

Bennett Ridge Community Wildfire Protection and Vegetation Management Plan



Updated October 2018,
Brad Hunter and Marilee Jensen, Bennett Ridge Residents

With the help of:
Cyndi Foreman, Fire Prevention Specialist

Originally prepared in 2009 by:

Bennett Ridge Emergency Preparedness Coordinator; Karen Sommer
Bennett Ridge Community Association President; David Sandine

With the help of:

Bennett Valley Fire Protection District - Darrin De Carli
Cal Fire – Mike Mickelson
Fire Safe Sonoma - Caerleon Safford
Sonoma County Department of Emergency Services, Pre-Fire and Vegetation
Management Planning – Peter Martin

Bennett Ridge Community Wildfire Protection and Vegetation Management Plan

Community at Risk

Bennett Ridge is located in Bennett Valley which is designated as a “community at risk” in the National Fire Plan. High risk communities are identified as being within the wildland urban interface (WUI), the area where homes and wild-lands intermix. Communities at risk were published in the Federal Register in 2001. The list represents the collaborative work of 50 states and 5 federal agencies using standardized process. Significant hazardous fuel risk resides in Annadel State Park adjacent and just east of the Bennett Ridge Community.

Wild-land Urban Interface Designation (WUI):

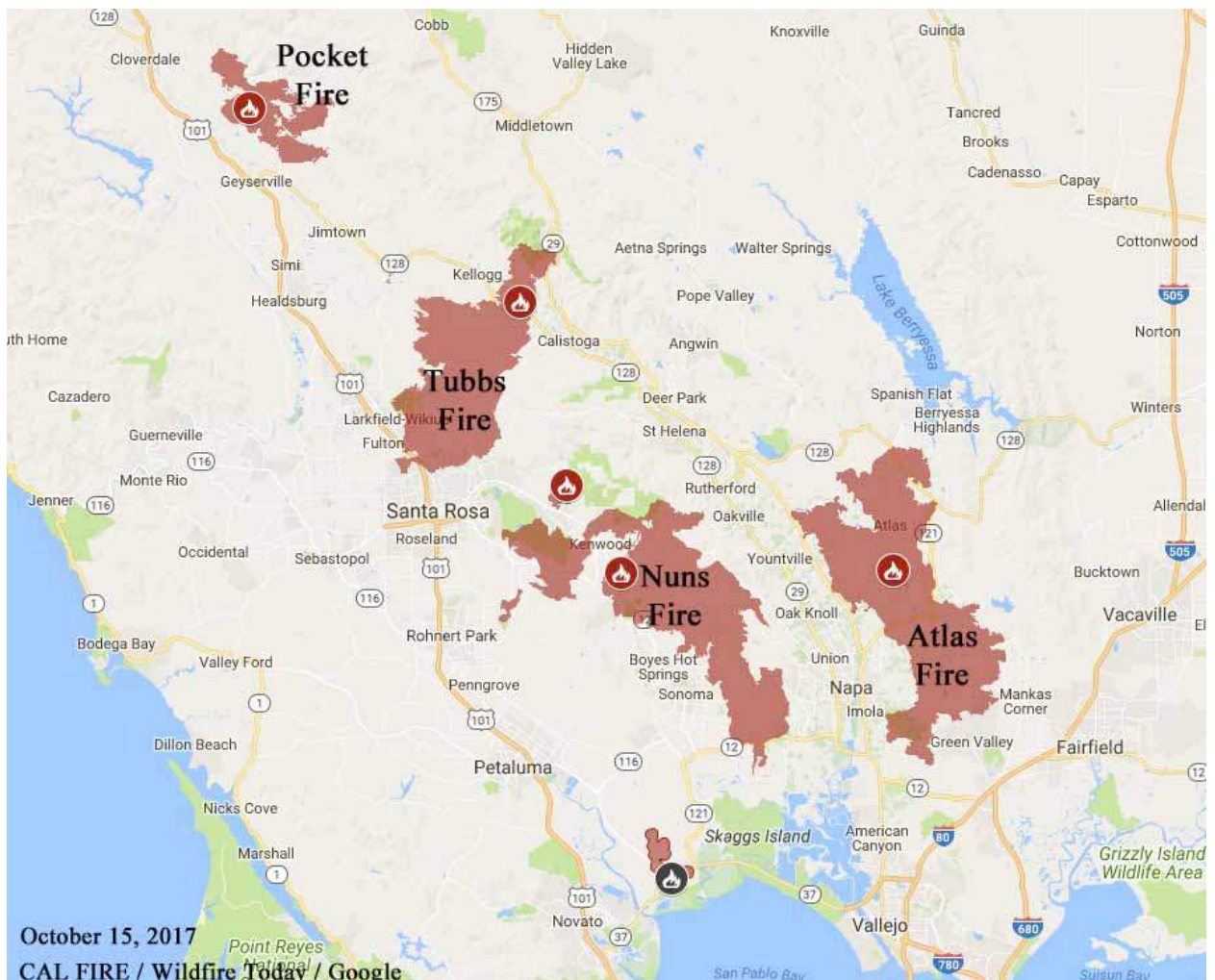
The Sonoma County Community Wildfire Protection plan designates all of Sonoma County’s State Responsibility Areas as WUI. Under this designation, all of Bennett Valley, including Bennett Ridge, and the wildland areas surrounding the community for ten miles on its north, east, west and southern borders, are WUI.

