

Anticipated Effects of Urbanization on Fire Protection in California's Wildlands: Report of Futuring Group 2¹

KEY TRENDS OF URBANIZATION

1. The population of the state's wildlands continues to increase rapidly.

2. The character of the wildland population is changing--more people are moving into the wildlands from urban areas; the population is becoming older; there is more ethnic diversity; the people are more active in local government affairs.

3. The general population continues to lack knowledge, awareness, and understanding of the wildland fire problem.

4. The population expects urban-type fire protection services in the wildlands but seems unwilling to pay for such services.

5. The cost of providing fire protection in the wildlands continues to increase tremendously partly because of the growing complexity of the fire problem.

6. Wildland fires are increasingly costly in terms of damages to lives, property, and natural resources.

7. Political bodies and the political process are not effective in dealing with the changing fire problem in the wildlands.

8. The fragmentation of local fire protection organizations results in decreased efficiency and increased costs of fire protection, and increased losses to lives, property, and natural resources.

9. New subdivisions and other developments in the wildlands increase the need for fire protection but do not pay their fair share of that protection.

10. Urbanization in the wildlands is decreasing the land-base of natural resources, thereby increasing the economic value of the remaining resources and placing a greater stress on their management and use.

KEY VISIONS AND ASSOCIATED STRATEGIES

Public Awareness

Residents would be more aware of wildland fire problems and more responsible for their own fire protection.

Strategies

- Inform people of the limitations of fire protection services and their responsibilities for protecting themselves.
- Develop more effective methods of public education, partly by assessing past methods (both successes and failures).
- Require that real estate disclosures include a description of the wildland fire problem.
- Define the wildland fire problem more clearly.
- Increase the amount of public education by using all fire protection personnel.

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Fire Management Organizations

Fire protection organizations would consolidate greatly and cooperation would improve among the remaining organizations.

Strategies

- Determine the cost-effectiveness of the existing system of fire protection organizations and develop more cost-effective alternatives.
- Develop methods, including enabling legislation, to encourage implementation of the preferred alternatives.
- Educate the public and politicians in the preferred alternatives and the need to implement them.

Management Ethic

Management ethic of stewardship for all privately owned wildlands would be accepted by the government and the public.

Strategies

- Define the preferred stewardship ethic.

- Include courses in resource management in the college curriculum for land-use planners.

- Accelerate public education in the protection and management of natural resources.

- Assign a state or federally funded staff position to appropriate counties to be responsible for technical assistance in the protection and management of natural resources.

Costs of Fire Protection

Mechanisms would exist to collect the true costs of fire protection from the individuals and organizations creating the need for and receiving the protection services.

Strategies

- Identify the true costs of fire protection and assign them to the appropriate individuals and organizations.
- Determine how best to inform the appropriate individuals and organizations of their assessments for fire protection in a timely manner.