienced:
- 37,432 fires
- 1.6 million acres burned
- $4 billion in fires from fires

City of Santa Barbara’s Wildland Fire Suppression Assessment District

To mitigate the risks from wildland fire, the City of Santa Barbara Fire Department created a one-of-a-kind Wildland Fire Suppression Assessment District. In exchange for a yearly fee of $55, residents receive additional fire protection services, such as:
- Defensible space
- Defensible space inspections
- Roadside clearance
- Vegetation management

Fires burning outside areas of high fire hazard.

FACT:
Defensible space is one of the top indicators for whether or not a home will survive a fire, making it an important service for residents to use.

Objectives

1. Determine the overall opinion of residents towards the fire mitigation special assessment district
2. Assess the effectiveness of vegetation management methods
3. Identify other cities that may benefit from the fire suppression district

Determining Residents’ Opinions

The reasoning approval by residents of the special assessment district proves that there is vast potential for other cities to benefit from a similar fire mitigation program.

In fact, 72% of survey respondents living within the district said that they believe the fire mitigation program creates a safer community.

We received 482 survey responses from 57 residents in the District and 52 residents of the coastal area.

Fire Risk Perception in High Fire Hazard Areas

Strategic communication efforts such as mailings and social media outreach can help increase awareness of the true fire risks residents face.

Assessing Vegetation Management Effectiveness

Vegetation management reduces flame length even under Santa Ana conditions. Fuel-removal returns flame length under Santa Ana conditions to baseline conditions post-treatment, making firefighting efforts less challenging. This once again emphasizes the importance of defensible space around structures.

The linearity of response to fuel removal indicates that more removal is better. In chaparral ecosystems, rate of spread is not affected until approximately 85% of fuel is removed. This highlights the importance of a quick response time by the fire department.

Finding Other Suitable Cities

Once we found that residents approve of the District and that it is successful in reducing fire risk, we conducted a multi-criteria decision analysis in ArcGIS to identify other cities that would benefit from a similar fire mitigation program. To do this, we used expert input to determine indicators that ensure suitability.

Indicators of Suitability:
- WR1 – cities that fall within wildland urban interface
- Fire frequency – cities with more frequent wildfire events
- Vegetation and topography – cities with slopes
- LRAs – cities that are not part of State Responsibility Areas to avoid double taxation

Top 10 most suitable cities:
1. Truckee
2. Mill Valley
3. Sausalito
4. Diamond Bar
5. San Luis Obispo
6. Fremont
7. San Diego
8. Chula Vista
9. Riverside
10. Oakland

Program adoption

Given the success of the unique Santa Barbara District, other cities should consider adopting Special Assessment Districts. The cities that are protected, the better off California is.

Conclusions

We would like to thank the following people for making this project possible: Sarah Anderson, Ann Marx, Joe Sowls, Chris Iredale, Pat McIntyre, Ben Best, John Brea, John Ahlman and the Fire Safe Council.

Acknowledgements
Other Suitable Cities

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City Suitability

Based on:
1) WUI - cities in the wildland urban interface
2) Fire Frequency - cities with high wildfire events
3) Vegetation - cities with flammable vegetation
4) Topography - cities with steep slopes and deep canyons
5) LRA - local responsibility areas selected
6) Income - cities with >$60,000 average household income
7) Democratic leaning - cities with more registered Democrats than other parties

IMPLEMENTING A FIRE MANAGEMENT DISTRICT

In compliance with Proposition 218, any new fee, assessment, levy, tax, etc. for a special assessment district must be approved by the constituents in the district. Unlike a tax, which requires two-thirds voter approval, only a majority vote, weighted proportionally for each property, is needed for a benefit assessment. To begin the process, a notice of the assessment is posted, and an assessment ballot is mailed to property owners within the district. There must be a 45-day return period, followed by a public hearing. If approved, the City Council takes action by a resolution to levy the assessment. After the initial vote, the City Council votes yearly for renewal. There must also be a public meeting to preliminarily approve a budget for the next year’s costs and services, which are supported yearly by an engineer’s report. The report must include the consumer price index adjustment, the new maximum authorized assessment rate, the yearly budget, and the amount to be charged to each parcel.

CONTACT INFORMATION

For more on the findings of this project, visit bren.ucsb.edu/~sbfire
For more about Santa Barbara’s Wildland Fire Suppression Assessment District, contact Chris Braden, 805-564-5737
For more on how to get started on implementing a special assessment district, contact John Bliss, Vice President of SCI Consulting Group at 707-430-4300

FIND YOUR CITY ON THIS LIST AND START THE JOURNEY TOWARD PROTECTING YOUR RESIDENTS FROM WILDFIRES!