The Purpose of this community wildfire Protection and Vegetation Management Plan is to:

- Improve the community’s ability to prepare for, respond to, and recover from wildland fires;
- Empower residents and public agencies to work collectively toward greater protection of life and property through pre-fire planning;
- Emphasize the duty of the residents to take personal responsibility for preventive actions such as creating and maintaining defensible space;
- Increase the community residents’ understanding of living in a fire-adapted ecosystem;
- Improve the fire resilience of the landscape while protecting social, economic and ecological values;
- Outline the future priorities, strategies and action plans for fuel reduction treatments within and adjacent to the Bennett Ridge Community;
- Address special areas of concern and make recommendations for reducing structural vulnerability and creating defensible spaces in the community;
- Identify strategies for reducing hazardous wildland fire fuels, and actions and responsibilities individuals can take to help protect themselves and their neighborhoods against the threat of wildland fires.

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- **History:** The Community of Bennett Ridge, in Bennett Valley, is located 5 miles southeast of the Santa Rosa City limits. This community was severely impacted by the 2017 Nuns fire that consumed 56 thousand acres. Fifty-three years earlier the Nunn's Canyon Fire burned through Kenwood, Warm Springs, Glen Ellen, and just short of Bennett Ridge.
- There were 128 homes on 1 acre to 7 acre parcels prior to the 2017 Nuns fire. The Nuns fire completely destroyed 92 homes, and resulted in one fatality within our small community. Quite a few of the lost homes are now in the process of being rebuilt by the homeowners. The rebuilding efforts will span over the next couple of years. The community's fire safety will be enhanced with the new building material as required by the Wildland Urban Interface Code (2016 Title 24, Part 2, Chapter 7A California Building Code).

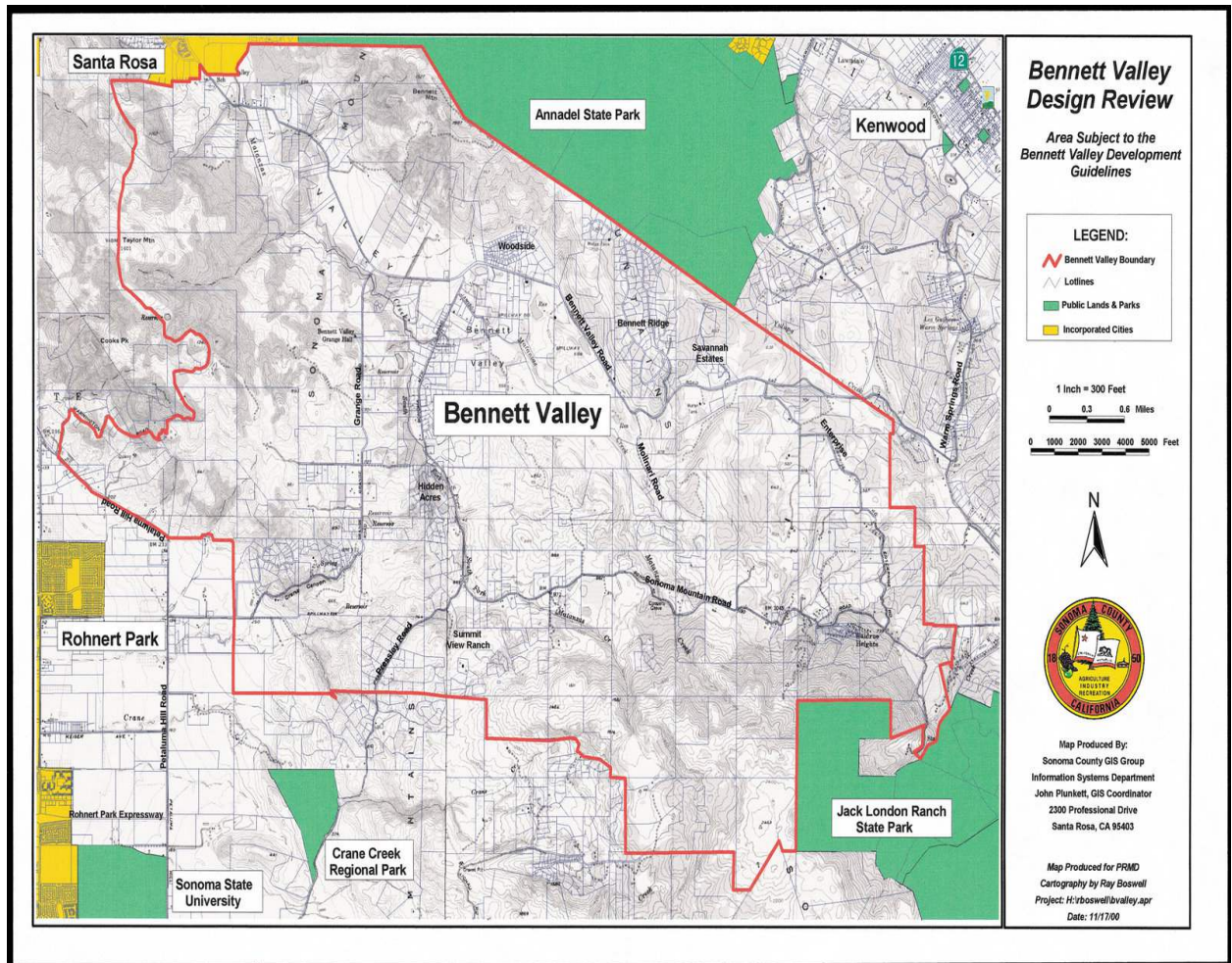


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The community, developed in the 1960's, is located on a ridge top, adjacent to the southwest side of Annadel State Park, in the eastern edge of Bennett Valley.

- The CC&R's restrict formal landscaping to 10% of the parcel; with the intent to blend in any structures within the natural Oak Woodlands.
- Access to the Bennett Ridge Community is a single entry/exit off of Bennett Valley Rd.
- Fire threats, historically have come from Bennett Valley Road. However the most destructive fires occur late in the season from strong north easterly winds (Nuns Fire).
- Any threat from Annadel State Park would more than likely come during the autumn months when north easterly winds, and heat combine to push a fire from the Park in a westerly direction. An intense fire within Annadel would very likely carry brands and embers well ahead of the fire.
- Annadel State Park is downslope from Bennett Ridge and a major fire within the park is influenced by the afternoon westerlies and burns upslope toward Bennett Ridge, a major threat to the Ridge.
- An established fire break has been maintained along Bennett Valley Rd. This fire break extends from Old Bennett Ridge Rd. to the west and ends where Bennett Valley Rd. unwinds and widens, about 2 miles west of Old Bennett Ridge Rd.

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Overview:

Dominant vegetation is Oak Woodland, minor component of Douglas Fir and California Bay Laurel trees / FUEL MODEL 8;

Fuel Model 8 Slow burning ground fires with low flame lengths are generally the case, although the fire may encounter an occasional heavy fuel concentration and can flare up. Only under severe weather conditions involving high temperature, low humidity's, and high winds do the fuels pose a fire hazard. Closed canopy stands of short-needle conifers, such as white-fir, are included in this model. The litter layer is mainly needles and twigs. The stands usually have little undergrowth.

Invasive plants include: Broom and Fir

Residents are organized for emergencies using models such as COPE and CERT to educate and prepare the community in a disaster such as Fire or Earthquake. The residents are active in maintaining personal property in a fire safe manner.

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Reducing Structural Ignitability

The Bennett Ridge Community is a mix of older and newer homes. The primary siding is wood with some stucco on the 36 homes which survived the 2017 Nuns fire. All roofs are composite or tile. Because of the terrain, many homes have overhanging decks that are exposed underneath. Many of the original homes have wood burning fire places. Post 2017 Nuns fire construction is a mix of wood, steel and concrete structures with water suppression systems.

The effectiveness of fire suppression/protection is subordinate to the individual's responsibility for ignition resistance of their home. A community approach to reduce structural ignitability and overall community vulnerability depends on property owners to engage in fuels reduction efforts around the home and reduce the ignitability of the components of the home.

Goals and actions:

- Distribution of educational materials defining the risks and a check list to mitigate the risks related to structural fire dangers
- Managing and reducing the flammable vegetation around structures
- Identifying ignitable material components of the home and providing incentives to replace or modify those materials
- Educate homeowners on alternate evacuation routes, as developed. As of December, 2018, without 4-wheel drive, only one route is available for driving out.
- Identify, install, and test possible alerting system for all residents on Bennett Ridge, as possible.

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- A check list/flyer distributed to each household in the summer of 2018:

A few seconds is all Cal Fire & Bennett Valley Fire has to determine if your home is defensible. If deemed unsafe, the fire crew will not try to save your house.

Things to Consider:

- 1. Can they get heavy fire equipment or lifesaving equipment down your driveway?**
- 2. Is there enough space for them to turn around in your driveway?**
- 3. Are there any low limbs or high brush along the driveway?**

Here is a checklist to make your property defensible:

On line resource for more information: www.firesafesonoma.org/

- Trim all tree limbs up 6-8 feet above the ground
- Trim tree limbs 15' high and 30' width along driveways
- Clear out gutters and keep roof clean of needles and leaves
- Remove tree branches that overhang the roof to at least 15' above the roof.
- Cut tall grass down to a few inches, 100' around structures
- If on steep hillside, take extra precautions to remove low limbs on trees and tall grass down-slope of house, this may exceed 100'.
- Remove flammable plants close to structures and along driveway; i.e. juniper bushes, Manzanita, chemise, Scotch Broom, Star Thistle, Pampas Grass, Acacia, Fir and Bay trees.
- Store firewood, construction materials and other flammable material a minimum of 30' feet from structures
- Remove any branches to within 10' of chimney.
- Cover your chimney or stovepipe with a non-flammable screen of 1/2" mesh.
- Enclose the underside of decks.
- Replace flammable door mats with fire resistant door mat.

WHEN FIRE IS APPROACHING AND YOU ARE ASKED TO EVACUATE, DO IT NOW!!!!

If there is NO time, shelter in your home. Park your car facing out. Go to the opposite side of the house from where the fire is approaching. Your home is the safest place to shelter. Your house will take longer to burn than the time it takes for a fire to move over it. Once the fire has gone through, leave the house immediately.

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Community Emergency Access and Egress

- Primary concern as expressed from CAL FIRE, is the single approach to the Community. Old Bennett Ridge Rd. from Bennett Valley Rd. to Bardy Rd. is the **only** access. This approach is cut out of a steep hillside with dense vegetation on both sides. In an event such as a Wildfire could make this approach a hazard and danger for emergency personnel and equipment coming up and residents heading down if smoke is dense, limiting visibility. A number of residents on the ridge were unable evacuate during the 2017 Nuns fire due to flames engulfing Rollo, Bardy and Old Bennett Ridge roads.
- Alternate evacuation routes are being explored and include the following:
 - Exit through property at 2759 Bennett Ridge Rd to the power line easement, accessing neighboring Savannah Estates and exiting onto Bennett Valley Rd., east of Old Bennett Ridge Rd. This is limited to 4-wheel drive vehicles.
 - Exit through property at 2590 Bennett Ridge Rd. to adjacent vineyard property utility road and Serenity Lane to Bennett Valley Rd. opposite Walker Pond, west of Old Bennett Ridge Rd. This access is not available to vehicles but only foot traffic. Another Bennett Ridge Property adjacent to this vineyard is being pursued as an emergency evacuation route. This plan is subject to property owner approval on Bennett Ridge and the Vineyard property.
 - Exiting through Annadel State Park is not advised. Trails are not suitable for vehicle use and could pose additional danger and risk if a vehicle were to get stuck.
- Annadel State Park is approximately 5000 acres with over 35 miles of trails. Ridge Trail borders Bennett Ridge on the southwest side of the park. This trail can be accessed by emergency vehicles at 2645 Bennett Ridge Rd. The trail is limited to 4-wheel drive only to the west. This trail narrows to about 4 – 6 feet in width to the east and is very rocky. Vegetation is similar to Bennett Ridge.

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Recommendations and Plan of Action:

#1- HIGH Priorities as follows:

1. Improve Fire safety along Old Bennett Ridge Rd. from Bennett Valley Rd. to Bardy Rd. to improve access and egress
 - a. Remove **ALL** Fir and Bay saplings
 - b. Remove dead Fir Trees and dead Pine Trees
 - c. Cut down all Broom and Pampas Grass to ground
 - d. Remove dead wood 20' from road
 - e. Limb up Fir trees and Bay trees 30' from road, removing limbs 20' from base of tree
 - f. Cut down small Firs of 4" or less in diameter
 - g. Remove dead wood along drainage on downhill slope, 30' from road
 - h. Remove any dense understory growth as a result of the fire
2. The community has an open space buffer (meadow) on the eastern boundary of Rollo Rd
 - a. Weed whip the meadow prior to every fire season
3. Bennett Ridge Road borders the wildland urban Interface with Annadel State Park.
 - a. Clear 50 feet into the park for all properties adjacent to the Park. (The Park has agreed to let individual homeowners to clear 50 feet into the park)
 - b. Continue to work with the Park to extend clearing to a 100-feet
4. Encourage residents to improve fire safety around property
 - a. Remove dead wood
 - b. Limb up Fir and Bay trees
 - c. Follow the check list provided by CAL FIRE to actively reduce structural ignitibility, particularly for homes that survived the 2017 Nuns Fire
 - d. Identify high risk properties and with the assistance of our fire protection district help the property owners institute fire risk mitigation strategies
 - e. Issue burn permits for certain properties that are difficult to clear with other methods
5. Have a Community Chipping week
 - a. Contract Chipper and crew
6. Remove dead wood along Bennett Valley Rd., between road and fire break
7. Limb up Bay and Fir 10' along fire break. Limb up Oak 4' along fire break

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Maintenance Plan:

1. Maintain Fire protection along Old Bennett Ridge Rd. from Bennett Valley Rd. to Bady Rd.
 - a. Continue action plan, removing saplings and dead wood
 - b. Spray any new growth of Broom, Pampas Grass with appropriate weed killer
2. Maintain Fire Break along Bennett Valley Rd.
 - a. Continue practice of spraying
 - b. Remove any dead wood
 - c. Remove Fir and Bay saplings

Bennett Ridge Community Wildfire Protection Plan Agreement

The Bennett Ridge Community Wildfire Protection Plan Agreement:

- Was collaboratively developed. Interested parties and agencies managing land in the area have been consulted.
- Identifies and prioritizes areas for hazardous fuel reduction treatments and recommends the types and methods of treatment that will protect the Bennett Ridge Community.